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'The Spiritual Dynamics of the New Age Movement'

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## ABSTRACT

The aims of this thesis are to provide a general overview of New Age spirituality/theology, and to organize this overview within a framework which highlights and explains many of the fundamental contradictions of the movement.

The introductory section begins with a discussion of the problems associated with defining the New Age, and looks at some recent overviews of the movement. It goes on to highlight some of the fundamental contradictions of the New Age, and criticizes attempts by researchers to preserve the notion that it is something characterized by 'common values and a common vision.'

The introduction moves on to outline the broad and heuristic framework that this thesis will employ in its overview of New Age spirituality. This framework makes an organizational division between 'patriarchal' and 'ecological' spirituality. The methodology section discusses research methods and definitions of key terms. My definition of 'patriarchal spirituality' is derived from ecofeminist theory. Given that ecofeminism is itself much associated with the New Age, my overview does in a sense reflect a 'New Age' approach to the New Age. 'Ecological' spirituality indicates more than simply concern with the interrelationships among organisms and their physical environment, although this concern is certainly expressed by those who embrace an ecological spirituality. The 'ecological' rubric is employed in a broader sense, indicating: 1) the belief that the earth and the cosmos are home to the human; 2) the belief that all things are interrelated and interdependent; 3) a high regard for 'diversity.'

Part One examines the historical roots of the New Age. Part Two is concerned with New Age patriarchal spirituality. Part Three looks at New Age ecological spirituality, with particular emphasis upon Christian creation spirituality and feminist Wicca. The conclusion section highlights problems involved in attempting to make a clear division between these two New Age dynamics.

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## G E N E R A L   I N T R O D U C T I O N

### WHAT IS THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT?

#### Problems of Definition

Those who study the growing phenomenon of the New Age movement, whether from within or without, appear to agree over one thing; namely, that its diverse components make it extremely difficult to define as a whole. J. Gordon Melton (founder of the Institute for the Study of American Religion) et al. argue that 'An attempt to understand the New Age Movement easily can be frustrated by the movement's diversity.' The movement has 'no single leader, no central organization, no firm agenda, and no group of official spokespersons.'<sup>1</sup> J. P. Tarcher, a leading New Age book publisher, points out that within the movement itself, 'there is no unanimity as to how to define it or even that it is significantly cohesive to be called a movement.'<sup>2</sup> John Drane, a Religious Studies lecturer at Stirling University, comments that the 'amazing diversity of the ingredients that go into the New Age mixture will always ensure that any definition we come up with can, with perfectly good reason, be challenged by someone else whose experience of it has been quite different.'<sup>3</sup>

To aggravate the issue further, there appears to be no general consensus as to precisely which 'ingredients' constitute this amorphous phenomenon. Elliot Miller, editor of the Christian Research Journal, believes that a number of religious groups - the International Society

for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and Christian Science to name but two - should not be considered part of the movement, 'in spite of the many beliefs they hold in common with it.'<sup>4</sup> Compare this with the more inclusive stance adopted by Norman Geisler, a professor of Systematic Theology at the Dallas Theological Seminary, who describes Christian Science, Bahai, Scientology, Transcendental Meditation, ISKCON and the Unification Church as 'cultic' manifestations of the 'shift from the Old Age humanism to New Age pantheism.'<sup>5</sup> A more problematic but equally plausible position is expressed by psychologists Steve and Linda Dubrow-Eichel, who suggest that 'a "New Ager" is perhaps primarily a self-described grouping or social status.'<sup>6</sup> Overall, as Paul Heelas of Lancaster University comments, the New Age movement 'tends to mean different things to different people, academics included.'<sup>7</sup>

To add to the confusion, some organizations and individuals identified with the movement seem keen to remove themselves from any such association. William Bloom, editor of a selection of New Age writings, argues that such manoeuvres represent attempts by some New Agers to divorce themselves from 'incompatible elements' associated with the movement. He writes:

It would be a mistake to assume that all people who might come under the New Age banner get on with each other - either personally or in terms of their ideas. In fact, some who are identified as New Agers actively reject the label for fear of being associated with seemingly incompatible elements.(8)

Such is the case with the Findhorn Foundation in northern Scotland. Miller describes Findhorn as 'An almost legendary New Age community.'<sup>9</sup>

The community itself would perhaps beg to differ. On the community's behalf, Carol Riddell writes that 'We are now a little wary of this [New Age] description, which was once eagerly embraced by the Findhorn Community.' The community is wary of the term because in popular thought it has become associated with sensation seekers 'whose interest lies less in seeking spiritual transformation than in dabbling in the occult, or in practising classical capitalist entrepreneurship on the naive.'<sup>10</sup> Another example of such dissociation is Matthew Fox, a former Dominican priest and proponent of creation or creation-centred spirituality. According to Ted Peters, a professor of Systematic Theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Fox and the New Age are like 'Two peas in a single pod.'<sup>11</sup> There would appear to be reasonable grounds for assuming this. Fox's written works line the shelves of New Age bookshops and are packed full with New Age rhetoric. For instance, he presents the movement from 'fall/redemption' to creation-centred spirituality as part of a paradigmatic shift out of 'the now dead-age of pisces.'<sup>12</sup> Again, the Centre for Creation Spirituality at St. James's Church in London works in association with a workshop programme called 'Alternatives.' This programme is described as being 'dedicated to New Age thinking,' and aims to provide 'a friendly atmosphere in which to taste the best of New Age ideas.'<sup>13</sup> Yet, Fox seeks to remove both himself and creation spirituality from any association with the New Age movement. He does this on the grounds that the New Age, unlike creation spirituality, has little or nothing to say on the issue of social justice. I have personally heard Fox denounce

the New Age for being nothing more than a 'fundamentalism for the rich.'<sup>14</sup>

A similar stance is adopted by former physicist Fritjof Capra. Miller describes Capra as a 'celebrated New Age author' and one of the movement's 'significant thinkers.'<sup>15</sup> Capra himself characterizes the New Age as an asocial movement and consciousness of the 1970s, and although considerably different in the 1980s, to the extent that it began to take on board both feminist and ecological issues, feminist and ecological activists no longer wish to be identified with it. He says:

I define it [the New Age movement] as a particular manifestation of the social paradigm shift ... that flourished in California in the 1970s ... a particular constellation of concerns, interests and topics - the human potential movement ... humanistic psychology, the interest in spirituality, in the occult, in paranormal phenomena, and the holistic health movement ... what characterized them in the negative sense was the practically total absence of social and political consciousness ... there was neither ecological consciousness nor social consciousness ... Nor was there feminist consciousness. All this was absent from the New Age movement. In the 1980s this changed quite a bit. These various holistic therapists and humanistic psychologists embraced the concerns of the peace movement, of the women's movement, of various other social movements, to the extent that they don't want to be called New Agers any longer. So I tell people in Europe that when we use the term New Age now, we mostly talk about people who are still New Agers, who are stuck in the consciousness of the 1970s.(16)

Finally, while some question whether the New Age movement is actually cohesive enough to be called a movement, others question whether the New Age as a movement actually exists at all. Martin Palmer, the founder-director of ICOREC (International Consultancy on Religion, Education and Culture), argues that to a large extent the New

Age movement 'is a publishing phenomenon, in part created, certainly sustained, and possibly even ... invented by a publishing world that has sensed the spiritual ... hunger and has set out to make money feeding it.' There is, he argues, 'no evidence of either a Movement which can be honestly titled New Age, or a conspiracy which can be called New Age.'<sup>17</sup>

### Some Recent Overviews

Despite the above observations, there appears to be no shortage of writers - Christian writers in particular - for whom terms like 'New Age movement' and 'New Age thinking' connote things at once both easily recognizable and universally consistent. Roger Olson of Bethel College speaks for many when he asserts: 'though the movement is diverse and dynamic, there seems to be a unifying worldview just as there is a basic unifying worldview underlying the many forms and manifestations of Christianity.'<sup>18</sup>

Christian overviews of the New Age movement range from the balanced and informed to the paranoid and confrontational. A good representative of the latter is Constance Cumbey's The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow. Cumbey, like other researchers from the fundamentalist pole of Christian thought, seems to know exactly what the New Age is. For her, it is an organized satanic conspiracy for world-takeover. '"It is the contention of this writer,"' she declares, in what was the first attempt by a Christian to describe the movement in its entirety, '"that for the first time in history there is a viable movement - the New Age Movement - that

truly meets all the scriptural requirements for the antichrist and the political movement that will bring him on the world scene.'" The foundations for this conspiracy were laid, she asserts, in the writings of novelist H. G. Wells and in those of Theosophist Alice Bailey. Its final form was realized in 1980 with the publication of Marilyn Ferguson's The Aquarian Conspiracy. (This is a text which many regard as the New Age movement's principal 'manifesto.') She warns that the New Age antichrist - 'Maitreya' - is already here, and that his followers are busy preparing the way for him, preparing '"the last stage of the New Age scheme to take the world for Lucifer.'" The New Age 'Plan' includes '"the installation of a New World 'Messiah,' the implementation of a new world government and new world religion under Maitreya.'" The New Age satanists also intend '"to utterly root out people who believe in the Bible and worship God and to completely stamp out Christianity.'" <sup>19</sup> Cumbey also informs her by now terrified readers that New Age conspirators can be identified through a number of 'codewords' that they employ; these include terms like 'global village,' 'holistic,' 'paradigm' and 'self-realization.' Cumbey's work - written in 1983 - was the first major effort by fundamentalists to come to terms with the New Age, and, as Palmer notes, it still 'forms the basis for just about all the subsequent books by writers from that section of Christianity.' Moreover, it is also widely believed: 'It is perhaps important to pause ... and remember that Cumbey's book outsells Ferguson's The Aquarian Conspiracy, that videos based upon the book sell worldwide and that she is quoted with approval by many opponents of the New Age.'<sup>20</sup>

More balanced and informed Christian overviews of the New Age include those advanced by Miller, Peters and Russell Chandler.<sup>21</sup> Chandler, the Religion writer for the Los Angeles Times, acknowledges that a 'precise definition [of the New Age movement] is a chimera.' Nevertheless, he insists that its 'broad lines of commonality form a pattern, and for me, at least, the big New Age picture-puzzle has come together.' Indeed, for Chandler, the movement is distinguished 'by a common vision, a shared worldview about the nature of existence and the purpose of life in the cosmos.' Underlying this shared worldview are a number of shared theological assumptions. These include monism or the belief that reality can be reduced to one undifferentiated principle, whether it be Mind, Power, Principle, or Energy. In short, 'All is One.' New Agers are also pantheists, and believe that if all is one, then all is divine, including humanity: 'humans, like everything else, are an extension of the Oneness, which is all the divinity there is.' There is also the belief that humans have a suppressed or 'higher' self that is at one with divinity. Thus: 'All is One. We are all One. All is God. And we are God.' Another common belief states Chandler is that of 'metaphysical amnesia' - the belief that humanity participates in a spiritual blindness which 'has caused us to forget our true identity'; that is, our divinity. Much of the blame for this blindness is placed upon Western society, which, the New Age claims, 'has caused most people to accept the fragmented vision of self-limitation and "failures" rather than know that they can be "like God."' Another key element in the movement's perennial religion is the common belief in reincarnation. The final goal of life on earth for the New Ager is, according to

Chandler, to work out one's karma and then 'merge with the cosmos, or God, and end the repetitious and painful birth-death-rebirth process.' Finally, New Agers hold that a new order - the Aquarian Age - will emerge from the old. This will be achieved through a 'paradigm shift' in consciousness; a shift from the egoic self to the higher self, from dualistic thinking to holistic thinking. This can be achieved through numerous consciousness-changing therapies or 'psychotechnologies,' including meditation, yoga, chanting, martial arts, esoteric religious systems and mind-expanding drugs, to name a few. The discovery of the higher self leads the New Ager to 'psycho-spiritual power and enlightenment.' Self-realized individuals will then inaugurate a 'planetary transformation, characterized by mass enlightenment and social evolution.' In tandem with the above assumptions, the New Age movement argues Chandler advances a 'broad social agenda,' including environmental activism, the abandonment of gender role-types, a concern with world peace, a movement away from conventional medicine to 'natural' healing processes, the setting-up of small-scale industrial and agricultural collectives, and of 'an eclectic "world religion" that closely resembles Eastern religious systems rather than Western monotheistic faiths.'<sup>22</sup>

Chandler goes on to discuss those interests, beliefs, practices, and organizations which he considers as being historical tributaries to, and/or contemporary components of the New Age movement. Historical tributaries include a variety of Western esoteric traditions (including Gnosticism), the American Transcendental movement, Spiritualism,



Theosophy, Jungian psychology, the insights into the nature of reality revealed by post-Newtonian physics, and the evolutionary theology of Teilhard de Chardin. Contemporary components include widespread interest in the 'intuitive' capacities of the brain's right hemisphere, Eastern mysticism, the channeling of supernatural and extraterrestrial entities, guruism, Scientology, Jungian and humanistic psychology, the human potential movement, holistic health, the development of unusual faculties through crystals and pyramids, interest in psychic phenomena and UFOs, certain management and educational programmes, New Age music, the creation spirituality of Fox, Neopaganism, ecofeminism, deep ecology, global politics, the peace movement, and appropriate technology. (Unfamiliar terms will be discussed and defined as the inquiry proceeds.)

Miller's critique presents a similar picture of the New Age movement. He argues that the movement is best understood as 'an extremely large, loosely structured network of organizations and individuals bound together by common values (based in mysticism and monism ...) and a common vision (a coming "new age" of peace and mass enlightenment, the "Age of Aquarius").' Within this New Age 'metanetwork' are numerous smaller networks and movements, 'encompassing a wide variety of interests and causes (all compatible with the ends of the larger network).'<sup>23</sup>

While acknowledging that New Agers place more emphasis upon experience than belief, Miller still insists that 'it should be obvious

that certain assumptions cannot be separated from New Age thinking, or there could be no such thing as New Age thinking.' According to Miller, 'universal' New Age religious beliefs and practices include monism, pantheism, and techniques for altering consciousness (such as meditation, chanting, and sensory deprivation). These techniques 'enable the seeker to ... experience ... oneness with God.' 'Ignorance' lies at the root of the individual's sense of separation from divinity: 'man is separated from God only in his own consciousness. He is the victim of a false sense of separate identity which blinds him to his essential unity with God, and this is the cause of all his problems.' Thus, continues Miller, salvation for the New Ager is connected with spiritual knowledge or 'gnosis,' 'the realization that one's true Self is God.' Mystical experience is viewed as the doorway to 'personal transformation': a 'lifelong growth process marked by increasing wholeness and personal power.' In addition to these universal beliefs, 'most New Agers adhere to the ancient Hindu doctrines of reincarnation and karma.' Another three 'central' New Age beliefs include, according to Miller, a 'spiritualized' doctrine of evolution, the conviction that personal transformation leads to planetary transformation, and of course 'the concept of the New Age itself (usually defined astrologically).'<sup>24</sup>

For Miller, key organizations, ideas and practices which have contributed towards and/or embrace these core aspects of New Age thinking include the counterculture movement of the 1960s, the human potential movement, channeling, Neopaganism, post-Newtonian physics, systems theory, holistic health, humanistic and transpersonal education,

the Green movement, the Findhorn Foundation, creation spirituality, and process theology.

Peters' account of the New Age concentrates particularly upon the theological underpinnings of New Age spirituality and constitutes perhaps the most sympathetic Christian appraisal to date. Peters attempts to place the entire spectrum of New Age spirituality under the single rubric of 'modern gnosticism.' The New Age worldview argues Peters is 'a version of the perennial philosophy or, more specifically, a form of gnosticism which makes use of neologisms plus vocabulary borrowed from Hinduism and humanistic psychology.'<sup>25</sup> Peters argues that the New Age is reminiscent of Hellenistic Gnosticism 'both in what it teaches and in its competitive position vis a vis Christian orthodoxy.' However, he uses the Gnostic label primarily to highlight the movement's concern with 'gnosis': 'I suggest [using] the term gnosticism ... because the term gnosis, having to do with knowledge, is here [in the New Age movement] the basic category for understanding the nature of the human predicament and for solving it.'<sup>26</sup> Peters identifies eight tenets of 'the new age variant on gnosticism,' and these are as follows:

1) Wholism: the affirmation of interconnectedness, and of the universal tendency towards the development of 'ever more complex and significant wholes' - both organic and psychic.

2) Monism: 'metaphysical wholism' - 'When new agers articulate what they mean by wholism ... it quickly becomes cosmic.'

3) The Higher Self: cosmic unity 'seems to carry with it a notion of a higher or supraindividual self, an inclusive reality within which one's apparent or phenomenal self participates.' The individual's task is to become 'self-realized,' 'to become aware of this metaphysical power, this unifying reality that lies within us.' The Gnostic doctrine of the divine spark argues Peters 'appears to be making a comeback, although it is only occasionally given this name.'

4) Potentiality: everyone has divine potential within, and 'self-realization and self-fulfillment are the proper ends of life.' 'Inner divinity' forms the connecting link between potential and Gnosticism: 'The divine within us can be considered part of our potential. "I am God, you are God" can be heard frequently in the human potential movement.'

5) Reincarnation.

6) Evolution and transformation: concern with evolution is 'the eschatological driving force of current new age thinking.' New Agers believe that they are part of a cosmic evolutionary process that is teleological in nature - it is continually moving in the direction of increased complexity and integration. By embracing New Age values, humans can 'achieve a quantum leap in evolutionary development and attain personal wellness as well as peace on earth.' The development of self-reflexive consciousness has added new momentum to the evolutionary drama. Through it, humans can 'give the evolutionary development of the

cosmos a boost ... We find ourselves, then, in the driver's seat of evolution. We are steering the direction all of nature will take. The role of human consciousness becomes awesomely significant.'

7) Gnosis: often dubbed 'new awareness' or 'higher consciousness.' For New Agers, 'the fundamental human problem is understood as ignorance, and the solution must then be some form of personal knowledge.' New Age gnosis is 'direct knowledge' of the whole through which personal and social transformation may proceed. By drawing upon our inner gnosis, 'we can create a new vision of how the world should work.'

8) Jesus, sometimes: as a reminder of outmoded spirituality, as a symbol of psychological growth, or as a celestial, enlightened master.<sup>27</sup>

Groups, individuals and interests which Peters links with the New Age include humanistic and Jungian psychology, the Church Universal and Triumphant, the holistic health movement, channeling, interest in UFOs, Neopaganism, Matthew Fox and creation spirituality, and physicist David Bohm.

Non-Christian introductions to the New Age movement include those by Melton et al. and Bloom. These will now be discussed. In contrast with expositions on the New Age provided by evangelical Christians ('who feel religiously threatened by it') and by religious sceptics (who 'have attempted to dismiss the movement as the product of psychological

aberrations and social dysfunction'), Melton et al. argue that their inquiry provides a non-polemical, balanced, objective, and comprehensive overview of the movement. For these researchers, a central concern of the New Age is 'personal spiritual-psychological transformation.' Personal transformation from a life 'dominated by ... oppressive "orthodox" modes of thought' and 'dysfunctional exploitative relationships,' to one characterized by a 'new openness ... regained vitality and health, excitement, intensity, new meaning, and a new future.' Given this personal dimension, they highlight - in contrast with Miller who seems keen to emphasize a 'network' image of the movement - that many New Agers 'have adopted a personal set of spiritual practices which may be very individualized and practiced either alone or informally with a few friends.' Nevertheless, as with Chandler, Miller and Peters, they assert that the movement 'does possess an identifiable ideological framework, and members do share a common set of beliefs.' Although the movement 'subordinates beliefs to experience,' there are 'some readily identifiable New Age beliefs held by most people in the movement.' These include, firstly, belief in a monistic principle which is said to support, underlie, or permeate the universe, and which is 'encountered in mystical states of consciousness.' As with Chandler, Melton et al. see pantheism as a key New Age belief. However they do make a very important observation - some New Agers embrace 'a form of dualism that sees spiritual reality as ultimately good and real, but matter as an evil that must be left behind.' Of course, dualism does not necessarily entail a rejection of monism. Some New Agers make a hierarchical (rather than absolute) distinction between various

'vibration' levels of reality (from the lower levels of matter, to the higher 'spiritual' realms). Matter, in short, is sometimes viewed as a lower emanation of a higher 'spiritual' principle. New Agers also share an interest in 'the production of a mystical consciousness or awareness,' variously termed higher consciousness, self-realization, or New Age awareness. This level of consciousness 'transcends mundane reality,' and promotes awareness of a supposed unity that 'underlies the appearance of diversity.' Another key New Age belief is that humans are manifestations of the divine, and thus 'New Age devotees frequently affirm their own godhood and/or self as God.' Tied to this notion of personal divinity is a certain degree of moral relativism: 'New Agers often affirm that all is god, hence all is good.' Evil in the New Age movement is 'usually tied to ignorance.' As with Chandler and Miller, Melton et al. also agree that most New Agers believe in reincarnation, indeed, that few beliefs 'are held with such passion and even dogmatic certainty as the belief in reincarnation and karma.' Finally New Agers affirm the immanent arrival of a planetary New Age: 'The New Age experience of transformation also gives a new vision of the world. Just as the individual has been transformed, it is possible to transform the culture ... for humanity to move out of the old eon into a New Age.' Concern for social transformation leads to a number of vital social issues which the New Age attempts to address, including environmental issues, and international peacekeeping and cooperation. In the immanent planetary New Age humanity will recognize one 'Universal Religion.' This will 'draw from all the present religious traditions,' and will

also place 'a renewed emphasis on self-knowledge, inner exploration, and participation in a continual transformative process.'<sup>28</sup>

According to Melton et al., historical tributaries to the New Age movement include Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy. More contemporary elements include astrology, parapsychology, channeling, interest in lost continents (particularly Lemuria and Atlantis), pyramid and crystal power, firewalking, tarot, UFOs, holistic health, voluntary simplicity, prosperity consciousness, appropriate technology, and intentional communities like Findhorn.

For Peter Donebauer, in his Preface to Bloom's anthology of New Age writings, the New Age is neither a movement nor a religion set apart from any other; it is neither something one can choose or not to join; it is 'essentially a view of the time we live in and the world we are creating.' It is an 'expansion of consciousness,' a 'profound transformation of our perception of both ourselves and our world.' For Bloom, who seems to speak on behalf of the movement, this 'profound transformation' is taking place within four major fields, and these he terms New Paradigm/Science, Ecology, New Psychology and Spiritual Dynamics. Together, these fields make up the New Age movement; together, they present 'a common general message.'<sup>29</sup>

New Paradigm/Science refers to new views derived from recent insights in physics, cosmology, and biology; views which are 'reworking our intellectual understanding of the structures of life.' The



reductionistic, deterministic, and mechanistic scientific paradigm inherited from Descartes and Newton is breaking down, and is giving way 'to a more fluid and expanded view of reality.' New Science theories - the Gaia hypothesis in particular - overlap and dialogue with certain trends in Ecology, particularly concerns with the intrinsic value of the natural environment and of the development of a more expanded sense of 'self,' as proposed in 'deep ecology.' The third New Age field is that of New Psychology. At the heart of the New Psychology lies the belief that 'all people are capable of becoming integrated, fulfilled and completely loving human beings.' For Bloom however, the hallmark of the New Age 'is the power of its Spiritual Dynamics' which he believes will transform our postindustrial feelings of 'isolation and alienation.' The New Age adopts a very eclectic approach to religion, but one of its major characteristics according to Bloom is 'its honouring of all the esoteric religious traditions and of the mystic traditions of native peoples.'

A remarkable renaissance of the wisdom traditions is taking place, both those within the major religions and those of indigenous peoples. Within the major religions, for example, are the gnostic tradition of Christianity, the Qabalah of Judaism, Sufism in Islam, and Zen and meditation techniques of Buddhism. The native traditions include those of Celtic Europe - such as Wiccan and Druidism - north American Indians, Australian Aborigines and African medicine people. And there is a powerful rebirth of the female aspects of deity, as the Goddess resumes her crucial role in our lives.

For Bloom, another two central features of New Age spirituality are its emphasis upon 'freedom' and the exploration of 'inner realities':

I see the New Age phenomenon as the visible tip of the iceberg of a mass movement in which humanity is reasserting its right to explore spirituality in total freedom. The constraints of

religious and intellectual ideology are falling away ... The great beauty of the New Age movement is that if someone in it is approached by someone else looking for insight or counselling about the inner or religious dimension, he or she will not be told: 'Believe this! Do this! Don't do that!' but rather: 'There are a thousand different ways of exploring inner reality. Go where your intelligence and intuition lead you. Trust yourself.' New Age attitudes are the antithesis of fundamentalism.(30)

#### Common values and a Common Vision?

Despite any differences in style or emphasis, researchers and theorists like Chandler, Miller, Peters, Melton et al. and Bloom all appear to agree that it is possible to extrapolate from the expansive gamut of New Age concerns and assumptions a more-or-less consistent New Age worldview and spirituality; indeed, that all New Agers are - to use Miller's phrase - linked by 'common values and a common vision.' Such opinions are not without criticism. Heelas notes the movement's lack of homogeneity, where some paths 'emphasize an individuated form of spirituality' while others 'the spirituality which runs through all that is natural.' Again, others combine 'New Age monism with beliefs to do with external spiritual agencies.'<sup>31</sup> For other commentators, the issue is less one of a lack of homogeneity and more one of fundamental contradictions. It is a rather confounded Ted Schultz who complains that the New Age is fraught with 'mutually contradictory ideas.' He notes that '"Body awareness" and "earth wisdom" are stressed, but we are told that the "material world" is the source of pain and suffering and that it is only the disembodied "spiritual world" that counts.'<sup>32</sup> A similar point is made by Michael Perry, the Archdeacon of Durham, who contends that the one thing absent in the New Age movement is 'logical consistency.' Some New Agers he observes hold that there is 'nothing

but God,' and that humans therefore 'partake of divinity by the very fact of existing.' On the other hand, some argue for 'a series of levels or planes between God and us, and of a hierarchy of Masters and Teachers.' Such hierarchism he further notes is accompanied with the belief that humans 'fell' from spirit into matter. The idea of a 'fall into matter,' concludes Perry, 'is a far cry from saying that we all partake of divinity and that the earth and the matter in it is as divine as we are.'<sup>33</sup> The same tension in New Age thought is also recognized by Dr. Michael York, who makes a distinction between the New Age and Neopaganism, even though he suggests somewhat confusingly that 'we have pagan New Agers or pagans who identify as New Age and we also have New Agers who entertain pagan metaphors and even what could be identified as pagan or Gaian beliefs.' The overlap between the New Age and Neopaganism states York is 'an uneasy one of self-contradicting tensions.' Even when Neopaganism is excluded from consideration, the New Age still remains in a state of 'unresolved dialectic.' The unresolved dialectic in the New Age, and between the New Age and Neopaganism, is

between the idea of Nature as Real and Nature as Illusion, between the immanentist pagan concept of pantheism and the transcendental gnostic concept of theism, between a numinous materialism and a world-denying idealism.(34)

One obvious area of contradiction within the New Age movement concerns the issue of material prosperity. On the one hand, some New Agers promote the idea of 'prosperity consciousness.' This entails the belief that poverty or wealth is a matter of individual consciousness. World resources are unlimited, and those who are poor have simply

'chosen' to be so; they have - to use a popular New Age dictum - 'created their own reality.'<sup>35</sup> Other New Agers embrace the ideal of 'voluntary simplicity,' advocating the values of frugal consumption and ecological consciousness in the face of diminishing world resources.<sup>36</sup> Common values and a common vision?

Another area of contradiction - and one noted by both Schultz and York above - concerns the movement's beliefs about and attitudes towards the material environment. According to Robert Basil, editor of a selection of essays on the New Age movement, 'a devaluation of the material world [from Swedenborg onwards] has remained postulate number one of the New Age movement.'<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in an article concerned with new forms of Gnosticism, Ellen and Paul Hinlicky argue that 'The New Age is a most radical denial of creatureliness,' where consciousness, as opposed to the human body, is viewed as the real 'basis of the self.'<sup>38</sup> Such accusations of dualism appear to be well justified. J. L. Simmons, in his The Emerging New Age, a popular introduction to the movement, asserts:

there are many levels in the spiritual realms, in increasing refinement of what we might crudely call vibration level or wavelength. Much like the variations in the color spectrum, these represent degrees of refinement of spirit. The lower ones are the coarsest and most similar to those of our physical plane. The higher levels evidently become increasingly 'heavenly,' in every sense of the word.(39)

Similarly, according to George Trevelyan - the so-called 'father' of the British New Age movement - the phenomenal world is derived from a single spiritual principle which has 'divided its unity into subordinate

hierarchical levels.' These subordinate levels have no abiding reality of their own; in the final analysis, the world is a 'plane of illusion.'<sup>40</sup> The individual's immaterial soul does not really belong to this illusory plane: 'The world of free spirit dips down into the fascinatingly beautiful realm of matter, in order there to sojourn and operate, for the gaining of experience in a condition of temporary separation from the Source.' Ecological destruction would in fact hasten humanity's transition into the New Age: 'We know that death for the true entity of man is an illusion ... Let us admit that a great tidal wave would be the quickest way to the New Jerusalem!'<sup>41</sup> 'Saint Germain,' an entity channeled by The Church Universal and Triumphant, informs his followers that in the material world, the soul suffers under the 'dark, dank energies of human bondage,' and here, every human condition is a 'perversion of a divine condition.'<sup>42</sup> According to 'Seth,' another channeled entity, the 'entire physical environment is the materialization of your beliefs': 'You are a creator translating your expectations into physical form ... The exterior appearance is a replica of inner desire.'<sup>43</sup>

In contrast with such radical denouncements of material existence, feminist Neopagans like 'Starhawk' celebrate a return to a spirituality of divine immanence; one which 'calls us to live our spirituality here in the world, to take action to preserve the life of the earth.' A spirituality of immanence means that 'we do not try to escape our humanness, but seek to become more human.' A spirituality of immanence constitutes an 'orientation toward life, toward the body, toward

sexuality, ego, will, toward all the muckiness and adventure of being human!'<sup>44</sup> Similarly, creation spirituality theologian Matthew Fox condemns the traditional 'fall/redemption' model of Christianity on the grounds that it has little to say about 'the New Creation or creativity, about justice-making and social transformation, or about Eros, play, pleasure, and the God of delight.' Fox urges a movement away from all notions of a transcendent, ruling male deity towards panentheistic immanence; towards 'an erotic God who plays, takes pleasure, births, celebrates and feels passion.'<sup>45</sup> Can it really be said that those who advocate otherworldly transcendence and those who advocate pantheistic immanence and social action to 'preserve the life of the earth' are really - to use Miller's phrase - linked by common values and a common vision?

It would seem that most of the previously mentioned researchers are not entirely oblivious to such fundamental contradictions. One response however is to ignore them. Melton et al. for example assert that the view of poverty as 'a social problem created by an unjust and exploitative society' and as 'a matter of individual consciousness' are both 'equally New Age' in their assumptions.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Chandler can suggest that the attempt to 'end the repetitious and painful birth-death-rebirth process' and the attempt to 'overcome world hunger ... humanize technology ... foster cooperative living styles ... and organize global politics' are both expressions of the movement's 'shared worldview about the nature of existence and the purpose of life in the cosmos.'<sup>47</sup>

Another response is to mask contradictions with vague qualifications. Chandler writes: 'Identifying individuals as "full-blown" New Agers is baffling. Some subscribe to certain portions of New Age, some to others; some dissociate themselves from the movement altogether, though they embrace core aspects of its thinking.'<sup>48</sup> Surely it is only 'baffling' to the extent that it presupposes a shared and consistent 'core' set of New Age beliefs to begin with? For Melton et al., the beliefs which underscore the movement's 'identifiable ideological framework' are 'extremely malleable,' 'constantly in flux,' 'tentative,' 'functional,' and 'secondary.'<sup>49</sup>

Another problem is that of over-generalization. A good example is Peters' interpretation of New Age 'gnosis.' For Peters, all New Agers are Gnostics in the sense that spiritual knowledge and awakening is for the New Age 'the basic category for understanding the nature of the human predicament and for solving it.' Peters argues that New Age gnosis differs dramatically from the gnosis of ancient Gnosticism, where it was simply a means towards an acosmic end - a device employed in the attempt to escape matter and time and return to the pleromatic order above the created one. By contrast claims Peters, New Age gnosis is world-affirming. The antipathy toward the physical or natural world evidenced in the Gnosticism of antiquity he says 'does not preoccupy contemporary new age thinkers.'<sup>50</sup> That some facets of the New Age movement do embrace a world-affirming gnosis cannot be denied. According to Buddhist and ecofeminist activist Joanna Macy for example, we are called to shake off 'a case of mistaken identity,' the erroneous

belief that we are 'separate and competitive beings, limited to the grasp of our conscious egos.' This belief will destroy us and our environment 'if we don't wake up in time.' The gnosis advanced by Macy is of a more expansive view of the self, or what she calls the 'ecological self.' Humans must wake up to the fact that their true nature is 'coextensive with all life on this planet.'<sup>51</sup> Yet, it is a gross over-generalization to suggest that all New Agers feel this way. For Trevelyan, gnosis means awakening to the fact that our true nature transcends - and is not coextensive with - all life on this planet. Humans have descended into the world and have forgotten their transcendent origins: 'They lost all knowledge, all recollection, of the reality of higher worlds and of the hierarchy of planes of being. They lost both spirit and God.'<sup>52</sup> In a mood of extreme anthropocentrism, he tells his followers that 'In order to become truly human, we have to eject the animal nature from our soul. The hyena in us, the wolf, the snake, the fox, needs to be sublimated and transmuted. As man, we need to rise above these qualities.'<sup>53</sup>

The final solution to the problem of contradiction is of course that of disqualification. New Age beliefs according to Melton et al. are secondary, tentative, malleable and functional; and yet they appear to have no hesitation in disqualifying most Neopagans from inclusion in the movement on the grounds that they are 'Focused on the pagan religions of the past' and 'not particularly interested in a New Age in the future.'<sup>54</sup> Perhaps Neopagans are reluctant to be called New Agers in fear of being associated with 'incompatible elements'; but to suggest



that they are not interested in 'a New Age in the future' is simply not true. Most Neopagans, as Howard Eilberg-Schwartz points out, appropriate the past in order to address problems of the present and offer visions of the future:

It does not matter [to most Neopagans] if the first religion of most societies was Goddess worship or even if the Goddess had the characteristics that paganism now ascribes to Her. It does not matter whether a Craft or faerie tradition existed during the European witch-craze. Nor does it matter if, in appropriating the symbols, languages, and myths of the past, the meaning of such forms is completely transformed ... What matters is only that these ancient religious forms offer alternative ways of living and new vocabularies that might help address current problems.(55)

According to Wiccan priestess and Neopagan researcher Margot Adler, Neopagan religions, especially Witchcraft, are New Age par excellence, in that they offer women positions of power, independence and authority denied to them in most of the other so-called 'New Age' religions. She notes:

Witchcraft is one of the few 'new age' religions where women can participate on an equal footing with men. Outside of Neopaganism in general, and Witchcraft in particular, the 'Aquarian Age' new religions have not been particularly comfortable with the idea of women as strong, independent, powerful, self-identified persons. One has only to peruse the pages of 'new age' journals ... to conclude that most of the new spiritual organizations are still in the dark ages when it comes to women.(56)

The desire to maintain the notion of a single, unified 'New Age worldview,' achieved through a process of disqualification, over-generalization, and by ignoring or masking contradictions, does more to obfuscate than to clarify. There appears to be a real need for some degree of discrimination.

### Spangler's Four Images of the New Age

Some degree of discrimination has already been provided in the four category typology of the New Age provided by David Spangler, a prominent New Age theorist. Spangler argues that the New Age movement can be divided into four distinguishable levels or 'images.' One level and image of the New Age is as a 'superficial label,' usually employed in a commercial setting. At this level one can talk of commodities such as 'New Age shoes' or about eating in 'New Age restaurants' where New Age music is played softly in the background. A more advanced level of the movement is the New Age as 'change.' Here, emphasis is placed upon the idea of transformation, usually presented in terms of a 'paradigm shift' from a 'Cartesian' to an 'ecological' or 'holistic' worldview. This is the image and level of the New Age presented in popular works like Ferguson's The Aquarian Conspiracy and Capra's The Turning Point. At this level, according to Spangler, the emerging New Age is presented in social, economic and technological terms, 'rather than spiritual ones,' and the term 'New Age' itself 'is rarely used.'<sup>57</sup>

The remaining two levels of Spangler's typology relate more specifically to the theological and 'spiritual' assumptions of the New Age. The first of these Spangler calls the 'new age as glamour.' This is the level of the movement populated by crystals, pyramids, UFOs, extraterrestrials and other exotic beings, including discarnate 'masters' who occupy various planes in a hierarchical chain of existence. This level is one of 'psychic powers and occult mysteries, of conspiracies and hidden teachings.' Here the 'coming New Age' is

perceived very much in millennial or apocalyptic terms (the 'old idea of a new age'), perhaps brought about by angelic or extraterrestrial intervention. It is often connected with astrological lore, with the belief in an immanent transition from the 'Age of Pisces' to the 'Age of Aquarius.' It is a level of the New Age which, as Spangler notes quite perceptively, has its roots in the 'western cultural and religious tradition,' and is 'identical in spirit if not always in language to many of the current millennial expectations of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian groups.' The spirituality of this level is concerned with 'transcendence,' and herein lies its danger: 'in the quest for the transcendent, for a renewed connection with the sacred at the heart of all true culture, we may opt for escape instead.'<sup>58</sup>

It is within the glamour New Age continues Spangler that 'one is most likely to find the words new age used, unfortunately, often by its most visible and vocal exponents.' Given this, the glamour New Age represents 'the source for much of the general public's awareness of the idea of a new age, which is consequently distorted.'<sup>59</sup> During a lecture at the Chinook Learning Centre near Seattle, Spangler relates the following incident:

I was awakened at 6 a.m. one day by a phone call from a Time magazine reporter ... 'What is the New Age?' she asked. I sleepily rattled off my usual philosophical answer, to which she replied, 'Well, that's very interesting, but what about crystals? Isn't it true that all New Agers believe in and use crystals for various purposes?' 'No,' I replied, 'I don't use them.' 'Well, in that case,' she said, 'I can't use you. My editor is quite clear that the New Age is about crystals, and that's what I need to write about.' ... Whatever New Age I represented, it wasn't the one that Time magazine was interested in.(60)

One individual responsible for popularizing this image of the New Age is actress Shirley MacLaine. MacLaine is linked to the New Age via a selection of autobiographies and a TV series ('Out On a Limb'), which chart her exciting adventures through the world of out-of-body experiences, extraterrestrial encounters, channeling, yoga, reincarnation, mantras, past-life recall and crystal power. New Age researchers William Kautz and Melanie Branon argue that MacLaine's televised exploits 'will probably go on record as having drawn more public attention to "raising consciousness" in the 1980s than TM [Transcendental Meditation] did in the 1960s.' Her discoveries 'have served as a primer in metaphysics for millions.'<sup>61</sup>

Given the MacLaine-inspired 'media hoopla' around channeling and other esoteric phenomena, it is clear, argues Spangler, that the New Age movement 'is being defined by its inwardly oriented elements - and particularly by the most sensational and bizarre of these.' Through such distortions and caricatures, 'people who were comfortable with the term New Age are now feeling put off by it. Now to identify oneself or one's work as being New Age is to risk being categorized with activities and ideas that have little spiritual, intellectual, or social credibility.' Rather than being a symbol of hope and inspiration, the term 'New Age' has become one 'of ridicule and irrelevancy.'<sup>62</sup>

For Spangler, the final level and image of the New Age is 'the new age as an incarnation of the sacred.' This level signifies the birth of

a 'new consciousness' that will allow for the celebration of 'divinity within the ordinary' and through this celebration, 'bring to life a sacred civilization.' A celebration of divinity within the ordinary entails a 'renaming of the sacred,' and new ways of relating to the world, which in turn promote the construction of social institutions which will honour these new modes of being. As Spangler puts it:

To rename the sacred is to have a different view of the universe. It is to reexpand those boundaries we have placed around God, even to redefine the nature of divinity ... It is to look at the objects, people, and events in our lives and to say 'You are sacred. In you and with you I can find the sacramental passages that reconnect me to the wholeness of creation.' It is then to ask ourselves what kind of culture, what kind of institutions - be they political, economic, artistic, educational, or scientific - we need that can honor that universal sacredness.(63)

For Spangler, this level or image of the New Age is more of a 'spirit' than a movement, but he offers various criteria for recognizing it. To begin with, it promotes a positive image of the future, and one which requires a decisive role to be played by every individual: 'I am not a victim of the future; I am a cocreator of its emergence, a midwife at its birth.' It also promotes a certain worldview which can guide individuals' choices. This worldview is holistic, ecological and androgynous. This worldview places emphasis upon 'self-realization,' which Spangler defines as 'the emergence of self-awareness, creativity, and accountability.' The self to be realized is not some kind of abstract essence that exists independent of its environment, but one 'that lives in mutuality and finds its fulfillment not only in realizing its unique potentials but in empowering and sharing in the unfoldment of others and of society as a whole.' Finally this New Age spirit is one

of action, whether it be 'in the renaming of the sacred and exploring the sacraments of ordinary daily living,' or in the pursuit of social projects 'that will nourish the emergence of a new cultural vision.'<sup>64</sup>

Spangler's model of the New Age does have some shortcomings. An obvious one is that the movement is far too fluid to be neatly pigeonholed into four distinct levels. A good example is Spangler's interpretation of the New Age as 'change.' For Spangler, this is the level of the movement in which the emerging New Age 'is usually seen in social, economic, and technological terms rather than spiritual ones.' He goes on to link Capra with this level of the movement. Yet, an analysis of Capra's work would suggest that the New Age as 'change' cannot be easily divorced from the New Age as an 'incarnation of the sacred.' For Capra, the new vision of transformation 'is an ecological vision in a sense which goes far beyond the immediate concerns with environmental protection.' This 'deep' ecological perspective is based upon a certain perception of reality; an 'intuitive awareness of the oneness of all life, the interdependence of its multiple manifestations and its cycles of change and transformation.' When it is seen that true transformation is dependent upon a level of consciousness in which the individual feels connected to others, to the earth, and to the cosmos, 'it becomes clear,' he argues, that such transformation 'will require a new philosophical and religious basis.'<sup>65</sup> Indeed, if the New Age as an incarnation of the sacred concerns a renaming of the sacred, and of finding the sacred in the everyday, why should the New Age as change not be included in this renaming process? And what does one make of

Spangler himself, who criticises the glamour New Age for shifting accountability from the individual 'onto the back of vast, impersonal cosmic forces, whether astrological, extraterrestrial or divine,' but who at the same time receives guidance from a supernatural entity by the name of 'John?'<sup>66</sup>

Despite such criticisms, Spangler's work strongly suggests that the movement does contain at least two contrasting types of New Age theology and spirituality. Although Spangler offers very little in terms of a detailed comparison, it is clear that there are some significant differences. The glamour New Age is millenarian, apocalyptic, passive, hierarchical, dualistic and concerned with transcendence. Spangler suggests that it is not 'new' at all - it has its roots in the 'western cultural and religious tradition'; it is the 'old idea of a new age.' The New Age as 'an incarnation of the sacred' on the other hand is holistic rather than dualistic, concerned with immanence rather than transcendence - with a celebration of 'divinity within the ordinary' and with action and 'cocreativity' instead of passivity. The division made by Spangler could crudely be described as one between a 'vertical' and a 'horizontal' spirituality.

## THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THIS THESIS

### Aims

The aim of this thesis is to provide a general overview of New Age spirituality and theology. As with Spangler and York I believe that it

is necessary to make some degree of discrimination, and to provide a framework that will make some sense out of the fundamental contradictions that characterize New Age thought. My organizational framework is, broadly speaking, 'typological,' in that a distinction is made between two very different types of New Age spirituality.

The typological distinction made is between 'patriarchal' spirituality and 'ecological' spirituality. This distinction is akin to the one Spangler makes between the 'glamour' New Age and the New Age 'as an incarnation of the sacred.' It also reflects York's discussion of the tension in the New Age between 'numinous materialism' and 'world-denying idealism.' It is hoped that this distinction will show that the New Age movement, taken as a whole, does not embrace 'common values' and a 'common vision,' and that fundamental contradictions are not indicative merely of a lack of homogeneity.

The hermeneutical principles upon which the patriarchal-ecological typology has been based are contained within the ecological dynamic itself (so in a sense this is a New Age approach to the New Age). The reasons why I have termed this type of New Age spirituality 'ecological' will be outlined shortly. However, this spiritual dynamic has already been given a variety of labels, including 'post-Christian spirituality,'<sup>67</sup> 'constructive postmodern spirituality,'<sup>68</sup> and 'New Age nature religion.'<sup>69</sup> Elements that have been linked with this New Age dynamic include 'ecofeminist' spiritualities like feminist Witchcraft and other Goddess-oriented spiritualities, creation-centred



spirituality, process theology, and some aspects of Jungian and transpersonal psychology. The ecological dynamic resonates strongly with Spangler's 'New Age as an incarnation of the sacred' and York's 'numinous materialism.' I believe the key motivating force in the generation of this type of New Ageism lies in feminism and feminist spirituality. This is recognized by New Age theorists like Capra who says that 'The spiritual essence of the ecological vision seems to find its ideal expression in the feminist spirituality advocated by the women's movement.' Unlike many overviews of the New Age which have little or nothing to say about feminism, this thesis shares Capra's contention that the feminist movement is one of the leading forces in the quest for a 'New Age,' 'creating a new self-image for women, along with new modes of thinking and a new system of values.' Feminist spirituality promises to have 'a profound influence not only on religion and philosophy but also on our social and political life.'<sup>70</sup> Feminists have self-consciously identified themselves and their cause with the symbol of 'the New Age' since the 1970s. For example, in her keynote address to the 1976 Boston Festival on Women's Spirituality, Barbara Starret argued that the purpose of feminism and feminist spirituality was to bring about a New Age that moved beyond the patterns of domination that characterize '"masculinist and patriarchal"' society: '"Domination of others by force: of nature and land and resources, of 'inferior' nations and groups, of women, of money and markets and material goods."' '"The New Age,"' declares Starret, '"will be the Age of the Female."<sup>71</sup> As recently as 1989, theologian Ursula King defined the goal of feminism as the creation of a 'new woman' and a 'new earth.'

Feminism she says 'seeks a change in consciousness and a change in the organization, power structures and fundamental values in our society.' It offers 'a vision of the possibilities of a new age and a new spirit to come.'<sup>72</sup> Yet this link between feminist spirituality and the 'New Age' has become increasingly tenuous as feminists have become more aware of incompatible elements within the spectrum of New Age thought, and many no longer wish to be identified with the New Age symbol. A good example of this can be found in Monica Sjoo's New Age & Armageddon, where an attempt is made to drive a deep wedge between ecofeminist Goddess spirituality and the New Age movement. Her work is grounded in the belief that much of the New Age is not new at all, but in fact continuous with patriarchal consciousness.<sup>73</sup> It is my contention that the term 'patriarchal,' as defined by proponents of ecological spirituality, serves as a useful rubric for a substantial portion of the New Age. The terms 'patriarchal spirituality' and 'ecological spirituality' will be discussed shortly, but before that, I wish to say a few things concerning the definitions of particular terms and research methods.

#### Definitions and Research Methods

This thesis is concerned with the spirituality of the New Age movement. It is necessary to clarify at this point how these terms will be employed. In the past, 'spirituality' and 'spiritual' have often been understood in a dualistic sense, as things removed from the concerns of the material world and of everyday living. The 'spiritual' person was not the 'worldly' person. This dualistic interpretation of

'spiritual' persists today. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990) for example gives the primary definition of 'spiritual' as being 'of or concerning the spirit as opposed to matter.' In this thesis 'spirituality' is employed in a more general sense, indicating 'paths' or 'ways' concerned with the development of humans and society into some state of completeness, wholeness, or fulfilment. This interpretation of spirituality has been adapted from an article by Religious Studies professor Walter Principle, whose 'universally applicable' definition of the term is the way in which a person understands and lives out that aspect of his or her religion or philosophy 'that is viewed as the loftiest, the noblest, the most calculated to lead to the fullness of the ideal or perfection being sought.'<sup>74</sup>

Spirituality cannot be divorced from questions and issues commonly regarded as being of a 'religious' or 'theological' nature - the nature of and relationship between God, nature, humanity, the destiny of humanity, and so on. Beliefs about such fundamental questions provide the basis for the kind of spirituality that will be lived, the kind of 'ideal or perfection being sought.' Principle agrees, and views the analysis of theological issues as integral to the task of looking at the 'total context' of spirituality. Yet looking at the total context of spirituality according to Principle must also involve an examination of wider influences upon the ideal or perfection being sought - including psychological and philosophical influences. Like theological assumptions, each of these wider influences 'fashions the person's or the tradition's spiritual ideal and response to that ideal.'<sup>75</sup> An

analysis of theological beliefs, as well as wider influences, and how these fashion the ideal or perfection being sought, will receive much attention in this investigation into the 'total context' of New Age spirituality.

Our inquiry recognizes the New Age movement as a 'movement'; but only in the broad sense of being a 'profound transformation of our perception of both ourselves and our world.' That I have included feminism in this interpretation indicates that I do not see the New Age, as some do, as being merely some kind of 'occult' tradition that exists on the fringes of or even outside mainstream society. On the contrary, much in the New Age movement is more diffuse and 'ordinary' than many seem to acknowledge. For example, both feminist Witchcraft and creation spirituality place emphasis upon reconciling humans with their finitude, and with the natural cycle of growth and decay experienced through the body and observed in the environment. There is little time in this area of the movement for beliefs about supernatural worlds of perfection. "Let us return," declares feminist poet Adrienne Rich, "to imperfection's school/ No longer wandering after Plato's ghost."<sup>76</sup> Such an attitude is not exactly alien to much in mainstream culture. As John Charles Cooper says in his inquiry into the roots of radical theology:

The question most often asked by people today is not the ontological question of the early philosophers, Where did we come from? but the genetic, developmental question of the historian and the sociologist, How did we get this way? Ours is an era that looks for the underlying processes of change, not for unchanging principles and structures. Alfred North Whitehead, with his emphasis upon the relationship of the past to the present and the future, is typical of our century. The thirst of Plato to uncover the unchanging world of reality - beyond the flux of historical change - is well-nigh

unintelligible to most of us. Every schoolboy, and certainly every college student, is at least exposed to this kind of thinking.(77)

In tandem with this broad interpretation of the New Age 'movement,' our inquiry will also adopt an open stance towards the issue of inclusivity. It will be taken that 'membership' entails acknowledging what Bloom calls the 'common theme' of the movement: 'that we are [or could be] entering a New Age and that human consciousness is going through [or needs to go through] a transformation that is cosmically significant.'<sup>78</sup> York describes the metaphor of an immanent shift in consciousness - whether it be achieved through supernatural intervention or simply through pragmatic human endeavour - as the 'one common theme behind all New Age identity.'<sup>79</sup> On a point of qualification, it should be noted that my consideration of New Age spirituality has been limited on the whole to North America and Europe (particularly Britain).

#### Research Methods

My approach to the New Age movement is almost entirely text-based. Literature examined includes general overviews and critiques of the New Age from both within and without the movement, material of a more specific nature relating to particular New Age groups and theorists, and material which 'touches' upon New Age themes and has in some way been incorporated into New Age thought - i.e., James Lovelock's Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth. Types of literature examined include monographs, anthologies, periodicals, articles from journals, essays, and introductory pamphlets and leaflets supplied by a number of New Age groups.

This text-based approach has been preferred over others for a number of reasons. First, while other methods like participant-observation may be appropriate for focus on a particular group, the focus of this thesis is on the New Age as a whole. This general approach does not require and indeed has had no time to make room for a more 'intimate' methodology. Second, it is assumed that the literature examined is a fair reflection of the beliefs and activities of those whom it describes. Third, with the exception of pamphlets and leaflets and certain New Age periodicals - most of which I have received from groups and individuals at New Age festivals and events - the literature examined is easily available, making the claims made and ideas expressed in this thesis easily checked by those who wish to do so.

#### The Patriarchal-Ecological Typology of New Age Spirituality/Theology

We now turn to discuss the nature of the patriarchal-ecological typology that I will employ in my overview of New Age spirituality and theology. The typology is a broad and heuristic one which does provide one way of making sense out of some of the fundamental contradictions that characterize the New Age movement. Saying this, the typology does not provide a solution to every contradiction in the movement. While many groups and theorists do appear to fit well into either one division or the other, some appear to fit in the main into one, but at the same time incorporate elements from the other. In other words, some New Agers are just inherently contradictory! A good example of such inherent contradiction was expressed in a recent talk by New Age theorist and former Green Party spokesperson David Icke at the

University of Stirling. Icke believes that to avoid an environmental catastrophe humans must develop a form of spirituality that will generate a more reverential attitude towards the planet. On the other hand, he holds that it is the spiritual destiny of humans to 'ascend' out of this world via a series of nonphysical planes.<sup>80</sup> If the latter is the case, why bother trying to develop a more earth-centred form of spirituality? Icke's New Age vision is a clear example of what York calls 'unresolved dialectic' within the movement. Other examples of such unresolved dialectic can be found in the movement's use of Jungian thought and evolutionary theories. Such tensions will be highlighted as the inquiry proceeds, and will also be discussed in the conclusion. Perhaps the typological division used here is best seen as reflecting spiritual 'poles' or 'tendencies' within the movement, rather than rigid categories. Either way many seekers of a New Age express more integrity and less dialectical tension than Icke does, and some kind of differentiation is certainly needed.

### Patriarchal Spirituality

As employed by feminists, 'patriarchy' generally indicates the oppression of women by men in all the institutions of society. In more recent discourse however the meaning of this term has widened to the degree that it has now come to signify, as Passionist Priest Thomas Berry puts it, 'the basic pathology of Western civilization.' To designate 'the deepest and most destructive level of determination in the Western perception of reality and value.' This term has been brought forward by feminists as a way of indicating

the larger sources of responsibility for what is happening not only with women, but also with the total civilizational structure of our society and even with the planet itself. The sense of patriarchy has now evolved as the archetypal pattern of oppressive governance by men with little regard for the well-being or personal fulfillment of women, for the more significant human values, or for the destiny of the earth itself.

Although this expanded sense of the term has not at present been adopted into our language, 'few words,' continues Berry, 'have appeared so suddenly to fulfill such a critical and ... creative role.' Through this term 'efforts are being made to identify the source and then to terminate the destructive course of human affairs that has emerged within the Western civilizational process and which now threatens the survival of the planet in all its basic life systems.'<sup>81</sup> This expanded sense of patriarchy is evident in the work of ecofeminist philosopher Karen Warren of the Philosophy department at Macalester College, who uses the term patriarchy to indicate a particular way of looking at the world, a particular 'conceptual framework.' The patriarchal conceptual framework according to Warren 'takes traditionally male-identified beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions as the only, or the standard, or the superior ones'; in doing so, 'it gives higher status or prestige to what has been traditionally identified as "male" than to what has been traditionally identified as "female."' The patriarchal conceptual framework according to Warren is characterized by three features: dualistic thinking, value-hierarchical thinking, and a logic of domination. Dualistic thinking separates as opposite aspects of reality which could be regarded as inseparable or complementary parts of a greater unity. Dualistic thought separates and opposes human to



nonhuman, mind to body, self to other, reason to emotion, men to women, nature to culture. Value-hierarchical thinking organizes such dualisms with a spatial metaphor of 'up-and-down' and gives greater value to that regarded as higher. It puts, as Warren says, 'men "up" and women "down," culture "up" and nature "down," minds "up" and bodies "down."' Value-hierarchical thinking gives rise to a logic of domination; a 'value-hierarchical way of thinking which explains, justifies, and maintains the subordination of an "inferior" group by a "superior" group on the grounds of the (alleged) inferiority or superiority of the respective group.' Value-hierarchical thinking, mediated by a logic of domination, has little respect for diversity, and 'serves to legitimate inequality.'<sup>82</sup>

It is recognized by feminists that the dualistic patriarchal conceptual framework is inextricably bound up with a particular view of the 'self.' Theology professor Claude Stewart echoes the views of many feminists when he says that mainstream Western thought has been dominated by a 'bias for atomism.' This regards 'relations as external rather than internal to beings(s),' and 'entities as self-contained and self-sufficient.' The West has embraced an 'entitative' view of the self; the self is 'what it is regardless of the relations in which the self stands.' Such an essentialist viewpoint, notes Stewart, is 'the antithesis of the ecologic way of viewing reality.'<sup>83</sup> The nature of the patriarchal self also occupies the attention of feminist theologian Catherine Keller. For Keller, as with Stewart, the male self of patriarchal culture is the 'separative self':

Myth and religion, philosophy and psychology center our civilization on the assumption that an individual is a discrete being: I am cleanly divided from the surrounding world of persons and places; I remain essentially the same self from moment to moment.(84)

Keller uses the term 'separative' rather than 'separate' to describe this self, for its separation she argues is matter of intention, not fundamental nature. Its separation is at the same time 'a repression of its own deep interrelatedness with everything else.' The separative self, according to Keller, has two essential characteristics. Firstly, its supposed autonomy. The separative self deems itself completely self-intact and self-enclosed; the outer world, it believes, merely bounces off its opacity, its impenetrability. Secondly, its fixed substantiability. The posture of autonomy leads to the illusion of a fixed, substantial self; a self that remains constant and enclosed through space and time.

Keller recognizes that the separative self is but one half of a dyad; the other half is the 'soluble self' - the model of selfhood offered to women. Together they function as a kind of two-part caricature of a single person: 'The masculine role fetishizes the moment of solitude, freedom and spontaneity ... To the feminine is left the role of sheer relation, of pure feeling, of transition between the moments of distinctive selves.' She is 'no self, no individuality at all,' while the male is 'all self, transcending his relations.' The classic Western epic of the Odyssey provides a clear example of how the separative and soluble selves function together. As Keller succinctly puts it: 'Penelope waits while Odysseus wanders.' The dyad of

separative and soluble selves is one in which his selfhood is achieved and maintained at the expense of her's: 'the soluble woman has embodied connection without self, while the separative male has incarnated self without connection.'<sup>85</sup>

It is further contended by feminists, particularly ecofeminists, that the characteristics of the patriarchal conceptual framework are deeply embedded in the Western religious heritage. According to feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, the Georgia Harkness Professor of Applied Theology at the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, classical Christianity, under the influence of Platonic philosophy, divided reality 'into a dualism of transcendent Spirit ... and inferior and dependent physical nature.' The things of the spirit were regarded as being 'higher' and of more value than those things which pertained to physical nature, and importantly, gender became the primary metaphor for the dualism of transcendence and immanence, spirit and matter: 'Whereas the male is seen essentially as the image of the male transcendent ego or God, woman is seen as the image of the lower, material nature.' The physical environment was regarded, not only as a realm of ontological inferiority, but one which imprisoned the male soul/mind, and subjected it to the torments of the passions. Liberation became liberation out of a world of finitude and flux; a 'flight of the mind from nature and body to a spiritual (disembodied) realm.' Women, as the representatives of the world, were viewed as 'the bearers of death, from which male spirit must flee to "light and life."' In this disembodied realm of 'light and life,' the male soul could 'live a

blessed and congenial existence for eternity freed from the struggle against finitude, change, and death.'<sup>86</sup> And what of the God of male monotheism, the ruler of the disembodied realm? The transcendent, impenetrable, immutable God of classical Western theology is as Keller argues the absolutization of the separative self. His perfections 'read like a catalog of the heroic ego's ideals for himself.' We are therefore left, as Keller notes, with the embarrassing situation of a religious tradition which on the one hand decries 'self-enclosure' as a sin against the imago dei, but which on the other deifies this same sin: 'Who is more "curved in upon himself" than this separate - not merely separative - supersubject?'<sup>87</sup>

The feminist view of classical Western religion and philosophy as dualistic, value-hierarchical, and ambivalent towards the body, women and the earth is shared by Don Cupitt, a lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion at Cambridge University. According to Cupitt, the West is moving towards the disintegration of a particular way of structuring reality which, until fairly recently, has underscored much of Western religion and philosophy. It is sometimes called the 'two-worlds dualism,' and it is rooted in Platonic thought:

In traditional Western thought you aimed to get away from the manifest, the contingent flux of things, as soon as you could. You thought that your salvation lay in moving to a higher, more-enduring realm beyond it ... you tried to jump from appearance to reality, from the sign to the thing signified ... Plato and others despised the world of sense and signs and feelings. It was secondary, subordinate and imperfect. Because it was a realm of constant and endless change and relativities, it seemed to Plato to scatter the soul and to make pitiable the condition of those caught up in it. Hypnotized, they gazed at a flickering painted veil that hid the Truth from their eyes. They were trapped by illusions and

needed to be rescued ... Thus began a long history of vilification of all that is changing, differential and manifest - signs, feelings, the body - a history from whose legacy we are now trying to escape.(88)

The aim of dualistic religion and philosophy was, as Cupitt suggests, to make up for the apparent unsatisfactoriness of this world by 'supplying us with additional, unchanging and specially-important higher Truths to steer by and hold on to.' It said that if we looked to the invisible order above the world, we would find 'the eternal perfection and truth and happiness that ... [the] soul longs for, and indeed was created for.' In philosophy, the invisible order was the world of necessary truth and eternal values and meanings. In religion, it was simply Heaven. Either way, 'the invisible order supports everything, gives everything value, and makes everything intelligible.'<sup>89</sup>

In the dualistic tradition, according to Cupitt, selfhood, meaning, truth, goodness and reason are pictured as coming down from above, and gender is used as the principal metaphor in scaling different degrees of goodness, truth, and so on. Everything is 'morally feminine in relation to what is above it in rank, and masculine in relation to what is below it in rank.' The male is identified with the fixed order of forms: 'light, stable, closed up, exalted, strong, self-identical, and self-consistent.' The female with the contingent things of the world: 'its counterpart, its excluded, subordinate, unstable, protean Other.' This sexual metaphor forms a valuative basis for all hierarchical scalings, whether cosmic, social or racial. In short, 'Sexism is civilization.'<sup>90</sup>

With the advance of disciplines like critical historical methodology, the dualistic tradition, continues Cupitt, is being deconstructed. History demythologizes the sacrosanct: 'what we had thought of as time-transcending concepts have themselves a history.' Timeless truths are shown to be things 'developed within a cultural tradition and ... embodied in a line of texts.' 'Historical study shows every supposed absolute to be just relative.'<sup>91</sup> Feminist theory has contributed to this deconstructive process by showing that the 'timeless truths' of religion are rooted, not in human experience, as often presented, but mainly in male experience. What has been lacking in Western thought, as feminist writer Elizabeth Dodson Gray explains, 'is articulation of and attention to perceptions rooted in female experience.'<sup>92</sup>

Cupitt's observations form the basis of what is frequently called 'postmodernism.' Its hallmark is the recognition that 'we no longer have any time-transcending standpoint from which to utter general and unchangingly true statements about the human condition.' It is a viewpoint from which everything is felt to be continuously shifting; a vision of the world in which 'there is no longer any absolute Beginning, Ground, Presence or End in the traditional metaphysical sense ... no anchorage whatever, in any direction ... the Centre is gone.'<sup>93</sup>

Shortly, we will be discussing the relationship between postmodernism and ecological spirituality. For the moment, we return to Ruether's reflections on classical religion. The late-Hellenistic era

sees patriarchal culture exhausted of its attempts to control the 'recalcitrant realities of nature and society.' Male consciousness turns instead to a 'world-fleeing spirituality' concerned with 'extricating mind from matter,' with 'escape out of the realm of corruptibility to eternal spiritual life.' Women, as the representatives of the world, are viewed as being part of that which the alienated male consciousness must flee.<sup>94</sup> Ruether connects this era with the growth of spiritualities of transcendence. Western religion, now directed by Jewish apocalypticism and Platonic dualisms, is transformed from being a powerful source for social renewal, and becomes instead an individualistic quest for transcendence, personal salvation, and self-infinetization.

The old religions of the earth became private cults for the individual, no longer anticipating the renewal of the earth and society but rather expecting an otherworldly salvation of the individual soul after death. Nature itself came to be seen as an alien reality, and men now visualized their own bodies as foreign to their true selves, longing for a heavenly home to release them from their enslavement within the physical cosmos. Finally, earth ceased to be seen as man's true home ... (95)

One of the most world-fleeing forms of spirituality to emerge during this period was that of Gnosticism. Gnostic scholar Jonas describes it as a 'revolt against the world,' a 'violent denunciation of the physical universe.'<sup>96</sup> It is worth looking at Gnosticism, briefly, for similarities between it and New Age spirituality have been noted since the early 1980s.<sup>97</sup> At the heart of Gnosticism lies a typically patriarchal view of the 'true' self - as a separate essence that is capable of full extraction from the world. Indeed, it has 'fallen' from

a world above into this one, and its salvation lies in return. In the meantime, this separate self owes no allegiance to the moral or social conventions of this world, which are merely instruments of oppression invented by the demonic powers which rule the fallen, physical cosmos. The self of Gnosticism is immersed in a vast and elaborate cosmic drama. This drama can be separated into three components: cosmogony, anthropogony, and soteriology.<sup>98</sup>

In terms of cosmogony, some Gnostic systems - Mandaean and Manichaeism for example - posit an absolute dualism between the realms of spirit and matter. Other systems - like Basilides' - advance an emanationist cosmogony which has some parallels with Neoplatonic thought. Here, the world is held as being created through a process of hierarchical devolution in which the Absolute projects forth its essence into a number of descending levels. The creation of each new level brings with it a further removal from the original source, until finally, the divine fullness (pleroma) is distorted, and eventually lost. The material level, constituting the lowest level of emanation, is therefore described as a realm of 'emptiness' (kenoma). A boundary or partition is set up which separates the kenoma from the pleroma. What we have here is neither absolute dualism nor straightforward monism, but as Gnostic scholar Kurt Rudolph aptly puts it, 'dualism on a monistic background.'<sup>99</sup> The divine 'Wisdom' (Sophia) attempts to emulate the creative capacities of the Absolute, but instead, creates an abortion, which she hurls into the kenoma. This establishes a link between femaleness and the fallen order. Her abortion is in fact the



craftsman (demiurgos) who fashions the physical cosmos out of matter, time, and mutability. The fallen order is regulated by a number of celestial rulers (archontes) that govern the heavenly spheres above the earth. The demiurge, often identified with Yahweh, is depicted as being either unaware of, or reluctant to inform his followers about his true origins. Overall, the cosmos is depicted as a counterfeit and distortion of the pleroma.

In terms of anthropogony, it is argued that sparks of the divine spirit (pneuma) are lured or fall from the pleroma and find themselves in the kenoma. As they pass downwards through the heavenly spheres, the sparks receive a number of 'seals' from the astrological archons which bind them to the wheel of cosmic fate (heimarmene). The spirit is imprisoned in both a soul (psyche) and a material body (hyle). Thus, every individual is an aggregate of three elements: pneuma, psyche and hyle. One in whom the spirit element predominates is a 'spiritual man' (pneumatikos); one in whom the soul element predominates is 'man of soul' (psychikos); and one in whom the material element predominates is a 'material man' (hylikos) or a 'man of flesh' (sarkikos). While in the flesh, the spirit is subject to the harsh laws of the demiurge, designed to keep it in a perpetual state of forgetfulness and ignorance concerning its divine origins. The spirit is left to rot in a world of deficiency, darkness, ignorance, illusion, and terror.

Salvation is facilitated by inner knowledge (gnosis) which leads to the remembrance of one's true self, of one's divine status. The quest

for gnosis constitutes a spirituality of turning away from the outer world to the world within. The Arabian gnostic teacher Monoimus gives the following counsel: '"Take yourself as the starting point in every search for the divine principle. Discover what abides within you and you will find all things."'100 However, such knowledge is not easily attained in this existence. Thus, we encounter in Gnosticism the doctrine of the saviour (soter) or illuminator (phoster) who descends from the pleroma with the liberating gnosis. The saviour, as Jonas comments, 'penetrates the barriers of the spheres, outwits the Archons, awakens the spirit from its earthly slumber, and imparts to it the saving knowledge "from without."'101 Before the awakened spirit returns to the pleroma, it must ascend the heavenly spheres and confront the archons. The archons may attempt to trap or trick the rising spirit; but, following the advice of the saviour, it is well prepared:

'When you come into their power, one of them who is their guard will say to you, "Who are you, or where are you from?" You are to say to him, "I am a son and I am from the Father." He will say to you, "What sort of son are you and to what father do you belong?" You are to say to him, 'I am from the Preexistent Father, and a son in the Preexistent One.' ... When he also says to you, "Where will you go?," you are to say to him, "To the place from which I have come, there shall I return." And if you say these things, you will escape their attacks.'

The archons are defeated and the spirit returns to its eternal home. In the words of the saviour: '"they [the archons] will fall into confusion (and) will blame their root and the race [of] their mother. [But] you will go up to [what is] yours."'102

In the typology employed in this inquiry's overview of New Age spirituality, 'patriarchal' will indicate the kinds of characteristics discussed above - value-hierarchical dualisms, antipathy towards physical existence, concern with 'transcendence,' obsession with the 'inner world,' and a separative view of the self. Part two of this thesis will offer a variety of examples of such spirituality.

### Ecological Spirituality

Ecological spirituality resonates Spangler's vision of the New Age as an 'incarnation of the sacred' and York's idea of 'numinous materialism.' New Age ecological spirituality is ecological in at least three senses. First, in direct contrast with a dominant theme of patriarchal spirituality, it regards the earth as humanity's true home. It therefore seems appropriate to describe such spirituality as ecological in that ecology is, literally, the study of our 'house' or 'oikos.' Ecological spirituality has little time for the belief that there is a transcendent occult realm by which humans are guided or should attempt to return to. Keller articulates the basic stance of ecological spirituality when she says: 'We need no new heaven and Earth. We have this Earth, this sky, this water to renew.'<sup>103</sup> Antipathy towards the 'disembodied constructs' of the old patriarchal age is also expressed by ecofeminist and Goddess theologian Naomi Goldenberg, who links their existence with contemporary environmental degradation:

We have lived through at least 2,500 years of theory based on illusions of transcendent entities controlling our destinies. Whether they are called Platonic forms, Jungian archetypes, or religious deities, theories based on their existence have colluded with the devaluation of physical life and of the physical environment.(104)

However, to complicate the issue, there is evidence here of 'unresolved dialectic.' While some worshippers of the Goddess reject belief in any kind of disembodied postmortem existence, others do not. A good example is that of Sjoon who on the one hand criticizes the New Age movement for being centred around a hierarchy of transcendent entities, but who on the other advocates the channeling of spirits from 'the spirit world.'<sup>105</sup> This and other unresolved tensions in ecological spirituality will be discussed in the conclusion.

The guiding metaphor of this area of New Age thought it could be said is that of 'belonging' - to the world, and to the cosmos. In the words of Berry:

In our totality we are born of the earth. We are earthlings. The earth is our origin, our nourishment, our support, our guide. Our spirituality itself is earth-derived. If there is no spirituality in the earth, then there is no spirituality in ourselves. The human and the earth are totally implicated in the other.(106)

From this sense of belonging to the world, ecological spirituality has a distinctive vision of what the 'spiritual' life means. Augustine's dictum that '"spirit is whatever is not matter'"<sup>107</sup> is abandoned. The spiritual is of, rather than in opposition to, nature, passions, the body, the earth. An ecological spirituality rejects atheism, but it also rejects belief in the supernatural; divinity is seen as being located within the structure of the cosmos itself. Salvation means reconciliation with ourselves and with this world. Death is viewed as complementary and integral to life, not the wages of sin, nor the

gateway to a better, disembodied existence. The 'spiritual journey,' in the words of Berry, is 'no longer the journey of Dante through the heavenly spheres,' or the 'Christian community through history to the heavenly Jerusalem,' but 'identification with the cosmic-earth-human process.'<sup>108</sup>

Secondly, like ecology, ecological spirituality affirms the fundamental interrelatedness and interdependence of all living systems. 'Relation,' argues Fox, 'is the essence of everything that exists - not substance, not thingness - but relation.'<sup>109</sup> From this sense of unity flows new ideas about the self, now seen, not as a fixed isolated entity, but as something more expansive and less static. In Jungian psychology we find a concern with expanding the range of capacities and values available to humans. Men for example are encouraged to reconcile their overly-rationalistic and egocentric way of being in the world with the so-called 'feminine' and other 'shadow' aspects of their personality. Concern is also expressed with moving away from separatist and essentialist ideas about the self. For example, transpersonal psychologist Frances Vaughan defines 'self-realization' as a naturalistic expansion of the self into wider fields of ecological identification. She holds that transpersonal therapies may help people to see the self as it really is: 'an open living system ... continually in flux,' 'continually changing, interacting, and joining with others in intersubjective exchange, in shared ideas and shared purpose.'<sup>110</sup> A more expansive sense of selfhood in turn prompts new ideas about compassion and justice-making. Fox writes: 'Compassion as feeling sorry for others

is explicitly rejected in creation theology precisely because in a panentheistic world view there is no other.' Moreover, as humanity constitutes but one aspect of the ecological web of life 'Compassion and justice-making ... can in no way be restricted to relations among the two-legged ones.'<sup>111</sup> Ecological spirituality hopes to replace anthropocentric ethics with 'biocentric' or 'ecocentric' ones.

Finally, like ecology, ecological spirituality recognizes the importance of diversity. As Starhawk argues:

Immanence is polytheistic - it allows for many powers, many images of the divine ... In ecological systems, the greater the diversity of a community, the greater is its resilience and adaptability in the face of change - and the greater is its chance for survival ...<sup>(112)</sup>

Recognition of the importance of diversity takes a number of forms in ecological spirituality - including a concern with preserving the biota of the planet, and of supporting diversity in lifestyle and religious belief.

#### Ecological Spirituality as Ecological or Constructive Postmodernism

To conclude this section on ecological spirituality, we will discuss its relationship with 'postmodernism.' Ecological spirituality can be described as being 'postmodern' in the sense that it is post-Platonic, post-Cartesian, post-patriarchal. This is the sense for example in which Fox considers creation spirituality to be postmodern: 'My perspective ... [is] postmodern, because only by consciously leaving the modern era of mechanism and dualism, patriarchy and

anthropocentrism, control and rationalism, can we recover our hearts as well as our minds.'<sup>113</sup> But, it is certainly not 'postmodern' in the sense in which this term is often employed - that is, as signifying a thoroughgoing relativism. This form of postmodernism, as Spretnak comments, is usually termed 'deconstructive' postmodernism. Postmodernism as a whole draws attention to the ways in which overarching concepts are actually culturally constructed and are not the universal truisms that most people assume. The deconstructive position in the postmodern spectrum, according to Spretnak,

declares that meaning itself is impossible, except as relative and essentially arbitrary choices we decide upon and act out in ironic performance ... Deconstructive postmodernists further maintain that since language systems determine our only possible mode of thought, no ground of meaning - such as God, history, Humankind, Reason - exists outside of our language inventions.(114)

This is the sense in which it is used by Eilberg-Schwartz. Postmodernism, he argues, recognizes 'the futility of seeking an absolute foundation for knowledge.' No model is in any sense more 'truthful' than any other, and 'no intellectual framework is ultimately any more secure than any other.' The only arbiter of truth is 'the local community that defines, through conversation and consensus building, what counts as correct and good.' The central task of the postmodern era is therefore 'a study of the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the various ways of talking that our race has invented.'<sup>115</sup> Patriarchal spirituality appears 'deconstructive' at times, by way of its separative view of the self, where the 'true' self is seen as fundamentally divorced from the physical and cultural reality

within which it stands. This sense of separation is articulated by Trevelyan, who says: '"This is what things look like to me. If it doesn't seem like that to you, you don't have to accept what I say. Only accept what rings true to your own Inner Self."'116 Ecological spirituality however does not accept such a thoroughgoing relativism. Starhawk for example calls for an appreciation of diversity, but even her openness only stretches so far: 'we must reject spiritual systems that further the flesh/spirit split. We must reject asceticism, hierarchies ...'117 Ruether is more emphatic. The patriarchal view of reality is not just one more framework, as 'truthful' as any other - it is 'The Big Lie':

The Big Lie makes those who toil appear to be idle, while those who speak into dictaphones appear to be the hard workers. It makes women appear the offspring of males, and males the primary creators of babies. It makes matter the final devolution of the mind, and mind the original source of all being. It regards the body as an alien tomb of the soul, and the soul as growing stronger the more it weakens the body. It abstracts the human from the earth and God from the cosmos, and says that that which is abstracted is the original, and the first, and can exist alone and independent.

The Big Lie tells us that we are strangers and sojourners on this planet, that our flesh, our blood, our instincts for survival are our enemies. Originally we lived as discarnate orbs of light in the heavenly heights. We have fallen to this earth and into this clay through accident or sin. We must spend our lives suppressing our hungers and thirst and shunning our fellow beings, so that we can dematerialize and fly away again to our stars.

It is said that mothers particularly are the enemy, responsible for our mortal flesh. To become eternal and everlasting we must flee the body, the woman, and the world. She is the icon of the corruptible nature, seduced by the serpent in the beginning. Through her, death entered the world. Even now she collaborates with devils to hold men fast in fetters to the ground. A million women twisted on the rack, smouldered in burning fagots to pay homage to this lie.(118)



Those aligned with the ecological dynamic are not unaware of the deconstructionist position, but, they offer at least five good reasons for not embracing a position of thoroughgoing relativism, of absolute deconstruction. Firstly, as feminist theologian Mary Grey points out, the deconstructive position relativizes the credibility of postpatriarchal critiques of patriarchy by asserting that all viewpoints, all truth claims, are equally valid.<sup>119</sup> A further two objections are raised by Goddess 'theologian' Carol Christ. Christ agrees with postmodernists that 'we must be suspicious of all claims to universal truth, to a direct correspondence between our visions and ontological reality.' Nevertheless, she rejects complete relativism, firstly, on the grounds that it endorses a 'detached' attitude towards religious commitment. Feminists need to be critical, but also committed: 'We should not present ourselves as detached critics of religious commitment, but ... as "theological subjects" who make truth claims in awareness of the perspectival and relative character of such claims.' A commitment to visionary transformation demands that feminists give more 'ontological status' to postpatriarchal rather than patriarchal truth claims. Her second point concerns the 'adjudication' of truth claims. For deconstructionists, the central task of our era is not the search for truth, since all truth is relative, but instead, 'a study of the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the various ways of talking that our race has invented.' However, Christ points out that although this sounds interesting in theory, in the actual world, there is no 'neutral court' in which different truth claims 'can be

judged more or less conducive to producing a "kind of existence" that might be chosen or preferred.' No 'universal forum in which questions of value can be adjudicated.' A position of absolute relativism actually promotes 'the will to power of those who have been able to express their views.'<sup>120</sup>

A fourth objection is made by Spretnak, who argues that the deconstructive position constitutes, not a radical break, but 'a continuation of some of the most destructive and deeply rooted strains in Western philosophy and culture.' With its posture of savvy disengagement, it continues 'certain thematic concerns of Western patriarchal philosophy and culture, such as autonomy from relationship, separateness, and control through abstraction.' Thus 'Far from escaping the atomized, alienated sensibility of modernity, the new relativism intensifies it.' In short, a position of absolute deconstruction is 'most' rather than 'post' modern.<sup>121</sup>

The final point in this debate is again raised by Grey. For Christ, an ecological paradigm should be given more ontological status. For Grey, it has more ontological status; that this, the ecological paradigm should be understood as an indication of the ways things really are. 'Interdependence and relating,' she asserts, 'are the very threads of the complicated tapestry of the world.' The question therefore is not how 'advantageous' is ecological spirituality to human existence, but how damaging is it to go against 'the very raw material of the world.' Are interdependence and relating the 'very raw material of the

world?' Grey thinks so, and makes much use of the fact that new perspectives in science - like systems theory - have given the ecological worldview 'scientific coherence and respectability.'<sup>122</sup>

Among its proponents, ecological spirituality and religion is not merely one more postmodern framework among others, but one segment of a new critical realism. This is certainly the opinion of Ralph Metzner, the president of the Green Earth Foundation, who places the emergence of pan(en)theistic theology and spirituality within the context of a cultural paradigm shift from an industrial to an ecological worldview. The outlines of a new critical realism, based on the ecological principles of interdependence and interrelatedness, are being articulated across a diverse number of fields, including the natural sciences, the social sciences, philosophy and theology, and reflect a far-reaching re-examination of widely-held values and assumptions in all areas of thought and life (see Figure One). Overall, there appears to be a 'remarkable degree of congruence and agreement, if not consensus, even among people in quite different areas.'<sup>123</sup> This emerging worldview is sometimes referred to as ecological or constructive postmodernism. It is 'deconstructive' in that it attempts to move beyond the separation and dualisms associated with patriarchal consciousness; but constructive in that it moves beyond postmodern nihilism to offer what Capra calls 'a new vision of reality.'

David Ray Griffin offers a concise summary of the main features of the constructive postmodern worldview. (Griffin edits the SUNY series

# Transition from the Industrial to the Ecological Age

Industrial Age   Ecological Age

## Scientific paradigms

Mechanistic	Organismic
Universe as machine	Universe as process/story
Earth as inert matter	Gaia: Earth as superorganism
Life as random chemistry	Life as autopoiesis
Determinism	Indeterminacy, probability
Linear causality	Chaos: non-linear dynamics
Atomism	Holism/systems theory

## Epistemology

Logical positivism	Critical realism
Operationalism	Constructivism
Reductionism	Reduction/integration

## Role of the human

Conquest of nature	Living as part of nature
Domination over nature	Co-evolution, symbiosis
Individual <i>vs</i> world	Extended sense of self
Superiority and arrogance	Reflection and creativity
Resource management	Ecological stewardship

## Values in relation to nature

Nature as resource:	Preserve biodiversity
Exploit or conserve	Protect ecosystem integrity
Anthropocentric/humanist	Biocentric/ecocentric
Nature has instrumental value	Nature has intrinsic value

## Relation to land

Land use: farming, herding	Land ethic: think like mountain
Competing for territory	Dwelling in place
Owning 'real estate'	Re-inhabiting the bioregion

## Human/social values

Sexism, patriarchy	Eco-feminism; partnership
Racism, ethnocentrism	Respect and value differences
Hierarchies of class and caste	Social ecology; egalitarianism

Industrial Age   Ecological Age

## Theology and religion

Nature as background	Animism: everything lives
Nature as demonic/frightening	Nature as sacred
Transcendent divinity	Immanent divinity
Creation as fallen, corrupt	Creation spirituality
Monotheism and atheism	Pantheism and panentheism

## Education and research

Specialized disciplines	Multidisciplinary, integrative
'Value-free knowledge' pursued	Unconscious values explicated
Science-humanities split	Unified worldview

## Political systems

Nation state sovereignty	Multinational federations
Centralized national authority	Decentralized bioregions
Patriarchal oligarchies	Egalitarian democracies
Cultural homogeneity	Pluralistic societies
National security focus	Humans and environment focus
Militarism	Commitment to non-violence

## Economic systems

Multinational corporations	Community-based economies
Assume scarcity	Assume interdependence
Competition	Co-operation
Limitless progress	Limits to growth
'Economic development'	Steady state, sustainability
No accounting of nature	Economics based on ecology

## Technology

Addiction to fossil fuels	Reliance on renewables
Profit-driven technologies	Appropriate technologies
Waste overload	Recycling, re-using

## Agriculture

Mono-culture farming	Poly- and permaculture
Agribusiness, factory farms	Community and family farms

Figure One: taken from Ralph Metzner, 'Age of Ecology' in Resurgence, November/December 1991, No. 149, pp. 4-7 (p. 6).

in constructive postmodern thought. Contributors to this series include feminist theologian and Jungian scholar Catherine Keller, Buddhist and feminist Joanna Macy, process theologian John B. Cobb, and Matthew Fox.) As with Spretnak, Griffin argues that deconstructive postmodernism is 'most' rather than 'post' modern. It is 'ultramodernism, in that its eliminations result from carrying modern premises to their logical conclusions.' By contrast the constructive position seeks to overcome the modern worldview 'not by eliminating the possibility of worldviews as such, but by constructing a postmodern worldview through a revision of modern premises and traditional concepts.' In doing so, it moves towards 'a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious intuitions.' In addition to this, the constructive position is also concerned with the establishment of a postmodern world that will support and be supported by the new worldview. This means moving beyond the value-system of the present order - 'individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism.' To achieve this end constructive postmodernism 'provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist, and other emancipatory movements of our time.' The constructive postmodern position, continues Griffin, is also 'modern' and 'premodern.' 'Premodern' in that it salvages positive meaning from premodern thought, including 'premodern notions of a divine reality, cosmic meaning, and an enchanted nature.' Modern in that unlike previous antimodern movements which rejected science, 'The current movement draws on natural science itself as a witness against the adequacy of the modern worldview.' In short,

constructive postmodernism 'involves a creative synthesis of modern and premodern truths and values.'<sup>124</sup>

Griffin moves on to outline some of the main features of constructive postmodern spirituality. His account corresponds to what this thesis has termed 'ecological spirituality,' although Griffin makes 'interconnectivity' rather than 'ecology' his organizing theme. Constructive postmodern spirituality affirms 'the idea that all things are interconnected, and that these interconnections are internal to the very essence of the things themselves.' It rejects not only 'atheistic nihilism,' but also 'dualistic supernaturalism.' Divinity is affirmed, 'but it is felt to exist within and between all nodes in the cosmic web of interconnections ... this web is sacred.' It argues for 'a nondualistic relation of humans to nature and of the divine reality to the world.' Thus proponents 'generally affirm a naturalistic panentheism [and pantheism in some instances].' They also advance a more expansive view of selfhood; one which moves beyond 'the notion of a separate, abiding self.' On a final note, it is recognized that constructive postmodern spirituality has 'deconstructive' aspects; and these are its well-articulated criticisms of the 'modern nonrecognition, or denial, of essential interconnections.'<sup>125</sup>

Constructive postmodern spirituality, or ecological spirituality - the term used throughout this inquiry - may be just one segment of 'a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious intuitions,' yet this segment, I would venture, is the most central. The reason why

is clearly shown in Lynn White's classic and controversial essay - 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.' White, in his 1967 analysis of environmental degradation, argues that the environmental crisis is at root a religious one, in that it is grounded in certain 'religious' assumptions, by which he means assumptions about human nature and destiny: 'What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny - that is, by religion.' He further argues that despite the modern belief that we live in a 'post-Christian age,' the West continues to live 'in a context of Christian axioms.' What, he goes on to ask, has Christianity taught people about the environment? It has, he suggests, taught them the anthropocentric notion that 'no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes.' It has also encouraged a dualistic attitude towards nature, in that it teaches that 'although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature ... Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature.' When Christianity replaced pagan animism with anthropocentric dualisms, continues White, 'the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled,' making it possible to 'exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.' And, given that the supposedly post-Christian world is still guided by such 'Christian' axioms, disrespect towards nature still persists in the modern, industrial era:

Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians.

Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim ... The fact that most people do not think of these attitudes as Christian is irrelevant. No new set of basic values has been accepted in our society to displace those of Christianity. Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.(126)

For White, Christianity 'bears a huge burden of guilt' for the contemporary ecological rout. It would be more accurate to say that it is Christianity fashioned by a patriarchal conceptual framework which bears the burden. White in a sense agrees when he concedes that 'Christianity is a complex faith, and its consequences differ in differing contexts.' Indeed, he goes on to propose Saint Francis as the patron saint of ecology, indicating that White is blaming not Christianity per se but a particular cultural expression of it. Generalizations aside, White's paper was the first to point out the close links between ecological destruction and issues of a 'religious' nature. It will need more than scientific innovation to halt the ecological crisis; as White concludes:

What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one ... Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny.(127)

### The Structure of this Thesis

This overview of New Age spirituality is divided into three main



parts and a conclusion. Part One looks at the historical roots of the New Age movement, and examines some key influences upon contemporary New Age thought, from Romanticism to the counterculture of the 1960s. Part Two looks at the patriarchal dynamic of the New Age, and an attempt is made to differentiate between different sub-types of patriarchal spirituality/theology. Part Two concludes with some reflections on the social significance of this type of New Age spirituality. Part Three looks at examples of ecological spirituality within the New Age, with particular emphasis upon the creation spirituality of Fox and feminist Wicca. Part Three also includes a discussion of some of the criticisms which have been raised against this type of spirituality. The conclusion looks at the problems involved in attempting to differentiate between these two very different types of New Age spirituality, from over-simplification on the part of researchers, to dialectical tensions within each of the dynamics themselves.

P A R T   O N E :  
T H E   H I S T O R I C A L   R O O T S   O F  
T H E   N E W   A G E   M O V E M E N T

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Part One of this inquiry is concerned with putting the New Age movement in context; that is, with exploring its historical roots. Attempts to outline the historical matrix of the movement have already been made by writers like Melton et al., Chandler and Ferguson. Yet it is felt that such attempts are seriously deficient in at least two respects. To begin with, they tend to focus primarily upon the more exotic and esoteric dimensions of the movement's history. For example, Melton et al. argue that the contemporary movement is best seen as 'the latest phase in occult/metaphysical religion, a persistent tradition that has been the constant companion of Christianity through the centuries.' Key historical contributories to this 'occult/metaphysical religion' they argue include Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Spiritualism, Christian Science and Theosophy.<sup>1</sup> While it cannot be denied that such elements have influenced the development of New Age thought, the suggestion that they are the most central or deserve the most attention does little more than perpetuate the habit of defining the New Age in terms of its most bizarre manifestations. There appears to be little discussion of the contemporary movement's more 'substantial' precedents - the Romantic revolt against mechanism, the humanist critique of supernatural religion, the rise of feminist consciousness, process thought, and so on. Secondly, and in relation to the first point, there

is the further assumption that these historical influences have somehow coalesced to form a single, unified New Age worldview. The disparate visions of transformation - from Swedenborg to Jung - have, claims New Age theorist Marilyn Ferguson, welded together to form 'the long-prophesized conspiracy.'<sup>2</sup> Such notions - in addition to providing fuel for populist polemic against the 'New Age conspiracy' - ignore the opposition expressed by many New Agers towards the opinions of visionaries like Swedenborg and Jung.

As with its approach to the contemporary New Age, this inquiry adopts an open and inclusive stance in relation to the issue of historical precedents. The discussion is divided into a number of small chapters, each exploring a different area of historical influence; including Romanticism, popular religious movements, the counterculture movement, and trends in psychology, philosophy, science and theology. Our discussion however begins with a brief look at the birth of modernity, with the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

## CHAPTER ONE : THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

How, one might ask, is it possible for our 'objective' scientists to behave in so unobjective a manner? The answer is that science is not objective ...

Edward Goldsmith<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that our hostility to nature flows partly from a vision of the cosmos in which we humans are only accidentally present and essentially absent ... Expulsion of the human subject from nature is implied in the scientific method of knowing which puritanically (one is tempted to say Gnostically) segregates the human knower from nature, and in the materialism, mechanism, or 'hard naturalism,' which follows from a severe logical divorce of physical reality from mental reality ... In spite of its explicit suspicion of religion, scientism remains tied to the same dualistic myths that have caused Christian and other religious spiritualities to distrust and even despise the natural world. Scientific and religious puritanism have a common ancestry, a fear of the physical in its swampy, wild, and untamed naturality.

John F. Haught<sup>2</sup>

For many, the quest for a New Age starts from the premise that the West is now facing a crisis of unprecedented proportions; one which affects every facet of personal and social life, and one which perhaps threatens to eradicate all life. And for many this crisis is seen as being rooted in the modern atheistic, secular, industrial, worldview; a worldview which emerged from the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Scientific Revolution, as ecofeminist historian Carolyn Merchant points out, has been treated by many as 'a period of intellectual enlightenment in which a new science of mechanics and a mechanical world view laid the foundation for modern scientific, technological, and social progress.' Nevertheless, she continues, a variety of current issues - from environmental mismanagement to

impersonal biomedical techniques - have challenged such a laudatory view, stimulating the reassessment of certain assumptions inherited from this era.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to explore some features of this historic period, and in particular, how it has been interpreted by New Age theorists. This may be of some help in the attempt to understand where the New Age is essentially 'coming from.' There is, however, no single New Age reassessment; on the contrary, the movement offers two quite different ones. One can be related to its patriarchal spiritual dynamic; and the other to its ecological.

#### The Patriarchal Critique

The patriarchal dynamic criticizes the Scientific Revolution for inaugurating a 'materialistic' worldview, and asserts that through it, humanity has lost touch with the higher worlds of spirit. A good example of this level of criticism can be found in Trevelyan's Operation Redemption.

From 'our grandfathers,' argues Trevelyan, contemporary society has inherited a picture of humanity and of the universe which has, on the one hand, 'swept away much old dogma,' but on the other, has 'landed us into the present materialistic world picture.' By 'materialistic' he means a worldview devoid of all reference to 'the spiritual worlds and the realms of the elemental beings and nature spirits.' The materialistic worldview is one, contends Trevelyan, which not only leaves humanity isolated in a meaningless and dead universe, but one which justifies aggressive and destructive domination over a dead earth. Having 'discovered his total unimportance in a mechanistic universe,'

the modern man 'feels himself fully justified in exploiting the planet for his own advantage and desire.' 'What does it matter that we use up the Earth's resources? The Earth is surely dead mineral and can't feel. And anyway, death is the end, so "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."' <sup>4</sup> Trevelyan's solution to the materialist's alienation from the cosmos is a return to the supernaturalism of an earlier era, where humans are connected to higher 'spiritual worlds.' Humans are not merely meaningless cogs in a mechanistic universe, but 'Ideas of God,' and the forms of nature are 'the Archetypal Ideas made visible in the material plane.' But here is the flaw in Trevelyan's thinking - supernaturalism is no solution to the modern problem of alienation from the cosmos, but merely another expression of it. Trevelyan would have us replace the view that we are meaningless cogs in a hostile, mechanistic universe (Jacques Monod) with the view that 'we are certainly not our body, that divinely-planned temple into which, as a spiritual being, we can descend to operate in the limitations of earth embodiment.' How integrative is the view that 'the purpose of incarnation upon earth is to take part in the great task of raising consciousness to ever higher levels so that in due time all the spirit imprisoned in matter and form can be redeemed?' <sup>5</sup> In spite of its criticisms of a supposed 'materialistic' worldview inaugurated by the Scientific Revolution, the dualistic element within New Age thought simply converts the Cartesian mind/body dualism of mechanistic science back into a Platonic spirit/body one. In doing so, it continues rather than negates the Western pattern of patriarchal thought whereby the spirit (or soul, or mind) is elevated above and alienated from the surrounding environment.

### The Ecological Critique

The ecological dynamic criticizes the Scientific Revolution at a number of related points. Firstly, it questions on scientific grounds the continuing scientific validity of the reductionistic, dualistic and mechanistic worldview inherited from the natural philosophers. Secondly, it makes a link between this mechanical worldview and the impoverishment of existence in the world. Thirdly, it points to the 'masculinist' assumptions which undergird the supposedly 'objective' nature of the scientific venture. Finally, and in relation to the last point, it highlights areas of continuity between patriarchal religion and patriarchal science. These points will now be discussed in some detail.

Fritjof Capra's The Turning Point - a popular critique of the mechanistic worldview - begins by taking note of our current situation: 'We have high inflation and unemployment, we have an energy crisis, a crisis in health care, pollution and other environmental disasters, a rising wave of violence and crime, and so on.' For Capra, these are all 'different facets of one and the same crisis,' which is 'essentially a crisis of perception.' It is a crisis which 'derives from the fact that we are trying to apply the concepts of an outdated world view ... to a reality that can no longer be understood in terms of these concepts.' The worldview which is obsolete and which needs to be replaced is 'the mechanistic world view of Cartesian-Newtonian science.'<sup>6</sup> Capra goes on to discuss the roles played by prominent scientific figures - including Galileo, Bacon, Descartes and Newton - in the rise of the mechanistic philosophy.

Proceeding from the Copernican heliocentric hypothesis, and with the help of the newly invented telescope, Galileo demonstrated beyond doubt that the earth revolved around the sun. Galileo was also instrumental in laying the groundwork for what would become known as the 'scientific method.' In the Aristotelian physics of the medieval synthesis, causality was described in terms of both efficient causation and future goals. By contrast, Galileo was content to describe events in terms of efficient causes, ignoring questions concerning telos, which he regarded as irrelevant. Galileo, as both Capra and physicist Ian Barbour note, was also the first to combine scientific experimentation with mathematics, and held that the only way to accurately express the laws of nature were as 'mathematical relationships among measurable variables.'<sup>7</sup> In order to describe nature in mathematical terms, Galileo argued that scientists should restrict themselves to the study of objects' 'primary qualities.' Size, shape and motion were the primary qualities of objects; these were characteristic of the objective world; qualities which existed independent of the observer. Other qualities that an object might have - such as smell, colour or temperature - were regarded as 'secondary qualities.' These qualities, Galileo argued, existed only in the mind of the observer, and not in the object observed.<sup>8</sup> On the positive side, Capra notes that such emphasis upon the quantifiable has 'proved extremely successful throughout modern science.' On the more negative side however, 'it has ... exacted a heavy toll, as the psychiatrist R. D. Laing .... reminds us: "Out go sight, sound, taste, touch and smell and along with them has since gone aesthetics and ethical sensibility, values, quality, form; all feelings, motives, intentions, soul, consciousness, spirit. Experience as such is



cast out of the realm of scientific discourse.'"<sup>9</sup> Cosmologist Brian Swimme agrees, and compares standard training in science to a 'frontal lobotomy.' By the time scientific institutions have finished training scientists to be leaders of major institutions, 'we have only a sliver of our original minds still operative,' and this is 'the sliver chiseled to perfection for controlling, for distancing, for calculating, and for dominating.' Such surgery, continues Swimme, has blinded scientists to the reality before their eyes:

Trapped inside our mind splinter, we are unable to see what is right there before us. We see something, no doubt, but it's at best a gnarled illusion of the actual reality enveloping us. Perhaps it seems odd that I insist that we do not see what is there before us. Don't the scientific facts ... refer to 'what is there before us?' Unquestionably so, but they capture only a fragment, which is then further warped when held by minds abused by patriarchal shaping. We have these scientific facts, but we as a society can feel neither the full terror they reveal, nor the pervasive majesty of this Earth they announce. Instead, all the universe is seen as crass material, as a barren mechanism.'(10)

As Galileo was developing his mathematical approach to nature in Italy, in England, Francis Bacon was formulating his inductive procedure of scientific inquiry. With Bacon, argues Capra, the 'scientific quest' became one of domination and exploitation. In contrast with the 'time of the ancients,' when the goals of science had been 'wisdom, understanding the natural order and living in harmony with it,' from Bacon onwards, 'the goal of science has been knowledge that can be used to dominate and control nature, and today both science and technology are used predominantly for purposes that are profoundly antiecological.'<sup>11</sup> The 'Baconian spirit,' in tandem with Galileo's concern with primary qualities, initiated the objectification of nature;

an objectification, which, according to Capra, found its completion in the theories of Descartes and Newton.

The concern of Descartes in his Discourse on Method was to establish a science of nature based on absolute certainty, and for Descartes - as seen in his earlier work, Regulae - one key assumption was the certainty of scientific knowledge. He writes:

'All science [scientia] is certain, evident knowledge [cognitio], and he who doubts many things is not more learned than he who has never thought about these things ... in accordance with this rule, we reject all knowledge [cognitiones] which is merely probable [probabiles] and judge that only those things should be believed which are perfectly known [perfecte cognitis] and about which we can have no doubts.'(12)

Through a process of radical doubt, Descartes reduced reality to the only thing he could be certain of - the existence of the self as a thinker. This, for Descartes, was the sure foundation for scientific inquiry. The essence of human nature was thought, and the method of inquiry was that of analytical reasoning. 'Cogito ergo sum' underscores the dualism which Descartes believed existed between the mind and the body. In his Meditations, he declares that '"it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist apart from it."'13 The division is radical; minds and bodies are of ontologically different types. There is, according to Descartes, "'nothing included in the concept of body that belongs to the mind; and nothing in that of mind that belongs to the body.'"14 For Susan Bordo, such radical dualism can be linked to the Cartesian quest for 'pure perception' and 'pure thought' - a quest which for Descartes demands 'the transcendence of the

body ... of all the bodily distractions and passions that obscure our thinking.' 'Indeed,' continues Bordo, 'much of the Meditations may be read as prescribing rules for the liberation of mind from the various seductions of the body, in order to cleanse and prepare it for the reception of clear and distinct ideas.'<sup>15</sup> Looking out, the liberated Cartesian mind can find nothing but mechanism. For Descartes, as Capra observes, 'Nature worked according to mechanical laws, and everything in the material world could be explained in terms of the arrangement and movement of its parts.' Such a radical conception, asserts Capra, helped to provide 'a "scientific" sanction for the manipulation and exploitation of nature that has become typical of Western culture.'<sup>16</sup> Why? - because humans have been removed from the world; there is no longer any sense of participation. 'For Descartes and Galileo,' as Bordo comments, 'what one smells, sees, hears, tastes, and touches can no longer be taken as a bridge to the world. That naive connection has snapped, decisively.'<sup>17</sup>

With Newton's discovery of gravitational forces, the rising vision of a 'world-machine' was complete. Scientists could now, in theory, predict the motion of all bodies, from atoms to planets. Nature was at last firmly fixed to the idea of a machine; a machine whose every detail could be determined from the operation of efficient causes. Capra goes on to describe how the mechanistic paradigm of physics was applied to various disciplines during the Enlightenment period; from the atomistic social theory of Locke, to the economics of Petty. In the nineteenth century, 'scientists continued to elaborate the mechanistic model of the universe in physics, chemistry, biology, psychology and the social

sciences.'<sup>18</sup> Modern thought, to borrow the words of Newtonian scholar Alexander Koyre, has been built on an edifice of 'physics envy.'<sup>19</sup>

Capra also relates the emerging mechanical worldview to the ever-diminishing 'God of the Gaps.' The world-machine implies 'an external creator; a monarchical god who ruled the world from above by imposing his divine law on it.' The increase in scientific knowledge 'made it more and more difficult to believe in such a god, [and] the divine disappeared completely from the scientific world view,' leaving behind 'the spiritual vacuum that has become characteristic of the mainstream of our culture.'<sup>20</sup> To be fair, the God of the Gaps did not disappear 'completely'; but nevertheless, Christians realized that if God and religion were to be saved, it would have to be on the grounds that they were 'beyond' scientific inquiry. The spiritual dimension of human existence was reduced to the 'personal religion' of Schleiermacher or Kant's 'moral law within.' This in effect made Christianity and God immune from the attacks of religion's 'cultured despisers,' but at the price of isolating them from contemporary scientific thought.

Despite the many advances brought about by the mechanical model, it has, argues Capra, brought humanity perilously close to the edge of annihilation. Fortunately, the emergence of new scientific disciplines like new physics, systems theory, and general systems theory - which are discussed later - have not only shown the limitations of the mechanical model, but can, through their application to many diverse areas, offer a new vision of reality. Capra describes the 'new vision of reality' as being 'based on awareness of the essential interrelatedness and

interdependence of all phenomena - physical, biological, psychological, social, and cultural.' He notes that although there is little indication that a framework for this new vision can be contained within current disciplinary and conceptual boundaries, such a framework is already being shaped 'by many individuals, communities, and networks that are developing new ways of thinking and organizing themselves according to new principles.'<sup>21</sup>

A persistent theme in Capra's work is that the shift from a mechanistic to an ecological paradigm will also involve a shift from 'male' to 'female' values and perceptions; from yang to yin. This observation connects with ecofeminist critiques of the Scientific Revolution, which have concerned themselves with exposing the masculinist and patriarchal underpinnings of the emerging scientific venture.

In his Science and Sexual Oppression, former physicist Brian Easlea argues that two prominent themes pervade the writings of the male natural philosophers from the seventeenth century onwards. The first is the conviction that the new 'experimental philosophy' would eventually sweep away the ignorance, myth and superstition of earlier generations, leaving humans with truth and knowledge of nature, and techniques that would allow scientists to appropriate nature in the service of humankind. The second however is, as Easlea puts it, an '"adult" detachment from the earth'; a male 'denial of intimate connection with the "womb" of nature.' This second theme is accompanied by the belief that science is a masculine pursuit concerned with the 'penetration' of

an either passive 'female' nature, or a dead, lifeless, mechanical nature.<sup>22</sup> This second theme is reiterated by Merchant in her study The Death of Nature. However, Merchant and Easlea differ over the matter of continuity. For Merchant this masculinist attitude is in opposition to the 'organicism' of the renaissance period, in which nature was seen as a benevolent, nurturing mother. The pre-scientific worldview she argues was one in which 'the root metaphor binding the self, society, and the cosmos was that of an organism,' and 'vital life' it was believed permeated the cosmos 'to the lowliest stone.'<sup>23</sup> A similar line is taken by Bordo, who sees the rise of mechanistic philosophy principally as a masculine 'reaction-formation to the dissolution of the medieval self-world unity.'<sup>24</sup> For Easlea by contrast, masculinist science is seen as the continuation and development of a persistent male longing - to master and transcend biological limitation, and everything associated with this limitation. Easlea is in agreement with Paul Hoch who sees Prometheus and Faust as the two towering symbols of the male of Western civilization, in his '"restless, persistent, often painful, even agonized, striving to assert his masculinity in an almost existential struggle with nature (woman being conceived of as the embodiment of nature), with other men, and with the limitations of his own biology."<sup>25</sup>

From its inception, argues Easlea, the scientific venture was perceived by many of its proponents as being essentially a male pursuit, and also that this somehow necessitated the exclusion of all 'feminine' qualities from the pursuit of 'Solid Truths.' In 1661, Joseph Glanvill, a fellow of the Royal Society, warned that '"where ... Passion hath the

casting voyce, the case of Truth is desparate."' It is impossible for science to proceed where '"the Affections wear the breeches: and the Female rules."'26 In 1664, Henry Oldenburg, then Secretary of the Royal Society, made quite clear the intentions of the scientific venture: to '"raise a Masculine Philosophy ... whereby the Mind of Man may be ennobled with the knowledge of Solid Truths."'27

Bacon went further and saw in science a 'masculine birth of time.' Both Merchant and Easlea note the sexually aggressive and manipulative metaphors which pervade Bacon's writings. In De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum, Bacon insists that the scientist's approach to nature should proceed along similar lines to the interrogatory methods employed in witch-trials: '"For you have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings ... to lead and drive her ... Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into these holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his whole object."' Nature should be '"bound into service"' and '"made a slave."'28 In Novum Organum he declares that nature should be '"forced out of her natural state and squeezed and molded."'29 Towards the end of inaugurating a masculine birth of time, Bacon - in what Easlea views as a call to the 'gang rape' of nature - invites his male colleagues to turn their '"united forces against the Nature of Things, to storm and occupy her castles and strongholds."'30 In a similar vein, the magician Thomas Vaughan in his Anima Magica Abscondita urges his fellow philosophers to redirect their gaze upon the '"green, youthful, and flowerie Bosome of the Earth."' But, unlike Aristotle, who was content merely to '"lick the shell"' of nature, Vaughan, in his Magia Adamica, eggs his fellows

on to '"Pierce experimentally into the Center of things."' Vaughan boasts to his male colleagues that he had '"all most broken her Seale, and exposed her naked to the world.'"31

In the writings of Descartes and other mechanical philosophers, in contrast with the 'Baconians,' there seems to be little in the way of a 'feminization' of nature. Easlea views this as a more thorough rejection of nature as 'a living womb, a semi-divine being that was both the producer and sustainer of living beings.'32 '"Know that by nature,"' argues Descartes in Le Monde, '"I do not understand some goddess or some sort of imaginary power. I employ this word to signify matter itself."' And what of 'matter?' '"There exists no occult forces in stones and plants"' declares Descartes; '"no amazing and marvellous sympathies and antipathies, in fact there exists nothing in the whole of nature which cannot be explained in terms of purely corporeal causes devoid of mind and thought."'33 Such a conception of nature of course raises the problematic issue of life itself. How does an inert and barren nature give rise to living beings? For Descartes, the answer is dualism. Humanity, as the sole possessor of mind, is set apart from a dead, mechanical universe. Descartes would undoubtedly have applauded the views of the Gnostic Jesus of the Gospel of Thomas: 'Jesus said, "Whoever has come to understand the world has found (only) a corpse, and who has found a corpse is superior to the world."'34

The mechanical worldview, as Easlea comments, is not only radical, but one which 'does not stare the natural philosopher in the face.' It is one thing to reject belief in some earth goddess; it is quite another



'to declare nature to consist of only inert, uninteresting matter and nothing more.' Given this, asks Easlea, 'why was it so widely subscribed to?' Echoing Capra, he suggests that the mechanical philosophy amounted to a 'de-mothering' of nature 'in preparation for, and in legitimization of, the technological appropriation of the natural world that the mechanical philosophers hoped they and their successors would establish.'<sup>35</sup>

Descartes may have rejected the idea of an earth goddess, but he certainly did not reject the notion of a transcendent God, responsible for holding together all the fragments of experience. For Bordo, Descartes' God is the one needed to alleviate the anxiety he feels in 'the absence of a sense of connectedness with the natural world ... with one's own body.' His appeal to 'God the father,' comments Bordo, can be described in terms of a 'separation from the maternal - the immanent realms of earth, nature, the authority of the body - and a compensatory turning toward the paternal for legitimation through external regulation, transcendent values, and the authority of the law.'<sup>36</sup> Easlea however makes the observation that even the mechanical philosophers - in 'perhaps unguarded moments' - spoke of 'barren matter' in essentially 'feminine' terms.<sup>37</sup> But, for the mechanists, this is a passive, inert, female nature, with no inherent creativity. Robert Hooke compares barren matter to the '"Female or Mother Principle"'; a principle '"without Life or Motion"' and '"wholly unactive"' until '"impregnated by the second Principle which may represent the Pater, and may be call'd Paternus, Spiritus, or hylarchick Spirit."<sup>38</sup> According to Descartes himself in the Discourse on Method, men should not merely attempt to

understand the dead world-machine, but become '"master and possessors of nature."'39

The nature of the scientific venture, as presented in the writings of the natural philosophers and scientists of the Scientific Revolution, is, as Easlea comments, at once both a denial of intimate maternal connection with the earth, and of 'male sexual wooing, conquest, and penetration of a female nature.' Yet this is a female nature 'basically deprived of creative maternal status.' The natural philosophers, contends Easlea, 'saw nature as a woman passively awaiting the display of male virility and the subsequent birth of a race of machines that would, in Bacon's words, not merely exert a "gentle guidance over nature's course" but would "conquer and subdue her ... shake her to her foundations."' Science, he suggests, insofar as it continues to operate within a framework of male alienation, ambition and domination, can offer and promote nothing but a 'culture of death.'40

A theme that Easlea touches upon, as mentioned above, is that the Scientific Revolution did not break with, but actually continued - albeit in a more humanistic guise - the more fundamental urge in Western civilization to deny, dominate, and eventually transcend nature (and by association, femaleness). Despite Darwin, despite Copernicus, and despite claims that we live in a post-Christian world, we are, as Lynn White has put it, still guided by religious axioms which place humanity above the natural process, and see nature in purely instrumental terms. (This notion of continuity is an idea which we will again return to later.) It therefore comes as no surprise when ardent atheists like

Bertrand Russell can on the one hand claim to reject Christianity for science, and yet on the other argue that we must 'Conquer the world by intelligence, and not merely by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from it.' Why? - because 'In this realm we are kings, and we debase our kingship if we bow down to Nature.' To respect nature is 'foolish'; nature 'should be studied with a view to making it serve human ends as far as possible.' He looks forward to the day 'when men have acquired the same domination over their own passions that they already have over the physical forces of the external world. Then at last we shall have won our freedom.'<sup>41</sup> This ardent atheist can join hands with John Dickie, a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, who in 1930 declared that '"the world exists for our sakes and not for its own.'<sup>42</sup>

The scientific venture, according to writers like Easlea, seems concerned with two interrelated pursuits - of dominating a passive 'female' nature, but at the same time, removing all sentiments and metaphors of 'female' creativity and biology from the cosmos, and replacing them with 'masculine' and mechanical ones. But this is not a new venture. As Charles Ferguson suggests in relation to the conspicuous absence of gestation imagery in the Hebrew creation narrative, '"the dream of the machine is very old.'<sup>43</sup>

C H A P T E R   T W O :  
T H E   R O M A N T I C   R E A C T I O N

O Divine Spirit, sustain me on thy wings,  
That I may awake Albion from her long and cold repose!  
For Bacon and Newton, sheath'd in dismal steel, their terrors  
hang  
Like iron scourges over Albion; reasonings like vast serpents  
Enfold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations.

I turn to the Schools and Universities of Europe  
And there behold the loom of Locke, whose Woof rages dire,  
Washed by the water-wheels of Newton; black the cloth  
In heavy wreaths folds over every nation; cruel works  
Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic  
Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden, which  
Wheel within wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace.

William Blake<sup>1</sup>

New Age claims concerning the deleterious effects of the mechanistic worldview are it seems, also shared to some extent by a visionary force which came to prominence in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century - the Romantic movement. Although there is no consensus among scholars over a precise definition of Romanticism, most would agree that it involves a rejection of mechanism, and in some cases an attempt to articulate a holistic vision of reality. It represents a European revolt against a static and mechanical conception of the world, 'and the rebel's subsequent acceptance of belief in a world of dynamic organicism.'<sup>2</sup> It is evident that there are some thematic overlaps between the New Age and eighteenth-century Romanticism. So much so, that for sociologist Hans Sebald, the New Age movement represents a 'nouveau romanticism.' 'Romanticism,' argues Sebald, rather uncharitably, 'substitutes fantasy and imagination for the facts' and takes nourishment in 'the childlike, hedonistic, picturesque, bizarre,

unknown, and mystical.' It exhibits 'nostalgia for bygone eras' and 'infatuation with the unreal.' Sebald recognizes that the most prominent surge of the Romantic thought occurred in the late eighteenth century (although 'there is hardly an epoch that is free of it') and that it was essentially a 'reaction against earlier neo-classicism, mechanism, and rationalism.' Eighteenth century Romanticism he argues has now 'blossomed as New-Age Romanticism.'<sup>3</sup> This chapter will highlight three points of overlap between the eighteenth century Romantic movement and the New Age movement; namely, their criticisms of 'Reason,' their criticisms of science and technology, and finally, their similar forms of religious sensibility.

#### Reason

For the Romantic, the problem with Cartesian-Newtonian 'Reason' - the pursuit of 'clear and distinct ideas' - lies in its propensity to remove all mystery from sense observation. For Shelley, the spirit of science, in its antipathy towards subjectivity, 'kills every sense of mystery and wonder.'<sup>4</sup> 'Our meddling intellect,' remarks Wordsworth, 'Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things,' and 'We murder to dissect.'<sup>5</sup> By bringing together 'murder' and 'dissection,' Wordsworth highlights the connection between the scientific venture and the elimination of value from the natural world. If the Romantic revolt was a protest against 'single vision' science, it was simultaneously, as A. N. Whitehead puts it, 'a protest on behalf of value.'<sup>6</sup>

For Coleridge, the scientific method displays an inability to reveal the 'true nature of things'; it can only observe and quantify.

In a letter written in 1801, he warns that Newton "was a mere materialist. Mind, in his system, is always passive, a lazy Looker-on on an external world. If mind be not passive, if it be indeed made in God's Image ... there is ground for suspicion that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false as system."<sup>7</sup> The Romantics sought after a 'New Reason'; one which would enable them to 'see into the life of things.' To this new way of comprehending the world, Wordsworth gave the name 'Imaginative Reasoning.' For Blake, humanity can only be saved from the hell of 'Ulro' (his symbol for bleak rationality and isolated selfhood), through the agency of 'Jesus Christ the Redeemer,' whom he equates with 'Imagination.' The integration of reason and imagination/intuition also plays a significant role in New Age thought, where it is expressed, not in the language of Romantic verse, but in that of neuroscience (and, as we shall highlight later, that of Jungian psychology). New Agers take advantage of neuroscientific theories concerning brain hemisphere specialization, and in particular, the view that the brain's left hemisphere coordinates language, reasoning, categorization, and other rational faculties, while the right hemisphere deals with patterns, images and 'wholes.' The Romantic calls for the integration of Reason with Imagination; in a similar fashion, some New Agers call for 'whole-brain' thinking. Westerners, argues Ferguson in The Aquarian Conspiracy, have relied too heavily upon 'left-brained' rational modes of thought, to the detriment of the intuitive and holistic 'right-brain.' We have become 'split-brain patients': 'We isolate heart and mind. Cut off from the fantasy, dreams, intuitions, and holistic processes of the right brain, the left is sterile.' We therefore need techniques - 'psychotechnologies' -

which will 'help us name our dreams and dragons,' and 'reopen the bridge between left and right.'<sup>8</sup>

### Science and Technology

In tandem with its view of 'Reason,' argues Sebald, Romanticism - whether old or new - is equally, if not more so, antagonistic towards science and technology. 'The brunt of New Age scorn is reserved for modern science and technology'<sup>9</sup> he says. This is simply not true, or is at best a partial truth. In her comprehensive study of Neopaganism, Margot Adler reports: 'contrary to my own expectations and the assumptions of various scholars, the majority of Neo-Pagans are optimistic about the uses of science and modern technology.'<sup>10</sup> Again, although New Agers like Capra and Easlea are severely critical of the scientific venture, it is only to the extent that it continues to promote a culture of death, to the extent that it continues to be 'irrational.' Easlea, following Marcuse, defines 'rationality' as a 'mode of thought and action which is geared to reduce ignorance, destruction, brutality, and oppression.' Given this, it is clear he argues, that modern science, 'despite its breathtaking theoretical, experimental and practical achievements' remains basically irrational to the extent that it continues to be 'entangled in the oppression of groups of people by other groups.'<sup>11</sup> Science will always remain so, he contends, in so far as it continues to operate within an antiecological and exploitative framework of masculinist ambition and domination. That science operates within such a framework is an observation which - as both Easlea and historian Theodore Roszak note - was intuited by the

young Romantic novelist Mary Shelley (daughter of feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft) in her dark and brooding novel Frankenstein.

Shelley's novel is subtitled 'The Modern Prometheus.' The Prometheus in question is science, and in particular, the scientific attempt at technical divinity. In his study Fathering the Unthinkable, Easlea detects in Shelley's Frankenstein an 'indictment of masculine ambition' and an exposure of the 'compulsive character of masculine science.' In Frankenstein's arrogant assumption to create life, he notes a violation of 'the mother nature his seventeenth-century predecessors declared dead and buried.'<sup>12</sup> Frankenstein is engaged to be married to a woman named Elizabeth, but he puts off the wedding in order to continue his experiments. Instead of the natural child he should have had, it is his ambition, as Roszak points out, to 'create his own artificial offspring.' To this end he 'has spent his days and nights in a dismal laboratory, stitching together the morbid remnants he has stolen from the graveyard.' In the incident immediately following the scene where Frankenstein brings his creation to life, Roszak sees the 'single, terrifying moment that foretells and diagnoses the ecological disaster of our time.'<sup>13</sup> After creating his monstrosity, the horrified Frankenstein rushes out and locks himself in his bedroom; here he has a terrifying nightmare. He dreams that he holds his fiancée in his arms, and as he turns to kiss her, her lips

became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.



He wakes up from this nightmare, only to behold his creation standing at the window: 'His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks.'<sup>14</sup> Who is the 'mother' that Frankenstein holds in his arms? She is, argues Roszak, 'Mother Nature ... killed by his ruthless, masculine claim to dominance.' Now that she is dead, he is left alone; alone 'in a world terrorized by the soulless monstrosity he has created.'<sup>15</sup>

The observations made by the ecologic dynamic of the New Age movement continue to reiterate those intuited by Mary Shelley. Namely, that the patriarchal values of dominance, manipulation, technological assertion, and compulsive expansion eventually lead to annihilation.

### Religious Sensibilities

The contemporary New Age movement embraces two antithetical religious impulses, and this is also true of the Romantic movement. At times, the Romantic poets articulate sentiments which appear to be particularly patriarchal - in the sense of being dualistic and concerned with transcendence. In his 'Intimations of Immortality,' Wordsworth comments upon the happy, pre-existent state of the soul, and its subsequent agnosia as it descends into the material world:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home.(16)

The world, with its 'dialogues of business, love, or strife,' gradually transforms our 'heaven-born freedom' into a 'prison-house.' While Wordsworth's conclusion is one of quiet resignation - to 'find/ Strength in what remains behind' - other Romantics opt for transcendence. Byron's 'Manfred' rejects the limits of the human clay which 'clogs the ethereal essence,' and aspires to go 'beyond the dwellers of the earth':

My spirit walked not with the souls of men,  
Nor looked upon the earth with human eyes;  
The thirst of their ambition was not mine,  
The aim of their existence was not mine;  
My joys, my griefs, my passions, and my powers,  
Made me a stranger; though I wore the form,  
I had no sympathy with breathing flesh.(17)

At other times, the Romantics opt for immanentism, invoking pantheistic images of divinity. In dialectical tension with the Gnostic sentiments expressed in 'Intimations of Immortality,' Wordsworth writes:

... And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things ...(18)

Similarly, for Ferguson, the God of the New Age is

experienced as flow, wholeness, the infinite kaleidoscope of life and death, Ultimate Cause, the ground of being ... God is the consciousness that manifests as lila, the play of the universe. God is the organizing matrix we can experience but not tell, that which enlivens matter.(19)

Again, for Fox, the idea of 'God up there' is a dualistic notion which

reduces religion to the childish state of pleasing a God divorced from human experience. The solution to this infantile form of 'Newtonian theism' is 'our moving from theism to panentheism.'<sup>20</sup>

An ecological sensibility naturally reaches out to a holistic rather than Cartesian/Platonic view of the self. The spirit 'rolls through all things.' In his 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,' Blake, as 'The Voice of the Devil,' glories in a new and integrated image of selfhood:

All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors:

1. That Man has two real existing principles; Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True:

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight.(21)

This holistic vision of self as an integration of mind, passions and body reaches out naturally to an even more expansive notion of selfhood - the self that feels united with the entire world. The German Romantic Holderlin declares: '"Let the new world spring from the root of humanity! ... There will be only one beauty; and man and nature will unite in one all-embracing divinity."' <sup>22</sup> Such feelings of divine immanence and identification with nature are expressed by contemporary Goddess advocates like Christ, for whom the Goddess symbolizes 'the

whole of which we are a part,' this whole being 'the Earth and sky, the ground on which we stand, and all the animals, plants, and other beings to which we are related.'<sup>23</sup> Identification with nature also occupies the attention of the deep ecology movement. The term 'deep ecology' was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. He calls his own perspective 'deep' simply because in comparison with other environmental perspectives, it asks deeper questions. For example, a question which might be asked by a mainstream environmental manager might be: 'How can I manage the environment in such a way as to sustain it, and at the same time maximize profits?' By contrast, a question that a deep ecologist might ask is: 'What gives environmental managers the arrogance to assume that the environment has no other purpose than to serve human interests?' Deep ecologists root environmental problems in 'anthropocentric' thinking - a value-hierarchical way of thinking which maintains that if anything has value or usefulness, it is only insofar as it has value or usefulness to humans. An anthropocentric perspective on the environment assumes that the environment is only there to serve humanity. Seldom is this stated, it is usually assumed. It has been left to deep ecologists to uncover such silent assumptions. Deep ecologists would wish to replace anthropocentric ethics with 'ecocentric' ones, based on the view that 'The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves,' and that 'These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.' Ecocentric ethics would seek to maintain the 'Richness and diversity of life forms,' and this would involve the implementation of policies that affect 'basic economic, technological and ideological structures.' According to Naess,

supporters of deep ecology adopt lifestyles that have tendencies towards using simple means, anti-consumerism, going for depth and richness of experience rather than intensity, showing concern about the situation of the Third and Fourth World and attempting to avoid a standard of living too much different from and higher than the needy.<sup>24</sup> The interesting point about this, to return to Holderlin's vision, is that Naess believes it is impossible to coerce people into deep environmental ethics. People will not adopt such an ethic from a sense of moral duty, but from a sense of identification, or what he calls 'self-realization' - the expansion of the self into wider fields of identification. In the words of Naess:

We need an environmental ethics, but when people feel they unselfishly give up, even sacrifice, their interest in order to show love for Nature, this is probably in the long run a treacherous basis for conservation. Through identification they may come to see their own interest served by conservation, through genuine self-love, love of a widened and deepened self.(25)

Such a self has been realized by John Seed, director of the Rainforest Information Centre in eastern Australia. When asked how he managed to overcome despair and sustain the struggle against lumber interests, he replied: "'I try to remember that it's not me John Seed, trying to protect the rainforest. Rather I am part of the rainforest protecting myself, I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into human thinking.'" <sup>26</sup>

### CHAPTER THREE : NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

From the eighteenth century onwards, the West has witnessed the birth and proliferation of many new and 'unorthodox' religious groups; unorthodox that is, from the perspective of mainstream Christian thought. Some, like Swedenborgianism and Mormonism, have drawn inspiration from or have declared nominal allegiance to 'Christianity,' but at the same time, have deviated from the classical tradition over a number of decisive theological issues. Others, like Theosophy, have drawn heavily from non-Christian traditions, like Hinduism.

An interesting point is that many of these movements originated or first took root in America. Ruth Tucker, in her comprehensive study of new religious movements, accounts for this by suggesting that in contrast with their European counterparts, the early American settlers embraced a level of liberalism which allowed for the free expression of new religious ideas. 'The American frontier,' she writes, 'with its free-wheeling individualism and spirit of democracy, served as an incubator for countless new religions that could not have thrived elsewhere.'<sup>1</sup> Ferguson agrees, but adds to this elements of mysticism and 'destiny.' There have always been two bodies of the 'American dream' argues Ferguson. One is the 'expansionist, materialist, nationalist, and even imperialist vision of wealth and domination.' The other is the 'Transcendentalist vision: excellence, spiritual riches, the unfolding of the latent gifts of the individual.' For Ferguson, the latter is the 'original dream':

Although it is rarely noted in histories of the American Revolution, many of the arch-Revolutionaries came from a tradition of mystical fraternity. Except for such traces as the symbols on the reverse side of the Great Seal and the dollar bill, little evidence remains of this esoteric influence (Rosicrucian, Masonic, and Hermetic) ... "A New Order of the Ages Begins," says the reverse side of the Great Seal, and the Revolutionaries meant it. The American experiment was consciously conceived as a momentous step in the evolution of the species.

For Ferguson, the American New Age movement is only America coming into its own; an 'enactment of the original American dream.'<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will now examine a few of the religious movements which, it is suggested, have contributed at least something to the shape of New Age spirituality.

#### Swedenborgianism

According to Melton et al., the 'modern metaphysical tradition' can be traced back to the Swedish scientist and visionary Emanuel Swedenborg. As a scientist Swedenborg 'became the first to state the nebular hypothesis of the origin of the universe' and 'pioneered the development of crystallography and mineralogy.' However, in the last two decades of his life, such scientific pursuits were rejected in favour of spending 'intimate communion with what he claimed were angels.'<sup>3</sup>

A key theme in Swedenborg's work is the belief that it represents a new and previously hidden Christian revelation. Now that there is 'no longer any love, and consequently, any faith' left in traditional

Christianity, he declares in his celebrated Heaven and Hell, 'the Lord will open the Word as to its internal sense, and reveal the arcana of heaven.' Swedenborg has come to reveal 'an arcanum not yet known in the world.' That this new 'arcanum' is true is vouchsafed by the fact that it has been revealed by angels to Swedenborg during a number of in- and out-of-body experiences. 'I have,' he ventures, 'spoken with spirits as a spirit, and I have spoken with them as a man in the body.'<sup>4</sup> Here, Swedenborg anticipates not only the trance-mediumship of Spiritualism, but New Age interest in channeling and out-of-body experiences.

Other 'unorthodox' features of Swedenborg's work include a denial of divine grace and atonement, the postulation of a spirit world between heaven and hell, and a law of correspondence between the spiritual and natural worlds (or as Melton et al. put it, 'a modern scientific restatement of the old Hermetic principle, "As above, so below."'<sup>5</sup>).

In spite of the above, Swedenborg's claim that his work represents 'an arcanum not yet known in the world' is - for me at least - unconvincing. Moreover, I find little in Swedenborg which would suggest - as Catherine Albanese has argued - that he is an historical tributary to 'New Age Nature Religion,' in that he 'collapsed the distinction between matter and spirit.'<sup>6</sup> To begin with, in spite of his correspondence theory, Swedenborg revels in a hierarchical dualism between all things natural and all things spiritual or rational, and in doing so, remains consistent to his Platonic/Cartesian heritage. (His view that all correspondences 'are elevated to a higher degree, when raised from natural things to spiritual' shows that his correspondence



theory is less Hermetic than Platonic; more 'as the form above, so the shadow below.') The body, considers Swedenborg, 'does not think, because it is material, but the soul [does], because it is spiritual.' All 'rational life' may appear in the body, but it actually 'belongs to the spirit, and nothing of it to the body.' In summary, the 'spirit is the real man,' and 'the corporeal frame adjoined to the spirit, for the sake of services in the natural and material world, is not the man, but only an instrument for the use of his spirit.'<sup>7</sup>

His view that 'he who has lived well comes into heaven, and that he who has lived wickedly comes into hell' is not exactly revolutionary either. For Swedenborg, heaven and hell are both eternal, and once in hell, there is neither hope nor chance of moral self-improvement. 'The angels said,' declares Swedenborg,

that the life of the ruling love is never changed with any one to eternity ... man after death can no longer be reformed by instruction, as in the world ... and hence it is that man remains to eternity such as the life of his love had been in the world.

It is also interesting to note Swedenborg's views on 'all whom I have seen taken up into heaven, and ... those cast into hell.' Cast down are 'those who are in the corporeal and worldly love, which is destitute of what is heavenly and spiritual'; those who are 'dull and stupid as to spiritual truths, so far as they indulge the sense of taste and allurements of bodily touch.' Taken up are those who have been 'purified from earthly things' and 'have ascribed all things to the Divine, regarding nature as dead in comparison.' For Swedenborg, the 'spiritual' is the antithesis of everything sensual: 'in proportion as

the mind can be withdrawn from the sensual things of the external man, or the body, it is elevated to spiritual and heavenly things.'<sup>8</sup>

Swedenborg's work formed the basis for the Swedenborgian Church or the Church of the New Jerusalem, established by Robert Hindmarsh in 1788. Its teachings were popularized in America by the evangelical activities of the legendary 'Johnny Appleseed.' In addition, argue Melton et al., Swedenborg's ideas and practices - like out-of-the-body travel and receiving communications from celestial sources - have become 'standard elements of the occult worldview.'<sup>9</sup>

New Age critic Robert Basil is correct in recognizing that Swedenborg may have in some respects prepared the way for the New Age movement's 'devaluation of the material world.'<sup>10</sup> But, as this thesis will contend, not all New Agers embrace such a radical devaluation. Some would be inclined to agree with Blake's assessment: 'Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not written one new truth. Now hear another: he has written all the old falshoods.'<sup>11</sup>

#### The Transcendentalist Movement

Along with Swedenborgianism, Melton et al. recognize the American Transcendentalist movement as another 'major building block' in the foundations of New Age thought.<sup>12</sup> The Transcendentalist movement was born in New England in 1836, when a number of intellectuals, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman and Henry Thoreau, began meeting together to discuss developments in theology, philosophy and literature.

They were influenced by a variety of sources, including Blake, Wordsworth, Swedenborg, and the recently translated Bhagavad Gita.

The Transcendentalists were concerned with the quality of human life in a culture that was becoming increasingly materialistic. They felt that humanity's intellectual and spiritual growth was being submerged in a 'philosophy of sensationalism.' Against this, as Chandler comments, 'The Transcendentalists sought God in nature.'<sup>13</sup> Emerson for example spoke of the 'Over-Soul'; a mysterious force that pervades both nature and human personality. This pantheistic vision was embraced by subsequent religious movements. According to Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, '"God is All-in-all ... He is all the Life and Mind there is ... there can be nothing outside of Himself.'"<sup>14</sup> Charles Fillmore, the founder of the Unity School of Christianity, declares: '"We believe that creative Mind, God, is masculine and feminine ... we live, move and have our being in God-Mind ... God-Mind lives, moves, and has being in us to the extent of our consciousness.'"<sup>15</sup>

The revolt against 'sensationalism' did not stop at seeking God in nature, but went on to propose a new level of personal autonomy. For Thoreau, the greatest threat to the human spirit is the State. In his 'Civil Disobedience,' he argues that those who follow the State's every whim - whether scientist, soldier or priest - lose the ability to exercise their own moral judgement, and become like pieces of stone or wood, 'and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well.' If the State violates personal moral integrity, then,

argues Thoreau, the individual has the right and duty to disobey the State. By doing so, it may eventually recognize the individual 'as a higher and independent power, from which all its power and authority are derived.'<sup>16</sup> At times, recognizing the individual as 'a higher and independent power' is elevated to the point of self-deification. 'And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is,' declares Whitman in his 'Song of Myself.'<sup>17</sup> The divinity of the self is a characteristic belief of the contemporary New Age movement, but it is also a feature shared by other religious movements of the Transcendentalist period. Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Mormon, asserts: '"God himself ... is a man like unto one of yourselves, that is the great secret ... You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves."<sup>18</sup> His successor, Brigham Young, adds: '"we are created ... to become Gods like unto our Father in Heaven."<sup>19</sup> According to the Unity School, '"Jesus was potentially perfect and He expressed that perfection; we are potentially perfect, but we have not expressed it."<sup>20</sup>

In Transcendentalism we find a dialectical tension between the self and society. On the one hand, the Transcendentalists were dedicated to more harmonious patterns of social existence, as evidenced by their various attempts at communal living. On the other hand, as Dominican scholar Jon Alexander notes, the Transcendentalists set the individual against the claims of tradition and society, by placing the sole source of authority within the individual who is 'his/her own redeemer.' Communal adventures failed because of this emphasis upon 'self-reliance,' which did not generate or inspire 'self-sacrifice and

cooperation.'<sup>21</sup> A similar dialectical tension can be observed in the Transcendentalist appreciation of the natural world. At times, as Albanese observes, the Transcendentalists saw matter as real, the 'embodiment of Spirit and the garment of God.' In such a pantheistic view 'Harmony with nature,' was for the Transcendentalist 'the broad highway to virtuous living and ... union with divinity.' At the same time, matter was sometimes viewed 'as illusion and unreality, ultimately a trap from which one needs to escape.' In this view, mastery over rather than harmony with nature 'became the avenue to a "salvation" that transcended, even as it managed nature.' According to Albanese, a similar contradiction lives on in even the most pantheistic New Age religions like feminist Wicca, where on the one hand we are told that the divine is the world, and that the Goddess celebrates the reality, the concreteness of matter, and on the other that matter is ultimately 'only a form of energy.' The religion of Starhawk and other Neopagans 'is a religion that exalts the world of mind as much [as nature].'<sup>22</sup> This is a claim that will be discussed in the conclusion.

### Theosophy

If the contents of New Age exotica - everything from celestial entities to submerged continents - have been shaped by one religious movement more than any other, then that movement is Theosophy. The Theosophical Society was formed in New York in 1875 by the Russian occultist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, along with Henry Steel Olcott and William Judge. Two key Theosophical texts, both written by Blavatsky, are Isis Unveiled (1877) and The Secret Doctrine (1888).

As with Swedenborg, who delivers 'an arcanum not yet known in the world,' Blavatsky, in her Secret Doctrine, claims to reveal a wisdom which has, until the publication of her text, been 'hidden under glyph and symbol.' Yet this wisdom entails more than merely opening Christianity 'as to its internal sense.' The 'Universal Gnosis' or 'Ancient Wisdom' is, argues Blavatsky, 'scattered throughout the thousands of volumes embodying the scriptures of the great Asiatic and early European religions.' At the heart of this perennial religion, claims Blavatsky, are the following teachings:

[1] The ABSOLUTE; the Parabrahm of the Vedantins or the one Reality, SAT ... [2] spirit-matter, LIFE; the 'Spirit of the Universe' ... [3] The Eternity of the Universe in toto as a boundless plane ... 'the playground of numberless Universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing' ... [4] the absolute universality of that law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow ... [5] The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Oversoul ... [6] the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul ... through the Cycle of Incarnation ... in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law ... The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations.(23)

Given this, it is easy to see why researchers like Melton et al. regard Theosophy as being largely responsible for the popularization of Eastern religious concepts in the West. Blavatsky and the Theosophists were of course not the only ones to promote such ideas. They were proclaimed by the Transcendentalists, by Vivekananda's Vedanta Society, Bernard's Tantrik Order, and Fillmore's Unity School of Christianity, to name a few. But Blavatsky, and later Theosophists may be given the credit, claim Melton et al., for making sure that Eastern ideas reached a wide audience beyond Theosophy, preparing the groundwork for the

cultural acceptance of the numerous neo-Eastern groups which emerged in the 1960s.

However, the 'Ancient Wisdom' does not stop here. From her list of core teachings, Blavatsky fleshes out a vast and colourful evolutionary drama. Each 'Manvantara,' or cosmic cycle of emanation and dissolution, is divided into seven 'rounds' of planetary transformation. Each round is further divided into seven 'yugas' or ages, the present period being near the end of the fifth yuga ('Kali Yuga'). Each age indicates a new state in human development. In the first age, the 'Pitris' or 'Elohim' ('a lower order of creative angels') cast their shadows upon the earth, thus creating a 'root-race' of devic beings; a second devic race is formed from the shadows of these beings. From these were created the beings of the third age - the hermaphrodites from the continent of 'Lemuria.' These beings split into two, forming the male and female giants of the fourth age - the Atlanteans. This race was apparently destroyed, along with Atlantis, in response to its arrogance and dangerous scientific endeavours. The fifth root-race - present humanity - is itself divided into seven sub-races. So far, only five of these seven sub-races have emerged, the fifth being the 'Aryan' sub-race. According to Blavatsky, the last two races to emerge in this cosmic cycle will not be 'new' root-races but the sixth and seventh sub-races to evolve from the fifth sub-race (Aryan) of the present fifth root-race!

Like Swedenborg's 'arcanum,' Blavatsky's 'Ancient Wisdom' embraces a devaluation of matter; a devaluation which is expressed through her

evolutionary agenda. The third and fourth races lead humanity to the 'very bottom of materiality'; but the present Aryan race is on the 'ascending arc,' and from it will emerge a new humanity, which will break 'its bonds of matter, and even of flesh.'<sup>24</sup> For Blavatsky and her New Age following, the 'Age of Aquarius' will be populated by, as feminist critic Monica Sjoo observes, 'the non-physical, dematerialised and "spiritualised" beings of a transformed earth.'<sup>25</sup> America will play the key role in this process; Americans are, contends Blavatsky, 'the germs of the Sixth sub-race, and ... will become most decidedly the pioneers of that race which must succeed to the present European or fifth sub-race.'<sup>26</sup> Yet Blavatsky's evolutionary drama goes far beyond any New Age on earth. At the end of this cosmic cycle, 'not only material and psychical bodies, but even the Spiritual Ego(s) [will be reduced] to their original principle - the Past, Present, and even Future Humanities ... will have re-entered the Great Breath ... everything will be "merged in Brahma."'<sup>27</sup> After a time, this entire cycle of emanation and dissolution will begin once more, ad infinitum.

'There is,' asserts Sjoo, 'hardly a self-respecting New Ager who doesn't talk knowledgeably about Lemuria and Atlantis as if they are historic and self-evident facts.'<sup>28</sup> This is certainly an over-statement, and it certainly depends upon how the term 'New Age' is understood; but it is clear that some Theosophical ideas have made considerable impact upon certain groups and theorists within New Age movement. Such is the case with Theosophy's doctrine of cosmic evolution. It is also the case with its doctrine of the 'Great White Brotherhood,' which makes an appearance in everything from the Truth Vibrations by David Icke to



Earth at Omega by former UN representative Donald Keys. In The Secret Doctrine, Blavatsky reveals that there are 'watchers' and 'architects' who supervise each round of human evolution (The Secret Doctrine was communicated to Blavatsky by one of these). These creatures vary infinitely in consciousness and intelligence, and range from the lowliest nature elemental to the highest archangel. Many of these beings have 'incarnated bodily in man' but nevertheless continue to function 'in the infinitudes of Space.' Later Theosophists like Charles Leadbeater and Alice Bailey elaborated upon these ideas to produce a complex system of classification for the most important beings in this spiritual hierarchy - the 'Great White Brotherhood.' Members of this celestial fraternity include the 'Solar Logos' (the personal creator God), 'Sanat Kumara' (the 'Earth Master' who resides in 'Shamballa'), 'Manu' (the World Lord to come), and seven 'ascended masters' ('Morya,' 'Koot Hoomi,' 'the Venetian,' 'Serapis,' 'Hilarion,' 'Jesus,' and 'Rakoczy' or 'Saint Germain').<sup>29</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, as Melton et al. point out, a number of new religious movements, but especially Theosophy, 'divided and subdivided, producing literally hundreds of new organizations ... Theosophy became the seedbed that nurtured the important new movements that would emerge so forcefully in the twentieth century.'<sup>30</sup> One Theosophy offshoot was the Arcane School, led by Alice Bailey. Another was the 'I AM' movement, led by Guy and Edna Ballard. The I AM movement itself spawned others which have become closely associated with the contemporary New Age movement, including the Church Universal and Triumphant.

## Neopaganism

Another contributory to the shape of the New Age movement has been the growing interest in Pagan religious systems. Melton et al. argue that the notion of recreating the ancient Pagan religions dates back to the Renaissance, and 'has been one thread in Western occultism ever since.'<sup>31</sup>

According to Melton et al., interest in Paganism grew rapidly during the nineteenth century, stimulated by the discoveries made by the new sciences of Archaeology and Anthropology. The roots of the contemporary Neopaganism revival can also be found in Romanticism, in its reaction against the Enlightenment interpretation of the witch hunts. The Enlightenment presented the witch hunts as a story of massacre by the forces of bigotry and superstition. By contrast, liberal writers like Jules Michelet suggested that the alleged witches were in fact 'Pagans' representing religious and social freedom, opposed to an intolerant Church.<sup>32</sup> Impetus was given to this theory when in the 1880s an American lawyer and folklorist named Charles Leland befriended an Italian woman by the name of Maddalena, who described herself as a hereditary witch of 'La Vecchia Religione' ('The Old Religion'). She supplied Leland with various pieces of lore which were recorded in his work published in 1899 - Aradia: The Gospel of the Witches. The lore which Leland recorded suggested to him that the origins of Witchcraft were very ancient indeed. However, it was not until 1927, when Margaret Murray published her extremely influential study, The Witch Cult in Western Europe, that this view was given any academic credence. Murray's central thesis was that the ancient pre-Christian world was

permeated by a fertility religion and that this descended in Christian times in the form of Witchcraft. This 'Old Religion' was concerned with the seasonal cycles and the harvest, and worshipped a Goddess and a Horned God. Murray argued that it was the recognition of this Pagan religion which lay behind the European Witchcraft persecutions. Although Murray's thesis has been abandoned by the academic establishment, her work set off a new burst of interest in Paganism and Witchcraft or 'Wicca.' The first attempt to actually set up a modern Wicca movement was led by Gerald Gardner in the 1940s. His introduction to Witchcraft - Witchcraft Today, was published soon after the abolition in 1951 of the English Witchcraft Laws. The 1960s witnessed the growth of 'alternative' Wiccan groups, including Alexandrian Wicca and the Ferafarian and Aphrodisian cults. The 1970s witnessed the growth of other Neopagan groups, centred around Celtic (or Druidic), Norse, Egyptian, and Shamanic lore. Neopaganism as Hutton notes has continued to move sideways 'to mesh with a wide variety of other cultural influences.'

From native America it took totemic animals, vision quests, medicine wheels and sweat lodges. From Hinduism came meditative techniques, mandalas, chakras ... The writings of Carl Jung supplied the concepts of synchronicity, archetypes, the Shadow, and the collective unconscious. From radical feminism arrived a heavy stress upon the goddess as the senior divine partner, and a belief in prehistoric matriarchy. From eighteenth and nineteenth-century romantic Celticism came an admixture of Welsh and Irish mythology. The result is a very diverse blending of these ingredients, together with the original character of Wicca, under the common name of Paganism.(33)

While taking much inspiration from the mythology and religions of pre-Christian Europe, contemporary Paganism is certainly more 'Neo' than

'Pagan.' Contemporary Pagans appear to be perfectly at ease combining ideas about ancient goddesses with modern science fiction and fantasy, and with scientific theories like the Gaia hypothesis. A number of other interesting distinctions between ancient Paganism and Neopaganism are made by Hutton. In the past, Paganism was concerned with appeasing the divine; the contemporary movement stands more in the tradition of 'High Magic' with the belief that divine power can be 'raised,' 'summoned,' and controlled for human benefit. Another distinction concerns the role of the 'feminine' as Hutton calls it. Classical Paganism expressed a rather ambivalent view towards women and sexuality. By contrast, Neopagans accord female equality (at least) with the male, and honour sexual intercourse 'as a sacred act.' Another important distinction is concern with the environment. Hutton argues that abuse of the natural environment and animals (through sacrifice) has been a characteristic of human societies since the invention of farming, 'irrespective of belief.' By contrast contemporary Pagans are to a great extent 'the Green Party at prayer.'<sup>34</sup>

A striking feature of the Neopagan movement is its lack of dogma. As Margot Adler reports:

Most Neopagan religions have few creeds and no prophets. They are based on seasonal celebration, the cycles of planting and harvesting, on custom and experience rather than the written word. They are based on myth and metaphor rather than literal understanding ... As one scholar, Robert Ellwood, once wrote, 'Neo-Paganism is a religion of atmosphere instead of faith, a cosmos, in a word, constructed by the imagination.' Since the religion is alogical or prelogical, it is harder to imagine a dispute over dogma.(35)

Yet, there are according to Adler, a number of beliefs and attitudes

which bind most Neopagans together. 'In general,' she writes, 'Neopagans embrace the values of spontaneity, nonauthoritarianism, anarchism, pluralism ... sensuality, passion, a belief in the goodness of pleasure, in religious ecstasy ...' In relation to ideas about God, 'Most Neo-pagans ... are usually polytheists, or animists or pantheists, or two or three of these things at once,' and it is this polytheistic outlook which allows 'differing perspectives to coexist.' Neopagans are united in the belief that 'reality is multiple and diverse,' and stand against 'totalistic religious and political views.' In addition to the above, most Neopagans 'share the goal of living in harmony with nature' and view 'humanity's "advancement" and separation from nature as the prime source of alienation.'<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned in the General Introduction, researchers like Melton et al. exclude most Neopagans from the New Age movement on the grounds that they are focussed on the past, and not really interested in a future New Age. In response to this, it was noted that Neopagans appropriate from the past in order to address contemporary issues. Indeed, a quick perusal of any recent Neopagan journal will illustrate the concern Neopagans have for many current issues, ranging from personal health to environmental deterioration. For example, in Quest, a well-established and long-running Neopagan journal, 'Moonwalker' in his article entitled 'Preparing for Aquarius,' declares:

'the real Aquarian Age will not start until well into the next century [but] it seems very obvious that many of the currents of the New Age are already with us ... If you are a magician, and particularly if you are a witch, [you] should be working with the Great Mother of Earth, to preserve the wilderness, restore the forests, refertilise the land ...'(37)

Furthermore, it should be noted that Neopagans are very articulate when it comes to understanding the goals and the scope of Neopaganism, and the root causes of some contemporary dilemmas. 'We want to present in the Pagan movement,' writes Rufus Maychild of Pandora's Jar, a 'radical journal of Earth-centred Pagan spirituality,'

a perspective on ecological politics which is politically and spiritually radical, that is, going to the roots of the matter ... It is our desire to go beyond the 'environmentalism' that just about everyone nowadays claims to espouse. Our commitment is to a biocentric world view, one in which humankind takes our proper place as a very recent species in the history of Gaia ... we are against all aspects of Patriarchy. Patriarchy comprises all the structures in our society whereby men as such are in general dominance over women, physically and also in terms of 'values' etc. The removal of patriarchy does not necessarily imply 'matriarchy' ... Rather, we may envision a 'matristic' culture in which as individuals we live in general equality, but where there is an overall focus towards the Great Goddess and all values implicit in Her.(38)

Maychild's anti-patriarchal stance highlights the impact that feminist theory has had upon some elements within the Neopagan movement. The relationship between feminism and Goddess Wicca is a topic explored in more detail in the final chapter of Part One.

C H A P T E R   F O U R :  
C O U N T E R C U L T U R E   R E B E L L I O N  
(   A N D   C O N F O R M I T Y )

This chapter is concerned with the relationship between the counterculture of the 1960s and the contemporary New Age movement. The general consensus on the counterculture seems to be that it was a failure. Concerned originally with the development of a new mode of consciousness which would help to build a new society beyond the alienation of the 'technocracy,' the counterculture ended in advocating a type of consciousness that would allow the individual to operate more successfully without having to change society. The chapter ends with a brief look at some of the more positive aspects of this period.

The term 'counterculture' itself has been made popular through a study of the 1960s by Theodore Roszak, and it is to Roszak's work, which provides perhaps the most optimistic assessment of the counterculture, that we first turn. In his The Making of a Counter Culture, Roszak equates the emergence of the counterculture with a growing resentment against the prevailing 'technocracy.' A technocracy, he says, emerges when a society reaches its peak of organizational integration, and starts to focus its attention upon maintaining and increasing levels of efficiency, affluence, and coordination. To do this effectively, the technocracy must control and manipulate various key areas within society, including politics, education, religion and even entertainment. By doing so, the technocracy ensures 'its capacity to keep the technological heart beating regularly.'<sup>1</sup> Roszak spends some time

discussing some of the features of the 'Technocratic Society,' and his ideas are summarized below.

The first feature of a technocracy is the belief that all vital human needs are technical in nature. These technical needs are only understood by state specialists, who translate them into a number of economic programmes, management procedures, and pieces of merchandise. A corollary to this, recently noted by deep ecologist Edward Goldsmith, is that the natural environment is robbed of its role as provider and sustainer of human life, and natural benefits are viewed as no benefits at all. The ecological implications are clear:

It is fundamental to the world-view of modernity that all benefits are man-made - products of scientific, technological and industrial progress, made available via the market system. Thus health is seen as something that is dispensed in hospitals ... with the aid of the latest technological devices and pharmaceutical preparations. Education is seen as a commodity that can only be acquired from schools and universities ... natural benefits - those provided by the normal workings of biospheric processes, assuring the stability of our climate, the fertility of our soil, the replenishment of our water supplies, and the integrity and cohesion of our families and communities - are not regarded as benefits at all; indeed, our economists attribute to them no value of any kind. It follows that to be deprived of these non-benefits cannot constitute a 'cost' and the natural systems that provide them can therefore be destroyed with economic impunity.(2)

Another feature of the technocracy is its ability to manipulate unobtrusively. Although it could coerce by force, it gathers allegiance argues Roszak by 'exploiting our deep-seated commitment to the scientific world-view.' In practical terms this means 'manipulating the securities and creature comforts of the industrial affluence which science has given us.' Thus the technocracy remains 'ideologically



invisible' - its worldview becomes the cultural imperative - beyond doubt and beyond question. The technocracy absorbs unrest within the system through a subtle process of manipulation; this process generates submission and weakens the 'rationality of protest.' The technocratic state employs its various manipulative schemes in order to disguise and obscure the inevitable effects of its social and cultural programme - the diminution of human freedom. This is a loss which must continue in order to maintain high levels of material affluence and industrial efficiency. 'Happiness' within a technocracy becomes 'whatever transient relief or exuberant diversion we can sandwich in between atrocities.' Whilst holding up the promise of increased human happiness and security, technological progress, as Roszak observes, given its continued implementation within a framework of domination, promotes human misery.<sup>3</sup>

It is against the backdrop of the technocratic society that Roszak sees the importance of the radicalism of the 1950s and 1960s. A radicalism which expressed itself in the poetry of Ginsberg, the Zen of Watts, and the bohemianism of the beats and hippies. According to Roszak, this new radicalism was not simply a youth protest against parental and state authority, but a 'counterculture,' whose outlook was directly opposed to the technocratic worldview. Furthermore, its aim was to transform society, not primarily through political reform, but through a change in consciousness. Thus the eastern mysticism and the drug experimentation of the sixties signifies for Roszak a desire to move beyond the rational, ego-centred consciousness characteristic of modernity towards a new way of 'seeing the world'; a new non-

intellective cognition. The 'New Jerusalem' begins, declares Roszak,

not at the level of class, party, or institution, but rather at the non-intellective level of the personality from which these political forms issue ... building the good society is not primarily a social, but a psychic task ... it [the counter culture] strikes beyond ideology to the level of consciousness, seeking to transform our deepest sense of the self, the other, the environment.

The New Jerusalem requires 'the subversion of the scientific world view, with its entrenched commitment to an egocentric ... mode of consciousness,' and the development of 'the non-intellective capacities of the personality.'<sup>4</sup>

The view that radical social transformation is based upon a 'new consciousness,' and that this itself will entail a shift from an 'egocentric' to a more expansive mode of consciousness, is clearly one which the New Age has adopted from the counterculture. For Ferguson, social transformation proceeds from personal transformation, and personal transformation means integrating the 'right brain' with the left. This notion of social transformation through personal transformation is prevalent in the human potential movement. The problems associated with this particularly individualistic notion of transformation will be more fully discussed later.

A similar account of the counterculture is provided by Kenneth Leech in his 1973 study Youthquake. For Leech, like Roszak, the distinguishing feature of the counterculture is an emphasis upon inner transformation, upon the 'inner life.' He writes:

In recent years much of the energy which had formerly been

directed towards social reform and political protest by the young has been diverted towards a search for spirituality, for the expansion of consciousness, for inner wholeness ... Out of disillusionment with a violent society, and out of the ruins of the drug culture, has come a concern for the inner life of man.(5)

The spiritual quest may have emerged 'Out of disillusionment with a violent society,' but at the same time it did not announce a return to traditional spiritual solutions, to mainstream Christianity. For the members of the counterculture, claims Leech, the 'violent society' and mainstream Christianity were inextricably linked. The emerging spirituality stood against, not simply materialism or Christianity, but against 'moneytheism.' (This is a view shared by Robert Bellah, who argues that America in the 1950s witnessed the 'corruption of the biblical tradition by utilitarian individualism, so that religion itself finally became for many a means for the maximization of self-interest.'<sup>6</sup>) Leech outlines what he considers to be the three most significant contributions to this emerging spirituality - elements of the drug culture, neo-oriental or Eastern spirituality, and a resurgence of what he calls the 'magical,' 'mystical' and 'occult.'

In relation to the drug culture, Leech points out the 'religious' significance of LSD and cannabis. In reference to LSD, he discusses the role of Timothy Leary in placing psychedelic fascination solidly in a religious context. '"LSD turns you on to God'"<sup>7</sup> declares Leary in his The Politics of Ecstasy. The acid trip is really a religious journey; and this journey goes nowhere but within. As Leary comments: '"I consider my work basically religious ... The aim of all Eastern religions, like the aim of LSD, is basically to get high: that is, to

expand your consciousness and find ecstasy and revelation within.'"8 Leary makes a (rather dubious) connection between 'the aim of LSD' and 'all Eastern religions.' A similar connection was made between Eastern religions and cannabis. And this is a connection which, claims Leech, 'has naturally led to a revival of interest in Eastern culture and religions' and 'must be seen as having profound effects' on the 'spiritual orientation' of the counterculture youth.<sup>9</sup>

Given that there were many groups interested in Eastern religions before 1950, Leech suggests that the counterculture's obsession with the East was never 'merely a by-product of the drug scene.' Indeed, 'the very Eastern teachers to whom the acid-religionists turned for guidance were most critical of the psychedelic claims.' However, Leech makes a crucial observation: although Eastern ideas have 'dominated the spiritual revival,' they have 'tended to be confused with a great deal of syncretistic Western material.' Eastern religions have been blended with 'magic,' 'mysticism' and the 'occult.' 'Rarely have Eastern traditions hit the counter-culture in a "pure state", but have rather carried with them, or accumulated, elements derived from occultism, theosophy, psychic and spiritualistic movements, astrology, and so on.'<sup>10</sup> (This is also true of the contemporary New Age movement, as we will discuss in more detail in Chapter Eleven.) Nevertheless, despite the syncretism, it appears that some identifiable New Age vision - involving themes like 'Aquarius,' 'new consciousness' and 'cosmic evolution' - was beginning to emerge from this strange religious concoction. The following New Age vision, taken from a 1968 issue of Gandalf's Garden, does not differ significantly from the opinions of

some contemporary New Agers:

'When the same thought awakens in a million evolving minds, that same idea makes a mental imprint on the psychesphere of this planet, and the world begins to slowly move in that direction. Thoughts are catching in the individual cells of the new World Brain ... On the edge of the Aquarian Age we are drawing into the swing of great cosmic events. The long awaited long-lost Dawn of Consciousness is at last glimmering in the mind of New Age Man-to-Come. Something is happening to the Planetary Consciousness ...'(11)

For Leech, the emerging spirituality, with its emphasis upon self-knowledge and new consciousness, 'is clearly a new Gnosticism.'<sup>12</sup> And Leech is not oblivious to the criticisms which can be made against such an individualistic and inward-looking type of spirituality. He cites with at least some approval the words of Berkeley artist Henry Anderson, who describes the Gnostic/psychedelic new consciousness as '"the latest opium of the people in a more literal and potentially more dangerous sense than anything envisaged by Karl Marx"':

'It seems to me damnably unjust for some people to be flying around on psychedelic trips, while other people are down below, stuck in dehumanizing kinds of employment, stuck in dehumanizing cities, being killed in wars. What is needed is not more people blasted out of their minds ... What is needed is more people in their minds, in their right minds. It is not really liberating, not really humanizing, to have people hallucinating that everything is beautiful. Everything is not beautiful.'<sup>(13)</sup>

The continuation of an introverted religious sensibility into the 1970s (the 'Me generation') forms, according to sociologist Robert Bellah, the legacy of the 'purely negative' experience of the 1960s. The counterculture may have divested modernity's 'utilitarian individualism' of its 'ideological and religious facade,' but 'that very exposure could become an ironic victory.' Bellah concludes on a very

pessimistic note: 'out of the shattered hopes of the sixties there has emerged a cynical privatism, a narrowing of sympathy and concern to the smallest possible circle, that is truly frightening.'<sup>14</sup>

Loring Danforth agrees, and argues that the 'mediative successors' of the counterculture have provided 'a new religious sanction' for utilitarian individualism, for 'worldly success.' The failure of counterculture radicalism has resulted in an attempt to reconcile what were from a countercultural perspective two 'mutually exclusive goals' - on the one hand, inner happiness, personal fulfilment, and on the other, 'material or worldly success.' The contemporary New Age movement, he argues, 'provides its followers with a world view through which they are able to integrate the apparently contradictory ideologies of mainstream American culture and the counterculture.' The 'alienated dropouts of the sixties' have been 'reintegrated into society.' New Age spirituality is, according to Danforth, not only private, but pro-capitalist:

Utilitarian individualism, then, which was forcefully rejected by the counterculture of the 1960s, has persisted in the New Age movement of the 1980s. People were 'exposed to the expressive values of the counterculture' in their adolescent years and who are now 'faced with the instrumental demands of adult middle-class life' are promised both 'inner satisfaction as well as external success' ... They are learning that they can maximise their well-being only by realizing their full potential. Material success has become the highest form of self-realization.(15)

A similarly negative assessment of the spirituality to emerge out of the countercultural response to the 'disenchantment of the world' is made by Roy Wallis. One response has been the emergence of 'world-

rejecting new religions.' Such religions - the Unification Church and the Krishna Consciousness movement for example - tend to be millennial and/or introverted. These are two responses 'to a world seen as beyond reform.' The second response has been the emergence of what Wallis calls the 'world-affirming new religions,' although 'socially conformist' would have been more apt. Wallis sees the 'human potential' therapies - 'a varied range of therapeutic cults and self-exploration and self-improvement systems' - as particularly representative of this second grouping. Like Bellah and Danforth, he views such religions as an attempt to reconcile counterculture radicalism with the expectations of mainstream society: 'Many young people, faced by their inability to change the world, decided to accommodate to it to a greater or lesser degree.' Such religions do not try to dismantle the utilitarian individualism and fragmentation of capitalist culture; on the contrary, they 'take these things for granted.' They provide 'salvation for those who already have firm attachments to the modern industrial world, or those who, like former American youth radical, Jerry Rubin, subsequently a Human Potential teacher, had decided that there were no viable alternatives to it.'<sup>16</sup>

Leech however is keen to point out that not all elements of the counterculture movement embraced an asocial or conformist spirituality. There was, he claims, a 'colliding move towards both mysticism and socialism'; a felt need 'to evolve a new style of community, an alternative society which will express the new consciousness.'<sup>17</sup> A more recent manifestation of this 'collision' is in the creation spirituality of Fox, who believes real 'social justice' can only take place in

dialogue with 'psychic justice.' 'Mysticism,' he says, is about bringing back the balance of left and right lobe, of 'light and dark, of passion and silence, of being and doing, of play and seriousness, of love and letting go of love, of work and art,' and that this crucial balance is one often absent 'when peace and justice movements lack a mystical grounding.' When psychic justice is absent, 'psychic injustice is projected onto society and its institutions.' The quest for psychic justice by contrast teaches 'a sense of personal understanding and compassion toward the "enemy" that is sometimes missing when one hasn't confronted one's own psychic battles.' By dealing with one's own projections, one 'clears the way for a more effective struggle for social justice.'<sup>18</sup> It is also important to note that the 1960s was a period of growing environmental and feminist consciousness - a fact ignored by Bellah et al.. In 1962 Rachel Carson published Silent Spring - the first and extremely influential presentation of the chemical poisoning of America and its consequences. In 1967 White argued that the environmental crisis was at root a religious crisis demanding a religious solution, a rethinking of human nature and destiny. In 1960, the feminist deconstruction of Christian theology began with the publication of Valerie Saiving's 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View.' Her essay argued that the supposedly generic doctrines of 'man' found in the works of influential theologians - including Reinhold Niebuhr - turned out on closer inspection to be reflective of male experience only. With this work Saiving opened the door, not only to fuller criticisms of a male-constructed theological tradition, but to theological reflection grounded in women's experiences.



### **The Counterculture and the New Age Movement**

Given the above, New Age researcher Miller is certainly correct in his contention that the counterculture represents 'a major historical tributary among the several that have converged to become today's rushing river of New Age activity.' Miller details a number of New Age ideas which he views as continuing 'sixties distinctives,' such as anti-materialism (but also, as we have seen above, pro-materialism), utopian community building, a rejection of traditional morality, and a fascination with the occult.<sup>19</sup> From an ecofeminist perspective, the counterculture did in a sense provide a new 'religious sanction' to the patterns of alienated consciousness found in the patriarchal conceptual framework. In the 'world-denying' religions like ISKCON we find an asocial, private form of spirituality that sees the present world order as something beyond redemption. In the so-called 'world-affirming' religions, like the human potential movement, we find emphasis placed upon the separative self in its pursuit of personal well-being. This is certainly not a 'new consciousness.' Yet on the other hand, we find the emergence of ecological and feminist consciousness, and the beginnings of a concern to bring together 'mysticism and socialism.'

C H A P T E R   F I V E :  
N E W   A G E   T H E M E S   I N   S C I E N C E

A Dialogue with Science

While some New Agers construct their New Age visions in reference to arcana received from disembodied spirits, others prefer to dialogue with 'science.' This is particularly true of ecological or constructive postmodern spirituality. This at first seems paradoxical given that for many in this New Age dynamic, Western religion and the scientific venture are merely different points in the patriarchal process of divinity-extraction. Mechanistic science argues Starhawk 'grew out of a Christian context in which divinity and spirit had long been removed from matter. Modern science undermined belief in the last repository of spirit when it killed off God after he had sucked the life out of the world.'<sup>1</sup> However, it is not mechanistic science that appeals so strongly to the New Age. The science embraced is often referred to as 'new science'; a burgeoning area of scientific speculation which places much emphasis upon ideas like 'emergent evolution' and 'interconnectivity.' Concern with these issues is seen by some, like Capra, as a return to science's original mandates: 'wisdom, understanding the natural order and living in harmony with it.' New science appeals to proponents of an ecological spirituality for a number of reasons. Firstly, it deconstructs past givens. Likewise, an important function of feminism, states feminist writer Robyn Morgan, is 'to break through the pervasive and powerful assumptions ... that certain past "givens" are inevitable, unchangeable, natural.' The 'new physics,' she argues, stands as the 'central analogy' for this process:

The New Physics encourages and even demands utterly new thinking; as an intellectual discipline, it refreshes the brain into glimpsing just how much nothing is inevitable, just how totally everything is relative, just how ceaselessly everything changes, just how inescapably natural all concepts are.'<sup>(2)</sup>

Secondly, new science - particularly in the area of cosmology - may generate a new sense of awe at our being in the cosmos. The 'new story' - which is the story of the universe as an unfolding creation - is, claims Fox, 'without doubt one of the most hopeful signs of our time.' It is offering a new creation narrative which will again bring 'mystery, delight and wonder and awe back to all of our lives, because it's all our story.'<sup>3</sup> The story engenders, not only a sense of awe, but of belonging. In Fox's words:

Our story is in no way separate from the cosmic story; Earth is a child of the cosmos and we are children of Earth. Trees, plants and flowers are offspring of the universe and our destinies are intertwined with theirs, and thus with the universe as a whole.<sup>(4)</sup>

Thirdly, new science confirms what an ecological spirituality sees as the primary foundations of reality: interrelatedness, interdependence, and process. 'In new science,' comments Margaret Wheatley, a professor of management at Brigham Young University, the underlying currents are 'a movement toward holism, toward understanding the system as a system and giving primary value to the relationships that exist among seemingly discrete parts.' Through the eyes of new science, we are introduced to 'an entirely new landscape of connections,' to 'the constant flux of dynamic processes,' and recognize that 'phenomena that cannot be reduced to simple cause and effect.' 'In

the work of quantum theorists,' explains Wheatley, '"things" have disappeared.'<sup>5</sup> Given this, it comes as no surprise that new science can also be invoked when it comes to discussing new ideas about the 'self.' 'The findings of twentieth-century science,' writes feminist and Buddhist activist Joanna Macy, 'undermine the notion of a separate self, distinct from the world it observes and acts upon.' Although Western culture has been organized around the notion of a discrete, separate self, 'there is no logical or scientific basis for construing one part of the experienced world as "me" and the rest as 'other.'<sup>6</sup>

New science is on the whole confined to a number of theories within the disciplines of particle physics, cosmology and the biological sciences, particularly ecology. Contemporary scientists identified with this perspective include James Lovelock, Lynn Margulis, Rupert Sheldrake, David Bohm, Stephen Jay Gould, and Capra. Although it is doubtful whether all of the above would consciously identify their work as being 'New Age,' what is certain, is that New Agers have found this area of scientific inquiry to be extremely useful in the attempt to add some weight to their own visions of renewal. The new scientific paradigm, asserts Fox, 'is sure to affect all elements of society - from education to medicine, from religion to economics, from politics to psychology - just as the previous Newtonian model has done for three centuries.'<sup>7</sup>

Critics like Miller regard the New Age dialogue between science and religion as unjustified. He argues that 'objective' science has limits, and that these are distinct from 'biblical claims' about the world.

Science deals with 'empirical data' and not 'metaphysical reality.' At the root of Miller's objections is a desire to protect his dualistic supernaturalism, his Platonic occultism - the 'sphere and personalities ... that are fundamentally not of this world.'<sup>8</sup> In an ecological spirituality however, divinity is located in the cosmic web of being itself. This erases the distinction between science and religion because it redefines the nature of the scientific venture itself. If divinity is nature, then science, as the investigation of nature, is a religious activity. In the words of Starhawk:

When you understand the universe as a living being, then the split between religion and science disappears because religion no longer becomes a set of dogmas and beliefs we have to accept even though they don't make any sense, and science is no longer restricted to a type of analysis that picks the world apart. Science becomes our way of looking more deeply into this living being that we're all in, understanding it more deeply and clearly.(9)

Indeed, Swimme argues that what in the past has been thought of as 'objective' science is really a 'mind splinter' discipline which fails to recognize and celebrate the majesty, grandeur and sacredness of the very universe it investigates. In place of 'lobotomized' science, we must 'learn to interpret the data provided by the fragmented scientific mind within the holistic poetic vision alive in ecofeminism.'<sup>10</sup>

Despite the term 'new,' new science actually has its roots in a number of developments which took place earlier in this century. It is to two of these developments - systems theory and new physics - that we now turn.

## Systems Theory

Systems theory as a new biological model was first proposed in the 1930s by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, although similar ideas were articulated in an earlier work by Jans C. Smuts (Holism and Evolution: 1926). The emergence of systems theory can be viewed in some respects as a reaction against the mechanistic outlook which dominated Biology at the turn of the century. According to von Bertalanffy, this was one of aimless atoms governed by causality - an outlook which left no room for 'any directiveness, order or telos.'<sup>11</sup> In 1926, Smuts noted that Darwinian evolution, 'so far from stemming the tide of mechanical ideas, has actually furthered and assisted it and raised it to full flood.'<sup>12</sup> (For the biologists of the time, chance variation within the evolutionary process was, as Barbour notes, 'a quantitative question, calculable by the mathematics of probability; here was a new kind of law which incorporated chance, namely a statistical law.'<sup>13</sup>)

The classical approach to Biology was one of mechanical reductionism. An organism was seen as being composed of many small, insoluble units, operating in a one-way causal system. The 'whole' was the sum of the mechanical components. The tenets of the mechanistic approach are neatly summed up by Oxford ecologist Arthur Tansley (the architect of reductionist ecology), who in 1920 argued that a mature science

'must isolate the basic units of nature [and must] "split up the story" into its individual parts. It must approach nature as a composite of strictly physical entities organized into a mechanical system. The scientist who knows all the properties of all the parts studied separately can accurately predict their combined results.'<sup>(14)</sup>

By contrast, systems theory holds that the whole is more than the sum of its parts; in von Bertalanffy's words, the 'constitutive characteristics are not explainable from the characteristics of isolated parts.'<sup>15</sup> A mechanical approach emphasizes externality and quantification - systems thought emphasises the 'inner' whole-making and organizational processes of organisms. Emphasis is also placed upon the idea of the organism as an 'open system' - that is, in continuous relationship with other systems. For example, plant and animal cells retain their self-regulating functions through an open metabolic relationship with the environment. In systems theory, as in holism, it is argued that the properties of an organism cannot be adequately understood simply in terms of its constituent parts, but in terms of the dynamic interrelatedness that exists between various systems, from a single cell to an entire ecosystem. Furthermore, whereas closed systems tend towards disorganization (entropy), open systems tend towards increased organization. This is a point central to Smuts' work, where it is asserted that the evolutionary process is teleological; it tends towards the emergence of more complex 'wholes.'

The appeal of systems theory is that it offers a model to explain how systems in general - not just biological ones - function. This at least was von Bertalanffy's assumption in writing his General Systems Theory. Bertalanffy, as Miller notes, 'was convinced that an interdisciplinary study of systems would yield a mathematically precise, experimentally verifiable description of these laws ... Then, he affirmed, the knowledge of organizing principles common to all phenomena

would make possible the long dreamed of unification of the sciences.<sup>16</sup> The need to apply a systems approach to a variety of disciplines - including medicine, psychology, politics and economics - is recognized by Capra. He uses the example of economics to illustrate the inadequacies of the present reductionist approach:

'Present-day economics ... remains fragmentary and reductionist, like most social sciences. It fails to recognize that the economy is merely one aspect of a whole ecological and social fabric. Economists tend to dissociate the economy from the fabric in which it is embedded, and to describe it in terms of simplistic and highly unrealistic theoretical models. Most of their basic concepts (e.g., efficiency, productivity, GNP) have been narrowly defined and are used without their wider social and ecological context. In particular, the social and environmental costs generated by all economic activity are generally neglected ... Because of its narrow, reductionist framework, conventional economics is inherently antiecological. Whereas the surrounding ecosystems are organic wholes which are self-balancing and self-adjusting, our current economies and technologies recognize no self-limiting principle. Undifferentiated growth ... is still regarded by most economists as the sign of a 'healthy' economy, although it is now causing ecological disasters, widespread corporate crime, social disintegration, and ever increasing likelihood of nuclear war.'(17)

### Physics and Indeterminacy

In 1927, the physicist Heisenberg noted certain properties concerning sub-atomic particles which he expressed in his 'Uncertainty Principle.' Heisenberg observed that although it was possible to predict the probability concerning the position and momentum of a large number of electrons, this could not be done for a single electron. The very process of observation disturbed the system making it impossible to determine both at the same time. This observation seemed to suggest that the absolute laws upon which Newtonian physics was based were actually the probability patterns for large numbers of electrons. It



also called into question the Laplacian notion of being able to determine everything about a system from a few of its variables, as these variables could no longer be determined. The electron's behaviour was 'uncertain' or 'indeterminate.'

As Barbour notes, there are basically three views regarding this apparent indeterminacy.<sup>18</sup> The first view, and the one held by Einstein, is that indeterminacy at the quantum level is due to human ignorance. The motion of sub-atomic particles is both deterministic and mechanistic, and the apparent indeterminacy is due to a number of 'hidden variables' as yet to be discovered. The second view is that indeterminacy is due to experimental limitations. The apparatus used in observation disturbs the system, making it impossible to know everything about the particles; their motion may be deterministic or indeterministic, but this cannot be known.

The third position, and the one advanced in the process thought of Alfred North Whitehead (Process and Reality: 1929), is that indeterminacy is an intrinsic feature of nature itself. The particle is acted upon by antecedent forces, but it is also 'free' to choose from a range of possibilities. Thus the future is not completely open (due to the action of antecedent causation), but it is not completely closed either (due to the particle 'choosing' from a range of possibilities). In short, the universe is neither closed nor determinate; it is, to use Whitehead's words, a 'creative advance into novelty.' And for Whitehead the force behind this creative advance is God: 'God is the organ of novelty.' The universe is God completing the deficiencies of the

transcendent and abstract pole of the divine being. The universe is 'God as really actual, completing the deficiency of his mere conceptual actuality.'<sup>19</sup>

### Physics and Interconnectedness

According to physicists like Bohr, Pauli, and Heisenberg, the notion of an 'individual' electron is simply an abstraction; the only way of making sense of quantum phenomena is in terms of relatedness and interconnectedness. As Bohr writes: "Isolated material particles are abstractions, their properties being definable and observable only through their interaction with other systems."<sup>20</sup> If sub-atomic particles are really interconnections within a system, and if these systems are interconnected with other systems, a picture of reality emerges that sounds distinctly like systems theory. Heisenberg sounds very much like von Bertalanffy when he asserts: "The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole."<sup>21</sup>

Related to this idea of interconnectedness is that of nonlocal or acausal connectivity. In the 1935 ERP experiment, Einstein, Rosen and Podolski observed that when two sub-atomic particles within a binary system are separated, they will still continue to affect each other, even though they do not seem to be causally connected. Einstein believed that this effect was due to hidden variables. However, the mathematics of the experiment, as worked out by John Bell in the 1960s ('Bell's Theorem'), demonstrated, according to Holroyd, that connections

between the separated particles 'not only occur but also that they cannot be attributed to the effect of local "hidden variables", as physicists concerned to maintain the classical ... view of causality had proposed.'<sup>22</sup> As with systems theory, new physics seems to affirm one of the key tenets of the ecological dynamic - all is interrelated and interdependent.

In Parts Two and Three, we will examine the dialogue between New Age spirituality and some of the more recent developments within new science. However, it will be shown that not all elements of new science are straightforwardly conducive to an ecological spirituality; indeed, that contradictory conclusions can be drawn from the same theories. For example, according to Fox the 'new story' of the evolving cosmos engenders cosmic awe and a sense of belonging. With a little imagination however, it can become a scientific rationale for social 'progress,' and even transcendence of the body through 'evolution.'

## CHAPTER SIX : NEW AGE THEMES IN PSYCHOLOGY

### JUNG AND JUNGIAN PSYCHOLOGY

The ideas of Carl Gustav Jung are met with much respect within the New Age movement. Reference to him is found in books dealing with everything from astrology to the nature of Wiccan rituals. Peters describes Jung as 'a patron psychologist to the new-age movement.'<sup>1</sup> Chandler looks upon Jungian thought as one of the many ways in which the idea of 'universal "oneness" seeped into the collective unconscious of the New Age.'<sup>2</sup> Miller classifies Jung's work as having 'strong affinities with New Age thinking, but it is not necessarily or strictly New Age'<sup>3</sup> - whatever that is supposed to mean.

The first section in this chapter offers a basic introduction to the key elements of Jung's thought, and highlights areas of dialogue between Jung and the contemporary New Age movement. This relationship will be further explored in both Part Two and Part Three. Jungian thought, as this thesis will show, is one of the largest areas of 'unresolved dialectic' within the New Age movement. On the one hand, Jung, like the ecological dynamic, expresses a more 'earthy' approach to our understanding of divinity, so much so that he has been accused of creating a religion of psychic immanence. Also, he does, like the ecological dynamic, express concern with the development of a richer and wider sense of self, with the recovery of the more 'instinctual' levels of our being, and of course with the recovery of 'feminine' values and

capacities. On the other hand, Jung has been accused of inventing a new patriarchal religion, and the reasons for this claim will be discussed in Part Two.

Jung's early work on the nature and function of the psyche was influenced and guided by Freud, whom Jung regarded initially as a father and mentor. However, in 1913, after years of fruitful collaboration, Jung and Freud parted ways amidst growing opposition to one another's views. For Jung, unlike Freud, the 'unconscious' was more than a storehouse of repressed sexual urges. Anthony Storr, one of Jung's many biographers, describes the opposition as a clash of 'fundamental values.' Whereas Freud gave supreme value to the orgasmic release of sex, Jung gave it to the 'unifying experience of religion.' Thus, Freud would see all significant experience as being derived from or substitutes for sex, while Jung tended to interpret even sexuality symbolically, having '"numinous" significance, in that it represented an irrational union of opposites, and was thus the symbol of wholeness.'<sup>4</sup>

The analytical psychology of Jung divides the psyche into three levels. The first is consciousness, with its focal ego. The second is the personal unconscious, which contains forgotten and repressed material derived from personal experience. Jung however proposes that the psyche contains a deeper level of unconscious dynamics, and this he terms the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is inherited and transpersonal, that is, common to humanity. In Jung's words:

personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not

derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the collective unconscious. I have chosen the term 'collective' because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.(5)

The collective unconscious contains energy patterns called 'archetypes.' These patterns have evolved through millennia of evolution, and, according to Jungian analysts like Anthony Stevens, not only predispose humans to approach life and to experience it in a certain way, but organize perception and experience in order to bring them into alignment with the archetype. Put simply, archetypes prepare us for life. There are as many archetypes as situations in life, including archetypal figures (mother, child, father, etc.), events (birth, death, separation from parents, marriage, etc.), and objects (water, sun, moon, snake, etc.), which together form 'part of the total endowment granted us by evolution in order to equip us for life. Each finds expression in the psyche, in behaviour and in myths.'<sup>6</sup>

At times Jung approaches the archetypes of the collective unconscious in a very 'biological' manner, comparing them with innate release mechanisms found in other animals. The archetype, he declares, 'is not meant to denote an inherited idea, but rather an inherited mode of functioning, corresponding to the inborn way in which the chick emerges from the egg, the bird builds its nest ...' He concludes that it is this 'biological' interpretation of the archetype which is 'the proper concern of scientific psychology.'<sup>7</sup> At other times Jung tends

towards something more mysterious. 'If it were permissible to personify the collective unconscious, we might,' writes Jung,

call it a collective human being combining the characteristics of both sexes, transcending youth and age, birth and death, and, from having at his command a human experience of one or two million years, almost immortal. If such a being existed, he would be exalted above all temporal change; the present would mean neither more nor less to him than any year in the one hundredth century before Christ ... He would have lived countless times over the life of the individual, of the family, tribe and people, and he would possess the living sense of the rhythm of growth, flowering, and decay.(8)

At times Jung abandons his 'biological' interpretation of archetypes completely, comparing them with Platonic ideas, and it is this dualistic tendency which has come under severe criticism from ecofeminists, who claim that Jung has simply replaced transcendent deities with transcendent archetypes.

The archetypes of the collective unconscious become the complexes of the personal unconscious. Complexes are autonomous 'personifications' of archetypes. They are the means by which the archetypes make themselves known. Archetypes, according to Stevens, become complexes in the following manner. When an individual comes into 'contiguity' with a situation or person possessing similarity to the archetype in question then that archetype - or at least part of it - becomes activated. For example, a child who lives in close contiguity with a woman whose behaviour possesses similarity to the inherited anticipation of maternal care (the 'mother archetype') will have this archetype activated. After activation, the archetype 'accrues to itself ideas, percepts and emotional experiences associated with the situation

or person responsible for its activation.' These additions are built into a complex which 'becomes functional in the personal unconscious.'<sup>9</sup>

Complexes are autonomous to the degree that they remain unconscious. As such they can 'manipulate us into situations which may be disagreeable or even disastrous for our well-being.' This is especially the case when complexes develop pathologically and are projected onto others. Stevens offers the example of a woman whose childhood had been dominated by a tyrannical father. This father activated the child's 'father archetype' - but only partially. While the authoritarian and commanding aspects of the father archetype were built into her father complex, the loving and protective dimensions of this archetype remained unactivated within the collective unconscious. As a result, 'this woman seemed fated to be drawn into the orbit of bullying, self-righteous men, whom she felt she had no alternative but to placate, appease and obey.' A man who would offer her love and protection would be 'too alien, too essentially unfamiliar to her, and she did not possess the emotional vocabulary necessary to share such love.' Through analysis, 'the woman was able to become conscious of the destructive influence of her father complex' and activate 'enough positive father potential for a much healthier and more supportive father complex to form in her psyche.'<sup>10</sup>

To recapitulate, complexes are archetypes 'fleshed out' by personal experience. Under healthy circumstances, complexes enable the individual to adapt normally to the external world. Under unhealthy circumstances, pathological complexes may form. Although many complexes



remain unconscious, they still, through the process of projection, exert influence over the individual's relationship with the environment. It follows that pathological complexes may have harmful consequences for that individual, and liberation from their grip requires making them conscious and confronting them.

Four important archetypal complexes in Jungian thought are the persona, shadow, anima and animus. The persona is one of the most conscious of complexes. It is the 'mask' the individual puts on to relate to the external world. In Jung's words it is 'a functional complex that comes into existence for reasons of adaptation or personal convenience, but it is by no means identical with the individuality.'<sup>11</sup> A healthy persona enables the individual to adapt to many social settings, while at the same time reflect the ego behind it. Pathology begins when the individual identifies completely with the persona, assumes a persona that does not fit, and so on. The persona is often developed at the expense of personality traits that the individual seeks to hide from the world. These repressed traits form a complementary complex called the shadow. Together, the two complexes perform a psychic balancing act. The shadow compensates for the pretensions of the persona; the persona for the antisocial impulses of the shadow. In Jungian analysis an attempt is made to raise the shadow to consciousness, and bring it into a healthier relationship with the wider personality.

The anima and animus are contrasexual archetypal complexes which enable the individual to relate to members of the opposite sex. Every

man has a 'feminine' anima which develops in close association with his mother complex; every woman has a 'masculine' animus which develops in close association with her father complex. In addition to the formation of relationships between opposite sexes, both complexes allow for the development of contrasexual traits within the personality. For example, the anima according to Jung is responsible for the development of a man's 'feminine' capacities to nurture, show compassion, play, create, and so on. Pathology occurs when the individual is 'possessed' by the complex, or alternatively, when the complex is completely repressed, in which case it forms part of the shadow. The obvious example of such repression would be patriarchal society, in which the so-called feminine qualities of men are repressed and projected onto women. The anima and animus are linked to two psychological principles which Jung calls 'Logos' and 'Eros.' Logos is the principle of reason, abstraction and discrimination, and underlies masculine psychology. Yet it is also identified with a woman's animus. Eros is the feminine principle of connection; it is also identified with a man's anima. To sum up in Jung's words:

Since the anima is an archetype that is found in men, it is reasonable to suppose that an equivalent archetype must be present in women; for just as the man is compensated by a feminine element, so woman is compensated by a masculine one ... I have called the projection-making factor in women the animus, which means mind or spirit. The animus corresponds to the paternal Logos just as the anima corresponds to the maternal Eros.(12)

Jung also believed that the anima and animus acted as mediators between the ego and the unconscious, and would manifest themselves in dreams and in the imagination. This takes us on to another two

interrelated ideas in Jung's psychology - the psyche as a system of homeostatic regulation, and the function of dreams. Jung holds that the psyche constantly regulates itself to maintain a state of dynamic equilibrium between the individual's internal and external environments. This is achieved through psychological compensation. It is the 'saint' who has visions of the devil; the ascetic who is subjected to sexual temptation. It is in dreams believes Jung that the compensatory nature of the psyche is clearly illustrated:

the psyche is a self-regulating system that maintains its equilibrium just as the body does. Every process that goes too far immediately and inevitably calls forth compensations, and without these there would be neither a normal metabolism nor a normal psyche. In this sense we can take the theory of compensation as a basic law of psychic behaviour. Too little on one side results in too much on the other. Similarly, the relation between conscious and unconscious is compensatory. This is one of the best-proven rules of dream interpretation. When we set out to interpret a dream, it is always helpful to ask: what conscious attitude does it compensate?'(13)

The therapeutic implications are clear - dreams manifest in symbolic fashion (the language of the unconscious) the repressed and neglected dimensions of personhood. Their subsequent interpretation and integration into conscious life leads to self-reconciliation, to greater wholeness. Jung gives the good example of a religious woman who came to him with the following dream. In this dream

She was singing hymns that put particular emphasis on her belief in Christ ... While she was singing it, she saw a bull tearing around madly in front of the window. Suddenly it gave a jump and broke one of its legs. She saw that the bull was in agony, and thought, turning her eyes away, that somebody ought to kill it. Then she awoke.

The combination of ideas in this dream led the woman back to the

religious disquiet she had felt during the war concerning her belief in the goodness of God and the adequacy of the Christian worldview. Jung gives the following interpretation:

This [the bull] is just the element that is represented by the Christian symbol as having been conquered and offered up in sacrifice. In the Christian mystery it is the sacrificed Lamb, or more correctly, the 'little ram.' ... In its sister-religion, Mithraism ... the central symbol of the cult was the sacrifice not of a lamb but of a bull. The usual altarpiece showed the overcoming of the bull by the divine saviour Mithras. Christianity [as with Mithraism] suppressed this animal element, but the moment the absolute validity of the Christian faith is shaken [as it was during this woman's experience of the war], that element is thrust into the foreground again. The animal instinct seeks to break out, but in doing so breaks a leg - in other words, instinct cripples itself. From the purely animal drives there also come all those factors which limit the sway of instinct. From the same root that produces wild, untamed, blind instinct there grow up the natural laws and cultural forms that tame and break its pristine power. But when the animal in us is split off from consciousness by being repressed, it may easily burst out in full force, quite unregulated and uncontrolled. An outburst of this sort always ends in catastrophe - the animal destroys itself.

The dream, continues Jung, is in fact an attempt to bring the Christian worldview into harmony with 'animal instinct' (something certainly advanced by creation spirituality and other elements within the ecological dynamic of the New Age). Jung writes:

the dream is an attempt on the part of the unconscious to bring the Christian principle into harmony with its apparently irreconcilable opposite - animal instinct ... The Christian love of your neighbour can extend to the animal too, the animal in us, and can surround with love all that a rigidly anthropomorphic view of the world has cruelly repressed.

Jung goes on to explore the pathological consequences of such continued repression:

By being repressed into the unconscious, the source from which

it originated, the animal in us only becomes more beastlike, and that is no doubt the reason why no religion is so defiled with the spilling of innocent blood as Christianity, and why the world has never seen a bloodier war than the war of the Christian nations. The repressed animal bursts forth in its most savage form when it comes to the surface, and in the process of destroying itself leads to international suicide.

And the value for the dreamer?:

If ... we assert that the dream is to be understood symbolically and is trying to give the dreamer an opportunity to become reconciled with herself, we have taken the first step in an interpretation which will bring the contradictory values into harmony and open up a new path of inner development. Subsequent dreams would then, in keeping with this hypothesis, provide the means for understanding the wider implications of the union of the animal component with the highest moral and intellectual achievements of the human spirit.(14)

For Jung, it is clear that dreams are there to engage the individual in some kind of integrative process; and this process Jung calls 'individuation.' Individuation, as Storr puts it, 'could be described as a kind of Pilgrims's Progress without a creed, aiming not at heaven, but at integration and wholeness.'<sup>15</sup> Individuation is also connected with the shift from an egoic to a wider centre of personality - the 'self.' In Stevens' words: 'Individuation ... involves the progressive integration of the unconscious timeless self in the personality of the time-bound individual.'<sup>16</sup> Who or what is this timeless self? 'The self,' writes Jung, 'is a quantity that is superordinate to the conscious ego. It embraces not only the conscious but also the unconscious psyche, and is therefore, so to speak, a personality we also are.' Self-realization, it could be said, is the integration of conscious and unconscious elements within the psyche. But the self is not something which can be fully realized. 'There is

little hope of our ever being able to reach even approximate consciousness of the self,' argues Jung, 'since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self.'<sup>17</sup> Self-realization is a task which requires a lifetime of constant development and integration, but one which has no definite end.

Jung has much to say on religion and on the 'Spiritual Problem of Modern Man.' To begin with, Jung views religious experience as a natural and irreplaceable dimension of human existence, and its function, he argues, is essentially therapeutic:

Religion, as the careful observation and taking account of certain invisible and uncontrollable factors, is an instinctive attitude peculiar to man, and its manifestations can be followed all through human history. Its evident purpose is to maintain the psychic balance, for the natural man has an equally natural 'knowledge' of the fact that his conscious functions may at any time be thwarted by uncontrollable happenings coming from inside as well as from outside.(18)

He further connects the era of 'scientific enlightenment' with the demise and repression of the therapeutic power of religion:

For the first time since the dawn of history we have succeeded in swallowing the whole of primitive animism into ourselves, and with it the spirit that animated nature ... for the first time, we are living in a lifeless nature bereft of gods.'(19)

And for Jung this has two implications. Firstly, as the religious function is natural and irreplaceable, and cannot be 'disposed of with rationalistic and so called enlightened criticism,'<sup>20</sup> it is merely repressed, only to emerge at some later date, distorted, and with a

vengeance. Secondly, as the religious function is essentially therapeutic, its repression makes for individual pathology. Indeed, Jung observes:

Among all of my patients in the second half of life ... there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age had given their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.(21)

To regain psychic integrity, Jung holds that it is essential to recover a religious myth to live by. Yet, he also insists that a return to supernaturalism is just as lop-sided as rationalistic atheism. Religion - if it is to provide meaning for contemporary individuals - must satisfy both intellect and feeling. Religion must be placed on a new foundation: 'a foundation which appeals not only to sentiment, but to reason.'<sup>22</sup> For Jung this new foundation is clearly obvious - what were once the literal truths of religion are not abandoned, but reinterpreted as symbolic representations of psychological dynamics. For example, here is Jung's reinterpretation of one Theosophical doctrine:

The Theosophists have an amusing idea that certain Mahatmas, seated somewhere in the Himalayas or Tibet, inspire or direct every mind in the world ... This myth of the Mahatmas, widely circulated and firmly believed in the West, far from being nonsense, is - like every myth - an important psychological truth. It seems to be quite true that the East is at the bottom of the spiritual change we are passing through today. Only this East is not a Tibetan monastery full of Mahatmas, but in a sense lies within us. It is from the depths of our own psychic life that new spiritual forms will arise; they will be expressions of psychic forces ...(23)

The 'psychologization' of religion is Jung's middle way between

supernaturalism and atheism. It is his picture of 'mature' religion: 'A mind that is still childish thinks of the gods as metaphysical entities existing in their own right, or else regards them as playful superstitious inventions.'<sup>24</sup>

Is Jung's psychology a religion? Despite what has been noted above, Jung is quite ambiguous about this. His interpretation of 'God' is a point in question. He says that it is a 'childish' mind which 'thinks of the gods as metaphysical entities.' Yet, he also argues that his psychology does not replace or contest claims about some transcendent deity: 'Psychological truth by no means excludes metaphysical truth, though psychology, as a science, has to hold aloof from all metaphysical assertions.'<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, he uses the term 'God' - suggestive to say the least - to describe a 'numinous' aspect of the psyche. On the other he says that 'When I say "God" I mean an anthropomorphic ... God-image and do not imagine I have said anything about God.'<sup>26</sup> Overall though, Jung shows little interest in this 'metaphysical' God. To begin with, its existence is a matter of intellectual presumption: 'since the gods are without doubt personifications of psychic forces, to assert their metaphysical existence is as much an intellectual presumption as the opinion that they could ever be invented.'<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, this God is, according to Jung, of little religious - that is therapeutic - value to the individual. Matthew Fox notes that Jung has said 'that there are two ways to lose your soul. One of these is to worship a god outside you.'<sup>28</sup> Overall, 'it seems fair,' as feminist Jungian Demaris Wehr



suggests, 'to say that experientially - which, for Jung, is the level of the real - God and the unconscious are one and the same.'<sup>29</sup>

Leaving the issue of God aside, the least that can be said of Jung's psychology is that it functions as a religion. In the words of feminist theologian Naomi Goldenberg:

The function of religions, Jung believed, is to provide people with myths to live by. Since religions seem to be increasingly unable to fulfill this task in modern times, Jung thought it was up to psychology to become religion ... Jung set out to build a psychology that would function like religion ... a religion for doubters, for people who were critical of the standardized institutional religions of their culture and yet who felt a need for religious reflection.<sup>(30)</sup>

Jung's psychology is also certainly a 'spirituality,' in that it is concerned with the development of fullness of being, or what in Jungian terms is called the process of individuation. Jung's psychology as Wehr notes 'comes closer than many psychologies ... to being a "way" or a "path" to truth, a further explanation for the devotion of its followers.'<sup>31</sup>

Jung's work is connected intimately with the New Age movement. He believed that humanity was moving towards a dramatic shift in consciousness, announcing a new era of religious understanding. 'We are living,' he asserts, 'in what the Greeks called the kairos - the right moment - for a "metamorphosis of the gods," of the fundamental principles and symbols.'<sup>32</sup> (As a matter of interest, he also suggests that on symbolic level, this shift corresponds to the zodiacal transition from Pisces to Aquarius.<sup>33</sup>) In concluding this section on

Jung, I wish to highlight some obvious themes of continuity between Jung and the ecological dynamic of the New Age movement.

To begin with Jung, as with the ecological dynamic, sees humanity as firmly rooted in the earth, its true home. Our roots are 'dark, maternal, earthy':

I would not speak ill of our relation to good Mother Earth ... he who is rooted in the soil endures. Alienation from the unconscious and from its historical conditions spells rootlessness. That is the danger that lies in wait for ... every individual who, through the one-sided allegiance to any kind of -ism, loses touch with the dark, maternal, earthy ground of his being.(34)

Here Jung stands in opposition to a patriarchal mentality which says that humans have fallen from a world of spiritual light into one of matter. But this does not mean that Jung has to abandon the idea of a 'fall.' On the contrary, his psychology brings it down to earth. It is neither literal nor primitive nonsense, but a mythological, symbolic rendition of an important event in the history of human development - the emergence of ego-consciousness. Jung writes:

Not for nothing did the Bible story place the unbroken harmony of plant, animal, man, and God, symbolized as Paradise, at the very beginning of all psychic development, and declare that the first dawning of consciousness - 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil' - was a fatal sin. To the naive mind it must indeed seem a sin to shatter the divine unity of consciousness that ruled the primal night. It was the Luciferian revolt of the individual against the One. It was a hostile act of disharmony against harmony, a separation from the fusion of all with all ... When man became conscious, the germ of the sickness of dissociation was planted in his soul, for consciousness is at once the highest good and the greatest evil.(35)

Another theme of continuity between Jung and the ecological dynamic

is that they both name 'dualism' as a key element in contemporary pathology. The ecologist Wendell Berry declares: 'Perhaps the great disaster of human history is one that happened to or within religion: that is, the conceptual division between the holy and the world, the excerpting of the Creator from the creation.'<sup>36</sup> Jung agrees, and finds the root of the problem within the psyche itself:

If only a world-wide consciousness could arise that all division and all fission are due to the splitting of opposites in the psyche, then we should know where to begin ... The crux of the matter is man's own dualism, to which he knows no answer.(37)

Jung uses a variety of terms to describe this split in consciousness - the split is between reason and instinct, intellect and feeling, Logos and Eros, knowledge and faith, Yang and Yin. The division is one in which the 'masculine' side of the dualism (reason, intellect, Logos, knowledge, Yang), has prevailed over the other, which is repressed, made unconscious. And it is this process of splitting and repressing argues Jung which leads to pathology:

Separation from his instinctual nature inevitably plunges civilized man into the conflict between conscious and unconscious, spirit and nature, knowledge and faith, a split that becomes pathological the moment his consciousness is no longer able to neglect or suppress his instinctual side.(38)

Jung's influence can easily be detected in New Age works like Capra's The Turning Point, which is organized entirely around the Yin-Yang motif, and asserts, along with Jung, that 'our current crisis' is rooted in the cultural and social preference for 'Yang consciousness' over 'Yin consciousness.' In Chinese religion, says Capra, all manifestations of the Absolute or Tao are generated from the dynamic

interplay of 'Yin' and 'Yang.' In their original context, Yin and Yang were associated with many images of opposites taken from nature and social life. Capra however extends this meaning to indicate 'two modes of consciousness,' the 'intuitive and the rational.' He describes these as 'complementary modes of functioning of the human mind.' Yang, or rational consciousness, is 'linear, focused, and analytic. It belongs to the realm of the intellect, whose function it is to discriminate, measure, and categorize.' Yin, or intuitive consciousness, 'is based on a direct, nonintellectual experience of reality arising in an expanded state of awareness. It tends to be synthesizing, holistic, and non-linear.' Rational consciousness generates 'self-centred' activity, while intuitive consciousness is 'the basis of ecological ... activity.' He goes on to suggest that Western society has 'consistently favored the yang over the yin,' and that this has led 'to a profound cultural imbalance which lies at the very root of our current crisis.'<sup>39</sup>

Like Starhawk and others, Jung also insists that the cultural imbalance towards Yang values lies upon a continuum which began long before the Enlightenment era. He notes:

Far too little attention has been paid to the fact that, for all our irreligiousness, the distinguishing mark of the Christian epoch, its highest achievement, has become the congenital vice of our age: the supremacy of the word, of the Logos, which stands for the central figure of our Christian faith.(40)

It is necessary at this point to outline why, according to Jung, this split in consciousness has come about. Put simply, Jung sees it as an unfortunate yet inevitable consequence of ego-development: 'When man

became conscious, the germ of the sickness of dissociation was planted in his soul, for consciousness is at once the highest good and the greatest evil.<sup>41</sup> Ego-development requires the devaluation of the 'feminine' because it entails moving beyond attachment to the unconscious world of the infant-mother relationship. An infant exists in a 'state of unconscious identity with the mother ... [and] is still one with the animal psyche and is just as unconscious as it.'<sup>42</sup> With such symbiosis, it is understandable why the Mother archetype has a number of positive qualities associated with it: 'maternal solicitude and sympathy ... all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility.' Yet this infantile attachment is confronted with the male child's Logos-oriented libido, 'Which eternally struggles to extricate itself from the primal warmth and primal darkness of the maternal womb.'<sup>43</sup> Identification with the mother can thus become a threat to the emergence of ego-consciousness, and this threat is linked to the male demonization of the maternal archetype - maternal solicitude has as its flip-side the 'Terrible Mother.' In the words of Storr:

Since maternal protection (overprotection) can also be a threat to developing individuality, the negative aspects of the maternal archetype are expressed in such symbols as witches, dragons, devouring and entwining animals and situations, and even the grave, or the sea in which the individual may drown.<sup>(44)</sup>

Thus in the typical Western myth of the hero's battle with some sea-monster - whether it be Marduk and Tiamat, or Yahweh and Rahab - the real struggle is for Jung 'the attempt to free ego-consciousness from the deadly grip of the unconscious.'<sup>45</sup> To put it another way,

'matricide' is complementary to ego-development, to Logos: 'Unconsciousness is the primal sin, evil itself, for the Logos. Therefore its first creative act of liberation is matricide.'<sup>46</sup> For Jung, such matricide is not a one-off event; the heroic ego can never extricate itself from the unconscious (its origins), and it thus requires perpetual matricide: 'this heroic deed has no lasting effects. Again and again the hero must renew the struggle, and always under the symbol of deliverance from the mother.'<sup>47</sup> 'It is from Jung,' observes Keller,

that we learn most definitively that the mythic matricide is an act of self-defence on the part of the heroic ego consciousness and that this matricide repeats itself endlessly in a culture centred around such an ego's consciousness ... Jung helps to uncover a deep structure of matrophobic strife underlying the civilizations of the world.(48)

For Jung, as with the ecological dynamic, wholeness will not be achieved by more transcendence, more 'progress,' but by turning back to that which an heroic patriarchal culture has repressed, made unconscious - instinct, the 'feminine,' Eros, the 'dark, maternal, earthy ground of ... being.' The male, he notes, 'will be forced to develop his feminine side, to open his eyes to the psyche and to Eros.' For it is 'the function of Eros to unite what Logos has sundered.' 'Perhaps,' he concludes, 'it will be the dawn of a new era.'<sup>49</sup>.

In Part Three, we will see how elements of Jungian thought have been intertwined with Goddess spirituality and creation spirituality. In Part Two, we will examine the more 'patriarchal' side of the Jungian path, for feminists are certainly right when they insist that Jung is

not as 'earthy' as he first seems. Indeed, Jungian psychology is charged as being little more than an introspective Gnosticism, and one that merely replaces Platonic, patriarchal, divinities with Platonic, patriarchal 'archetypes' - or as feminists claim, absolutized stereotypes. Moving away from Jung for the present, we encounter another two forms of psychology which have made at least some impact on New Age thought - humanistic and transpersonal.

### **HUMANISTIC AND TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

With the advent of clinical psychology in the early 1950s, there emerged a number of psychological models and therapies which differed significantly from the Freudian and Behaviourist<sup>50</sup> approaches (which until then had been the two dominant schools of psychological thought). One of the most prominent schools to emerge from this dissatisfaction with earlier models was humanistic psychology, spearheaded by Abraham Maslow.

Humanistic psychology is so-called because, as Holroyd points out, 'its primary concern is to specify what constitutes full human-ness, to define the conditions and psychodynamics that on the one hand enable people to attain it and that on the other hand prevent them from doing so.'<sup>51</sup> Maslow's main criticism of Freudian therapy was that it offered a psychology, not of human beings, but of mentally-ill human beings: 'Freud supplied to us the sick half of psychology and we must now fill it out with the healthy half.' Maslow's model focussed upon healthy individuals in order to 'supply a firmer foundation for the theory of

therapy, of pathology and therefore of values.'<sup>52</sup> Another criticism which Maslow raised against earlier approaches was that they were nothing more than 'adjustment' therapies; concerned merely with the return of the sick back into society, without questioning the values and assumptions of that society. By contrast, Maslow argued that human needs which fulfilled no obvious social function or purpose were vitally important to the health of the individual.

Through much practical research, Maslow developed his well-known 'hierarchy of needs' or motives. This hierarchy moves from basic biological needs (food, sleep, security) to more complex psychological ones (for instance, aesthetic needs). Once the lower needs are met, argues Maslow, the individual is drawn towards the higher needs (sometimes called 'growth,' 'being' or 'meta-needs'). A variety of biological and social ills, it is claimed, result from the frustration of these growth needs. The growth needs involve the individual in a process which results in what Maslow calls 'self-actualization,' 'the full use and exploitation of talents, capacities [and] potentialities.'<sup>53</sup>

Interest in growth and creativity led Maslow to study the personal lives of individuals capable of self-actualization. He found that many 'self-actualizers' experienced temporary 'peak experiences.' This is a term which Maslow used to describe experiences characterized by feelings of ecstasy, transcendence of ego, and unity with the world. The individuals involved recognized such experiences as being important and good, and never evil or destructive. Maslow concluded that individuals



who have such experiences will usually become more creative, spontaneous, positive, and caring. In his analysis of peak experiences, Maslow confessed that he experienced a collapse of what he had previously viewed as the 'unassailable laws of psychology,' which turned out to be 'no laws at all but only rules for living in a state of mild ... psychopathology and fearfulness, of ... immaturity.' This crippling state of existence is given the name 'normal living,' and therefore goes mainly unnoticed because 'most others have the same disease that we have.'<sup>54</sup>

This leads on to Maslow's opinion on the factors which impede the development of full human-ness. As with Wordsworth, Maslow is critical of 'custom' which 'lie upon thee with a weight,/ Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!'; that is, of culture and enculturation. Human nature, for Maslow, is independent of culture. To become more human, the individual must transcend the limitations imposed by culture and enculturation. The 'authentic' person, asserts Maslow, 'transcends his culture' and 'resists enculturation.' 'I become most purely myself when ... insisting on living only by the laws and rules intrinsic to me.' True growth, he argues,

consists in peeling away inhibitions and constraints and then permitting the person to 'be himself,' to emit behavior - 'radiantly,' as it were - rather than to repeat it, to allow his inner nature to express itself, to this extent the behavior of self-actualizers is unlearned, created and released rather than acquired, expressive rather than coping.(55)

What we find in the work of Maslow, as Richard Adams and Janice Haaken observe, is a 'basis for a subjectivized worldview.' A worldview

in which 'culture and social structure play a very small role in either defining human potential or enhancing its fulfillment.' From such a subjectivist position, it is clear that 'society and culture can best serve the cause of human potential by getting out of the way of the individual's intrinsic growth capacity.'<sup>56</sup> The social implications of such a separatist vision of selfhood are discussed in Part Two.

During the 1960s, a number of therapies developed which were based upon the principles of humanistic psychology (that is, concerned with the personal development of clients, rather than the adjustment of patients). These included Encounter, Gestalt, and Rogerian therapy, Guided Fantasy, Psychodrama, Psychosynthesis, and Transactional Analysis. By the 1970s a collective term had been given to these psycho-spiritual therapies - the human potential movement. These therapies were eventually incorporated within a number of (still-popular) growth centres (like the Esalen Institute) and seminar programmes (like 'est' and 'LIFESPRING').

For Maslow, humanistic psychology did not mark the 'end of psychology.' In the preface to the second edition of Toward a Psychology of Being, he writes: 'I consider ... Third Force [humanistic] Psychology to be transitional, a preparation for a still "higher" Fourth Psychology, transpersonal, transhuman, centred in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interest, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization and the like.'<sup>57</sup> In 1970 the Association for Transpersonal Psychology was formed; a 'Fourth Force' in psychology, and one concerned with understanding spiritual, mystical, or 'transpersonal' states of

consciousness. This 'fourth force' borrowed much of its conceptual framework from the theories of Jung and Assagioli (the founder of Psychosynthesis), and from the spiritual traditions of Zen, Sufism, Taoism and yoga.

A fundamental tenet of transpersonal psychology, according to Hazel Guest, is the belief that 'in each individual there is a higher or inner self distinct from the personal ego.' The ego is seen simply as a 'conglomerate of mental processes, learned responses and programmed reactions.' Behind this stands 'the real, true self, the transpersonal centre ... the source of inspiration and inner wisdom.' As with humanistic psychology, the transpersonal perspective is concerned with personal growth; with the 'on-going process of gradually releasing oneself from the fetters of mental programming ... to become responsible for one's own life, psyche and spiritual development.' Yet, it moves beyond self-actualization to higher levels of development, 'namely self-realisation or knowing one's own true spiritual nature.'<sup>58</sup>

Marcie Boucouvalis has compiled what she regards as 'a working outline' of transpersonal psychology; one which takes note of its 'essential components, concepts, characteristics and concerns.' At the level of the individual, transpersonal psychology aims to explore 'the variety of transcendent experiences and to nurture particularly the mode of being traditionally called "liberation," "enlightenment," etc.' At the social level, it is concerned with promoting 'environments, organizations, institutions ... which facilitate [the] growth-impulses of humankind to transpersonal levels of being and awareness, and which

stress both individual learning and service to humanity.' At a planetary level, it is concerned with understanding humanity's role in planetary evolution, in the movement towards a 'harmonious unification of consciousness.' In achieving these ends, transpersonal psychology is also interested in the following: 1) mapping-out the entire spectrum of human consciousness, from subconscious to 'superconscious' states of awareness; 2) 'extraordinary human experiences and phenomena,' including dreams, ESP, out-of-body experiences, alternative healing, and past-life recall; 3) the convergence of various disciplines and movements, including holistic health, ecology, eastern disciplines, Western psychology, religion, science and mysticism.<sup>59</sup>

It should be noted that interest in transpersonal experiences is not strictly confined to the domain of transpersonal psychology. As far back as 1976, Donald Stone noted that certain human potential therapies had moved beyond the 'self-actualization' and 'encounter' phases of humanistic psychology, and were advancing 'experiences of transcendence, cosmic consciousness, the Self beyond the self, or of nothingness.'<sup>60</sup>

## CHAPTER SEVEN : NEW AGE THEMES IN PHILOSOPHY

Many of the concerns voiced by the New Age Movement relate to contemporary events. Yet many New Age concerns - and in particular, the concerns of the ecological dynamic - are not so new, and can be seen as part of a continuum of thought rooted in nineteenth-century philosophy. This continuum could be described as the attempt to replace supernatural religion with a more earth- and human-centred one; to create a 'naturalistic' religion.

This chapter will highlight themes of continuity between nineteenth-century philosophy and the ecological dynamic of the New Age movement. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that the movement is not as obscure and as esoteric as many suppose; not simply the 'latest phase in occult/metaphysical religion.' I wish to look at the ideas of three philosophers in particular - Ludwig Feuerbach, John Stuart Mill, and Friedrich Nietzsche. (The ideas of Alfred North Whitehead - a slightly more recent philosopher, but one who has exerted much influence upon New Age thought - will be discussed in the next chapter.) This is not to suggest that these philosophers would agree with everything argued for by the ecological dynamic - or vice versa. Nietzsche for example, does, like the ecological dynamic, express much disdain at the description of the world as 'mechanism.' Yet, unlike this dynamic, he also rejects the idea that the world functions as a single organism. For Nietzsche - as for contemporary deconstructive postmodernists - both 'mechanism' and 'organism' are human valuations projected onto an

essentially meaningless and chaotic world (or alternatively, a world whose essential meaning lies beyond human grasp). The world he says "has no desire to become any of these; it is by no means striving to imitate mankind! It is quite impervious to all our aesthetic and moral judgements!"<sup>1</sup> Again, while Nietzsche and the ecological dynamic both agree that mainstream Western religion bears a burden of guilt for the devaluation of life, they both propose radically different solutions to this problem. The ecological dynamic returns to a celebration of nature, finitude, imperfection, interconnectivity, the giving-up of 'Plato's ghost.' Nietzsche seeks to replace a world-denying 'will to power' with one which 'overcomes' without turning away from life - the will to power of the 'superman.' But, answers the ecological dynamic, does not the promethean morality of the superman end, as does the morality of world-negating 'ressentiment,' with the overcoming of life itself? As such, all will to power - whether of the world-weary cleric or the superman - are merely different expressions of the patriarchal 'will-to-transcend.' Nietzsche's assertion that 'Where I found a living creature, there I found will to power' is a masculinist interpretation of life disguised as the normatively human. In this respect it is telling that Nietzsche could find no room for women in his philosophy of will: 'The man's happiness is: I will. The woman's happiness is: He will.'<sup>2</sup> Jung's observation is apposite: 'where has the feminine side, the soul, disappeared to in Nietzsche?'<sup>3</sup> Yet despite such areas of fundamental disagreement, there are some obvious themes of continuity, and it is to these that we now turn.

The ecological dynamic of the New Age movement employs two complementary processes - the deconstructive and the reconstructive. The deconstructive process begins by highlighting the main structural features of mainstream Western religion and then proceeds to dismantle them. The reconstructive process moves towards a new vision of reality, grounded in an ecological rather than patriarchal conceptual framework. These two processes, as we will now discuss, show a degree of continuity with the ideas and observations of a number of nineteenth-century philosophers, of which this chapter highlights three - Feuerbach, Mill and Nietzsche.

As far as the deconstructive process is concerned, the ecological dynamic places much emphasis upon 'dualism' as a core feature of mainstream Western religion. Religion in the West, it is argued, makes a value-hierarchical division of reality into the 'spiritual' and the 'material.' 'Spirit' is divided from, and placed above, matter, nature, and body; the 'sacred' is placed in a similar relationship with the sensual and sexual. Religion has taught, argues feminist poet Susan Griffin, 'that the divine and matter are separate ... The material world belongs to the devil. What's under your feet is closer to hell, and the more sensual you are, the more open you are to being corrupted by the devil.'<sup>4</sup> The history of patriarchal civilization, according to Starhawk, can be read as an attempt 'to drive a wedge between spirit and flesh, culture and nature, man and woman.'<sup>5</sup>

Similar observations were being made by both Feuerbach and Nietzsche in the last century. In the Christian tradition, remarks

Feuerbach,

'The difference between flesh and spirit, between the sensible and supersensible ... develops to the point of an opposition, a bifurcation of spirit and matter, of God and the world ... And in this development of the supersensible as what is alone essential, & of the sensible as non-essential, Christianity, in its historical development, becomes a ... world-denying religion.'(6)

Nietzsche is blunt but to the point: 'Christianity is Platonism for "the people."'7

The ecological dynamic makes a point of emphasizing the structural differences between dualistic religions like mainstream Christianity, and supposedly more holistic ones - classical Paganism and Neopaganism, prepatriarchal Goddess religion, native American spirituality, Wicca, and so on. So too Feuerbach: '"Unity was the essence of classical paganism; dualism, bifurcation is the essence of classical Christianity."'8

After highlighting the dualistic nature of mainstream religion, the deconstructive process then proceeds to dismantle it. To begin with, it argues that the 'timeless truths' of religion rest upon a false dichotomy between 'truth' and experience. Truth cannot be divorced from experience. All truth claims are contextual, perspectival, relative. Secondly, it points to the many ways in which dualism - as Wendell Berry has put it, has been the greatest disaster in human history.

In relation to the first point, the ecological dynamic argues that mainstream religion sees 'truth' as something which 'comes down' from



the above and beyond, and into this imperfect world of relativities. Truth is seen as something which can be separated from experience. The division between 'absolute' and 'experience,' claims Goldenberg, 'lies at the base of all patriarchal religion.'<sup>9</sup> This separation is one which makes the revealed truths of religion difficult to challenge. It is also one which serves to reinforce existing inequalities. Religions centred on a transcendent male God, argues Christ, 'keep women in a state of psychological dependence on men and male authority, while at the same time legitimating the political and social authority of fathers and sons in the institutions of society.'<sup>10</sup> Similar observations about the timeless truths of religion are made by Mill. On the one hand, he notes, the religion of the past has contributed much to the widespread adoption of beneficial moral maxims. Yet on the other hand, he says, there is a 'very real evil' involved in offering a supernatural origin for 'the received maxims of morality.' That origin 'consecrates the whole of them, and protects them from being discussed or criticized.' Ideas which are erroneous, not guarded in expression, or no longer suited to changes in human relations, 'are considered equally binding on the conscience with the noblest, most permanent and most universal precepts of Christ.'<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the patriarchal distinction between truth and experience is one which - as historical criticism has shown - fails to recognize the contextual and developmental nature of concept-formation. Feminists, in their reconstruction of a prepatriarchal Goddess-culture, have - to themselves at least - demonstrated the temporal and relative nature of patriarchal truth claims. For them, the best criticism of

dogma is the history of dogma. Research into matriarchy argues feminist theologian Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel 'draws our attention to patriarchalizing processes in which the independent image of the women is taken over or even demonized,' and it also 'teaches us another perspective which ... discloses new sources of human, female history.'<sup>12</sup> The ecological dynamic would in this respect surely agree with Nietzsche's observation concerning the 'family failing of philosophers':

'They involuntarily think of "man" as an aeterna veritas, as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things ... They will not learn that man has become ... everything has become: there are no eternal facts, just as there are no absolute truths.'(13)

For the ecological dynamic, and for feminists in particular, the relative and perspectival nature of mainstream religious dogma is further demonstrated by its inability to speak and provide meaning to the experiences and expectations of contemporary women. Goldenberg recounts the experiences of one woman (Sharon Neuffer Emswiler) during her attendance at a traditional Christian worship service:

She describes her alienation as arising from the preponderance of male images surrounding her. The hymns have titles like 'Rise Up, O Men of God,' 'Men and Children Everywhere,' and 'Faith of Our Fathers.' The service contains phrases like "To be is to be a brother." She notices that throughout the service masculine pronouns and adjectives are always used when referring to people or to God. As she leaves the church she asks herself 'Why am I going away feeling less human than when I came?' She answers that 'what was meant to be a time of worship of the true God was ... a worship of the masculine - the masculine experience among humans and the masculine dimension of God.' Sharon Emswiler experiences the masculine focus of the Christian service as painful. The images presented by Church personnel and their rituals seem to exclude and even demean her. She tells us that she tries to affirm herself by changing the words of the service in her own mind. But this personal solution does not work well for her. She cannot 'outshout' the rest of the congregation. She wants to have her internal reality - her self-affirmation -

confirmed by her surroundings.

This woman, like many others, 'has experienced alienation from the images that her tradition literally says she should find meaningful in a positive fashion.'<sup>14</sup>

The dichotomy between 'truth' and experience has led feminists to the conclusion that the revealed truths of religion are less intimations of divinity and more projections of male experiences, ambitions, ideals - 'a worship of the masculine.' In the words taken from a short but powerful piece of imaginative prose by Elizabeth Dodson Grey: 'Only men cast their cosmologies out upon reality: their metaphors of dualism and hierarchy had etched the ontological skies for so long that they seemed embedded in truth itself.'<sup>15</sup>

The idea of 'projection' occupies a central place in the philosophy of Feuerbach. Religion argues Feuerbach is 'esoteric psychology,' and 'esoteric anthropology.' It is the projection of human values, needs, and self-understanding onto a divine other. '"This is the mystery of religion: man objectifies his own nature."' The image of God is '"the mirror of man.'" Yet, the religious individual is unconscious of the fact that the divine being worshipped is the projection of his or her own nature. Consciousness of God is human self-consciousness, but humans remain unaware of this, and '"the lack of this very awareness is in fact the distinctive mark of religion."' Religion is really a primitive and indirect form of self-understanding.<sup>16</sup>

According to Feuerbach Western religion has projected two rather distinct images of the divine - the suffering and compassionate God, and the eternal, immutable, transcendent God. The former is the projection of the human capacity for feeling; the latter, the projection of the capacity for abstract reasoning. Whereas the God of feeling draws God close to humanity, the God of reason drives an infinite gulf between the two by objectifying God in the form of superhuman perfection. The God of reason makes God and humanity strangers: '"Religion is man's self-estrangement: man posits God over against himself as a separate being. God is not what man is, - man is not what God is ... God and man are extremes."' However, as God is but the projection of human nature, it follows that the divine/human estrangement does in fact signify self-estrangement: '"man objectifies his own secret essence in religion ... this dichotomy of God and man, which is the starting point of religion, is a dichotomy within man, of man with his own essence.'" For Feuerbach, like the contemporary New Age movement, the dichotomy is in consciousness - between feeling consciousness and reason or intellect. And like the New Age, Feuerbach urges psychic wholeness: '"Where man is one with himself, his world cannot fall apart into two worlds."'17

There are however important differences between Feuerbach's and the contemporary New Age movement's interpretation of religious projection. For Feuerbach, it is human ideals which have been projected. For New Age feminists, traditional religion has 'etched the ontological skies' with male ideals disguised as the normatively human. Secondly, all projections are for Feuerbach unconscious expressions of humanity's self-understanding. By contrast, while seeking to promote the full

humanity of both men and women, feminists are also concerned with more 'accurate' representations of God, instead of simply reducing everything to projection. 'Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is,' writes Ruether, 'presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer.'<sup>18</sup>

The deconstructive process also takes note of the negative influences exerted by religious dualisms upon the world. The exploitation of the natural environment, has, argue Philip N. Joranson and Ken Butigan, both members of the Graduate Theological Union's Center for Ethics and Social Policy, 'been possible on such a massive scale because humans have set themselves apart from it and have therefore been encouraged by the intoxication of this distance to dominate, control, and recreate in their own image.'<sup>19</sup> Fox agrees, but adds a more personal dimension: 'The reigning spirituality of patriarchal culture ... has not been friendly to the environment; nor has it taught persons to be gentle to themselves, their bodies, their enemies, their imaginations.'<sup>20</sup>

Similar thoughts are found in the writings of Nietzsche. Traditional religion's concern with the next world robs this world of all divinity; it has '"placed the spirit of man in a false relation to the terrestrial.'<sup>21</sup> The resulting religious ethic is one which Nietzsche describes as 'anti-life.' Christianity's response to the passions has been '"excision in every sense: its practice, its 'cure' is castration.'" To attack the passions at their roots is '"to attack life

at its roots: the practice of the church is hostile to life.'<sup>22</sup> In reference to Christianity's historical contempt towards sexuality he writes:

'The preaching of chastity is public incitement to unnaturalness. Every expression of contempt for the sexual life, every befouling of it through the concept "impure", is the crime against life - is the intrinsic sin against the holy spirit of life.'<sup>(23)</sup>

Western religion's retreat from sexuality, the body, the terrestrial, is for Nietzsche grounded in a bitter 'ressentiment' against life itself. This does not seem too far removed from the views of contemporary radical feminist theologian Mary Daly, for whom patriarchal religion and culture are expressions of a deep-rooted resentment against the 'biophilic' capacities of woman and everything that patriarchy has come to associate with woman. Patriarchy she claims is 'necrophilia,' and has as its goal the elimination of all life. In patriarchal religion this death-wish is disguised in terms of a return to the 'God-Father,' to 'eternal life.'<sup>24</sup> Or as Nietzsche puts it: 'Everywhere resound the voices of those who preach death ... Or "eternal life": it is all the same to me...'<sup>25</sup>

Another criticism of religious dualism is that it discourages social action. The self is seen as some atomistic unit which must concentrate upon its individual salvation; and this is an otherworldly salvation. In Ruether's words, a 'liberation out of or against nature into spirit.'<sup>26</sup> The 'old religions of the earth' have become 'private cults for the individual, no longer anticipating the renewal of the earth and society but rather expecting an otherworldly salvation of the

individual soul after death.'<sup>27</sup> A similar point about the individualistic nature of traditional religion is made by Mill. 'The religions which deal in promises and threats regarding a future life' he observes 'fasten down the thoughts to the person's own posthumous interests,' and thus moral responsibility towards others is seen 'mainly as a means to his own personal salvation.' The notion of otherworldly deliverance concludes Mill is 'one of the most serious obstacles to the great purpose of moral culture,' namely, 'the strengthening of the unselfish and weakening of the selfish element in our nature.'<sup>28</sup>

The ecological dynamic also makes a connection between dualistic thought and the separation of science from religion. In relation to fall/redemption spirituality, Fox writes: 'An ideology that considers all of nature helplessly fallen does not look kindly on those who spend their lives studying nature, i. e., scientists. To probe the universe is not a salvific act in such a spirituality or religion.'<sup>29</sup> A similar point is made by Feuerbach, who links the emergence of a 'negative religiosity' in the West to the destruction of the art and science of antiquity. '"How can the Spirit concentrate on, or take as an object of serious concern that which has significance only as finite, vain and empty?"' Such a conception is not one '"which allows for the deep investigation of nature."<sup>30</sup>

Feuerbach however goes on to suggest that medieval scholasticism may be credited for loosening Western religion's stranglehold over scientific inquiry. Even though scholastic philosophy stood in the service of the Church, it nevertheless '"awakened and engendered the

free spirit of inquiry.'"<sup>31</sup> That Fox is in some agreement here with Feuerbach is confirmed by his recent work on Thomas Aquinas; a scholastic praised for emphasizing the 'salvific' quality of scientific inquiry:

Aquinas does not let off the hook easily those who ignore the search for truth as a matter of both head-work and heart-work. He insists that to fail to know what we should or to refuse to know what we should is a sin. 'Error is imputed to the reason as a sin when it is in ignorance or error about what it is able and ought to know.' Fundamentalist or literal thinking or nonthinking is sinful, as Aquinas sees it. 'Ignorance denotes a privation of knowledge, that is, a lack of knowledge of those things that one has a natural aptitude to know ... ignorance of what one is bound to know is a sin.' It strikes me that, for example, cosmology is something we need to know if we are to act rightly today. And knowledge of the ecological.(32)

Fox is perhaps right to argue that mainstream religion has, generally speaking, never looked upon scientific inquiry as a 'salvific act.' Yet, according to the ecological dynamic, it would be misleading to suggest that Western religion and the scientific venture - at least how it has been shaped and defined by patriarchal consciousness - are not continuous with each other (a point raised earlier). As Griffin asserts:

many assumptions, methods, and even questions we take to be scientific, actually partake of the same paradigm that in an earlier age we described as Christian ... if religion told us that the earth was a corrupt place, that our true home was heaven, that sensual feeling was not to be trusted and could lead us to hell and damnation, science did not in essence contradict that doctrine. For science, too, told us not to trust our senses, that matter is deceptive, and that we are alien to our surroundings.(33)

For some ecofeminists, terms like 'religion' and 'science' are simply incidental to the overarching patriarchal project of removing



divinity and value from the world. 'In prehistory,' according to Merchant, 'an emerging patriarchal culture dethroned the mother Goddesses and replaced them with male gods to whom the female deities became subservient.' The Scientific Revolution continued the process of divinity- and value-extraction 'by replacing Renaissance organicism and a nurturing earth with the metaphor of a machine to be controlled and repaired from the outside.'<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Starhawk argues that the patriarchal project works through both religion and science to produce, finally, the 'empty world.' Mechanistic science 'grew out of a Christian context in which divinity and spirit had long been removed from matter.' Modern science merely finished the job off. The process of abstracting God and spirit leaves behind a world in which 'we trust only what can be measured, counted, acquired.'<sup>35</sup>

Like Starhawk, Nietzsche views Western religion as one long process which culminates in the removal of meaning and value from the universe. Religion, he argues, ends in nihilism, nothingness, the 'death of God':

Finally: what was left to be sacrificed? Did one not finally have to sacrifice everything comforting, holy, healing, all hope ... Did one not have to sacrifice God himself and out of cruelty against oneself worship stone, stupidity, gravity, fate, nothingness? To sacrifice God for nothingness - this paradoxical mystery of the ultimate act of cruelty was reserved for the generation which is even now arising: we all know something of it already.(36)

Nietzsche recognizes that the nihilism brought about by the death of God must be transcended, and a new basis for the affirmation of life brought into being. It is here that Nietzsche and other nineteenth-

century philosophers resonate with the reconstructive process of ecological spirituality.

Mill for example seeks to replace supernatural religion with a new 'Religion of Humanity.' A core component of this new religion will be the abandonment of all notions of an afterlife, which will be replaced by 'the idealization of our earthly life.' This will be an idealization 'capable of supplying a poetry, and, in the best sense of the word, a religion'; a religion fitted to 'exalt the feelings' and ennoble conduct better 'than any belief respecting the unseen powers.'<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Christ argues that the acceptance of finitude will be the 'essential religious insight' of postpatriarchal religion: 'We come from earth and to earth we shall return. Life feeds on life. We live because others die, and we will die so that others may live.' This does not mean that life is of no value; on the contrary:

our task is to love and understand, to live for a time, to contribute as much as we can to the continuation of life, to the enhancement of beauty, joy, and diversity, while recognizing inevitable death, loss, and suffering. To understand and value the life we enjoy is to understand and value the lives of all other beings, human and nonhuman ...<sup>(38)</sup>

Mill agrees, and argues that the acceptance of finitude need not result in a pessimistic 'eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' For a start, 'the maxim of the Epicureans is sound, and applicable to much higher things than eating and drinking.' Moreover, to suggest that because life is short we should not have any regard for anything beyond it 'is not a legitimate conclusion.' The notion that 'human beings in general are not capable of feeling deep and even the deepest interest in

things which they will never live to see, is a view of human nature as false as it is abject.' The future of humanity and of the world it finds itself in 'offers to the imagination and sympathies a large enough object to satisfy any reasonable demand for grandeur of aspiration.' Despite the limitations of finitude, such concern is possible, because it is disinterested. There is no concern for the posthumous fate of the atomistic self, and instead, the Religion of Humanity 'carries the thoughts and feelings out of self, and fixes them on an unselfish object, loved and pursued as an end for its own sake.'<sup>39</sup> This seems to resonate with the views of the ecological dynamic which, as discussed in detail later, links its spirituality with expansive and non-separative notions of selfhood.

An acceptance of finitude means to claim the gift of life and to celebrate our rootedness in the earth. 'We know,' writes Gray, that 'our living is part of the earth's living systems - that we are rooted in the earth and sensually in dialogue with it.'<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche himself, although refusing to grant the status of organism to the world, puts these words in the mouth of Zarathustra: 'I entreat you, my brothers, remain true to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes! They are poisoners, whether they know it or not.'<sup>41</sup> Again: '"Man is in his highest and noblest powers entirely nature.'<sup>42</sup>

An acceptance of finitude also means to accept the negative aspects of our earthly lives. As Christ puts it: 'recognizing inevitable death, loss, and suffering.' This is emphasized by Fox, who names the 'Via

Negativa' - the acceptance rather than denial of the darker, and unfathomable aspects of existence - as an essential ingredient in creation spirituality. Indeed, suffering is for Fox an almost necessary factor in the processes of learning and growth: 'if we fail to let pain be pain - and our entire patriarchal culture refuses to let this happen - then pain will haunt us in nightmarish ways. We will become pain's victims instead of the healers we might become.'<sup>43</sup> For Nietzsche too, a 'Dionysian affirmation of life' cannot mean a running away from suffering. To those who wish to abolish suffering, he makes this reply:

The discipline of suffering, of great suffering - do you not know that it is this discipline alone which has created every elevation of mankind hitherto? That tension of the soul in misfortune which cultivates its strength, its terror at the sight of great destruction, its inventiveness and bravery in undergoing, enduring, interpreting, exploiting misfortune, and whatever of depth, mystery, mask, spirit, cunning and greatness has been bestowed upon it - has it not been bestowed through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering?(44)

Moving on - Mill also suggests that the new 'Religion of Humanity' need not reject totally all previous religious beliefs, but instead, understand them in context. An historical approach to religion allows us to see the doctrines and institutions of the past from 'a relative instead of an absolute point of view,' and thus as indications of 'human development.' They may deserve 'admiration and gratitude for their effects in the past, even though they may be thought incapable of rendering similar services to the future.'<sup>45</sup> This is a prominent and much explored theme in the writings of Feuerbach. Feuerbach's interpretation of religion as projection is reductive, but not to the extent that religion is totally rejected. Supernatural beliefs are

alienated forms of human self-understanding, and should therefore be decoded and demystified rather than abandoned. Religion holds the key to self-understanding. Feuerbach can therefore talk about the 'progress' of religion into humanity's complete understanding of itself:

'The historical progress of religion consists therefore in this: that what an earlier religion took to be objective, is late recognized to be subjective; what formerly was taken to be God, and was worshipped as such is now recognized to be something human ... every advance in religion is therefore a deepening in self-knowledge.'(46)

With this Feuerbach anticipates the Jungian 'psychologization' of religion in which the supernatural is not abandoned, but brought down to a more naturalistic level. Supernatural beings are now located in archetypal levels of the psyche rather than in some distant supernatural beyond. In a passage reminiscent of the ancient Gnostic teacher Monoimus, Feuerbach declares:

'The book in which all secrets lie hidden is man himself: he himself is the Book of the Essence of all Essences. Because he is like unto God, he contains the great Arcanum ... Why do you seek God in the depths or beyond the stars? You shall not find him there. Seek Him in your heart, in the center of your life's origin. There shall you find Him.'(47)

Feuerbach's views are certainly shared by the New Age movement. 'It is likely,' declares Goldenberg, 'that as we watch Christ and Yahweh tumble to the ground, we will completely outgrow the need for an external God'; 'the death of the father-Gods could mean the onset of religious forms which emphasize awareness of oneself and tend to understand gods and goddesses as inner psychic forces.' She goes on to name Witchcraft or Wicca as 'the first modern theistic religion to conceive of its deity mainly as an internal set of images and

attitudes.'<sup>48</sup> The danger here of course - as far as the ecological dynamic is concerned - is that of 'psychological Gnosticism' (Jung, as discussed later, is often accused of being a Gnostic), in which the inner realities of the mind and the 'self' take precedence over the external world - yet another form of dualism. And this is why Wiccans like Starhawk are keen to emphasize the all-encompassing nature of the 'Goddess.' The Goddess is a psychological force, and can be known internally; but 'To a witch the world itself is what is real. The Goddess, the Gods, are not mere psychological entities, existing in the psyche as if the psyche were a cave removed from the world ...'<sup>49</sup> 'The womanspirit movement' notes Hallie Iglehart 'emphasizes a consciousness that inner must always be combined with outer, that the psychic is inseparable from the material, that political power cannot exist without spiritual power.'<sup>50</sup>

On a final note (and one we will return to in the next chapter), the ecological dynamic is well aware that radical reformulations of ideas like 'divinity' - as a psychic and pantheistic reality - must be part of a wider reconstruction of religious language in general, which has until now operated by means of binary dualisms - i. e., divinity is felt to be or explicitly defined as something opposed to nature, spirit to matter, and so on. One way of doing this is to repeatedly bring together notions which traditional spirituality has kept apart. Carol Lee Sanchez for example proclaims that 'the profane is sacred, and spirituality is applicable to every mundane aspect of our daily lives.'<sup>51</sup> For Starhawk, 'sexuality is ... sacred, deeply valued.'<sup>52</sup> The bringing together of such 'felt' oppositions is also a linguistic

technique employed by Nietzsche. 'The degree and kind of a man's sexuality,' he writes, 'reaches up into the topmost summit of his spirit.'<sup>53</sup> The ecological dynamic would certainly go along with Nietzsche when he declares: "I am body and soul" - so speaks the child ... But the awakened, the enlightened man says: I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body.'<sup>54</sup>

C H A P T E R   E I G H T :  
N E W   T H E O L O G I C A L   P E R S P E C T I V E S  
O N   G O D   A N D   T H E   S E L F

This, the final chapter in Part One, investigates some important contributions to New Age thought - new thinking about God and self. We will focus in particular upon process and feminist theology, although some key aspects of the latter have already been discussed (see previous chapter). New Age thinking about God and self did not emerge in a vacuum and indeed can be viewed as continuous with the emphasis upon 'immanentism' that is characteristic of the theologians belonging to the 'contrapuntal' or radical tradition within Western theology. These include Feuerbach, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and more recently, 'Death of God' theologians like John Robinson, William Hamilton, and Thomas Altizer. The radical theology, as with the New Age, 'locates the transcendent of the Divine within the immanence of the human,' as Cooper puts it. There are however some important differences between New Age spirituality and the 'Christian atheism' of radical theology. The latter argued for a 'secular' or 'religionless' Christianity devoid of all reference to the supernatural, or even tolerance for 'mythical forms of religious expression.'<sup>1</sup> By contrast, New Age spirituality recognizes the need for the creation of new myths and rituals. We begin this chapter with a look at some features of process theology.



## PROCESS THEOLOGY

The term 'process theology' came to currency in the 1950s, and it does, according to process theologian John B. Cobb, have several overlapping meanings. Firstly, it may refer to 'all forms of theology that emphasise event, occurrence, or becoming over against substance.' In this respect, a number of different theologies - including for example the evolutionary theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin - could and have been labelled 'process.' (The theology of Teilhard de Chardin appears to exercise considerable influence upon the New Age movement, and its core ideas will be discussed in Part Two.) Secondly, it refers to a type of theology that employs the process metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead. Such theology 'is called process theology and has been a major contribution to the development of the movement.' Finally, and in its narrowest sense, it refers to the 'process movement' that emerged during the 1930s at the University of Chicago. This movement was influenced by Whitehead, 'but many of the participants are not best understood as Whiteheadians in a narrow sense. Yet their emphasis on "process" has not been less than his.'<sup>2</sup>

The Chicago-based brand of process theology has, continues Cobb, 'understood its responsibility ... as that of clarifying what a Christian in the modern world should affirm and of guiding the church toward appropriate formulations of its faith.' It views Christianity as an historical movement which developed out of Judaism under the influence of Jesus, and that its original doctrines were formulated to be 'appropriate for the time and for the sake of providing sanction and

guidance for the task at hand.' The 'task at hand' was support for the oppressed classes in their struggle for justice, and the 'doctrines of God and Christ and ecclesiology were to be shaped in such a way as to encourage and aid the church in this task.' Thus, process theologians are not concerned primary with the 'truthfulness' of Christian doctrines, but with their relevance to the 'task at hand.' Doctrines which are seen as being no longer relevant to this task are modified to reflect contemporary ideas. 'Theology' argues Cobb 'must be formulated in the terms of the social mind of the time, which meant, for the Chicago thinkers, in democratic categories and thought forms shaped by the influence of modern science.' This does not entail abandoning traditional scriptures; on the contrary, 'in a movement which looks back to the records of its origins for inspiration, it is important to show the connection of current teaching to the Scriptures.' Study of the Bible can bring the history of the early Christian movement 'to life for us today and renew our zest in continuing the movement of whose origins and early history it tells us.'<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter we will focus upon the more theoretical side of process theology, and especially upon its views of personal existence and of God. The aim will be to show how process thought resonates with the New Age, and with its ecological dynamic in particular.

Process thought, according to Bernard M. Loomer, Professor of Philosophical Theology at the Graduate Theological Union, revolves around two fundamental assumptions - the 'ultimacy of becoming' and the 'givenness and primordiality of relationships.' The first principle

assumes that the 'final actualities of the world are specific processes of becoming.' There are no fixed essences, only 'occasions of experience' leading to 'events,' which give the appearance of stable continuity. Reality in other words is constant flux:

instances of becoming are the very 'stuff' of existence. They constitute the 'substantial' side of things. The individual process of becoming is the concrete actual reality. The actuality consists of becoming. All else, forms, structures, and qualities, are components of processes.

This vision of the world could be described as 'anti-Platonic' in that the notion that this world of becoming is only a lesser image of a more real and static one is firmly rejected. There is as Loomer comments 'nothing more basic or ultimate than processes of becoming ... They do not "rest upon" or presuppose something more "substantial" or "real" or elemental than themselves. Becoming is the foundational category.' The second principle of process thought - the givenness and primordially of relationships - assumes that events do not stand by themselves, but are 'emergents from causally efficacious relations ... causal relations are constitutive components of events.'<sup>4</sup>

In terms of ideas about selfhood, the 'ultimacy of becoming' undermines the Western (patriarchal) view of the self as fixed and enduring. In 'the philosophy of organism,' writes Whitehead, 'the notion of an actual entity as the unchanging subject of change is completely abandoned.'<sup>5</sup> Process thought in the words of Cobb 'depicts the actual entities as events rather than as objects that exist through time.'<sup>6</sup> If the ultimacy of becoming challenges the view of the self as enduring and static, the givenness and primordially of relationships

challenges the Western conception of this same self as atomistic and impenetrable. The entire physical world according to Whitehead is 'bound together by a general type of relatedness which constitutes it into an extensive continuum.' It is 'a vast nexus extending far beyond our immediate cosmic epoch.' In this interconnected world of becoming, each entity sits at the centre of a complex web of relations. The world is a nexus and 'the actual world of one actual entity sinks to the level of a subordinate nexus in actual worlds beyond that actual entity.' Given this primordially of relationships, it is impossible - indeed nonsense - to separate the self from anything else in the cosmos. We cannot, states Whitehead, 'abstract the universe from any entity, actual or non-actual, so as to consider that entity in complete isolation ... In a sense, every entity pervades the whole world.'<sup>7</sup> In the words of Cobb, an entity 'exists only in its relation to its environment. One cannot think first of an entity and then, incidentally, of its relation to the rest of the world ... every entity is relational in its most fundamental nature.'<sup>8</sup> The maxim to be drawn from this insight - as the ecological dynamic of the New Age proclaims repeatedly - is that there is 'no other.' We do not exist above or distinct from the environment and compassion does not mean being sorry for others.

If process thought holds that the world is a nexus of relationships in which 'every entity pervades the whole world,' why, it must be asked do we not often 'feel' this to be the case? For Whitehead, 'feeling' is the point in question. Every entity he argues has 'a perfectly definite bond with each item in the universe,' and this bond is its 'prehension of that item.' A 'negative prehension' is a refusal to 'feel' that item

as a part of oneself. It is 'the definite exclusion of that item from positive contribution to the subjects's own real internal constitution.' Positive prehension is the 'feeling of that item.'<sup>9</sup> Here process thought shares with the ecological dynamic a concern with forms of selfhood that go beyond the sharply delineated self of Western culture. For deep ecologist Arne Naess, like Whitehead, 'increased sensitivity' is the key issue in question. 'Now it is the time,' he writes,

to share with all life on our maltreated Earth through the deepening identification with life forms and the greater units, the ecosystems, and Gaia, the fabulous, old planet of ours ... Unhappily, the extensive moralizing within environmentalism has given the public the false impression that we primarily ask them to sacrifice, to show more responsibility, more concern, better morals. As I see it we need the immense variety of sources of joy opened through increased sensitivity towards the richness and diversity of life ... care flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves.(10)

Process theology - as with the creation spirituality of Fox - advances a panentheistic vision of God. God, according to Whitehead, is 'a being at once actual, eternal, immanent, and transcendent.'<sup>11</sup> This counters traditional notions of God as entirely independent, impenetrable, immutable and eternal. This traditional conception is one which feminists have charged as being the idealization of male separatism. It is one which process theologians have charged as being riddled with contradictions. As Kenneth Surin, Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Duke University, notes: how can theists maintain that God knows and loves the creaturely realm, 'while denying that God is affected by that which is known and loved in this unsurpassable divine way?' Again, if theists maintain that God

exercises divine omnipotence and therefore has an unqualified monopoly over all power, how can it be said that creatures 'have a real freedom which they can use or abuse?'<sup>12</sup>

The God of process theology is 'dipolar' - a synthesis of concrete and abstract aspects. The abstract pole - to use the terminology of Whitehead - is the 'primordial nature' of God. This is God as potential, as 'deficiently actual.' The concrete pole is God's 'consequent nature.' This is 'God as really actual, completing the deficiency of his mere conceptual actuality.' It is 'the weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts,' 'the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom.' To put it another way, God's nature is enriched and completed by God's experiences in the world. In the world itself each entity is to some degree part of God's nature: 'each temporal occasion embodies God, and is embodied in God.' Each entity is to some degree a divine 'cocreator,' for the cosmos - as the body of God - is a 'creative advance into novelty.' However, each entity shares God's wishes only to a degree; God can inspire, and attempt to persuade, but not control. God 'is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness,'<sup>13</sup> but humans are free not to comply with this poet's desires. God 'values' certain choices over others, and 'influences' (but does not determine) the choices that organisms make. The God of process theology has continual involvement within the world at the price of sovereign control. In Barbour's words, 'This is a God of wisdom and compassion who shares in

the world's suffering and is a transforming influence in it, even if he is not omnipotent.'<sup>14</sup>

As with the ecological dynamic of the New Age, process theology advances immanence (or at least partial immanence) in its conception of divinity and interdependence in its understanding of life. As with the ecological dynamic, it claims to offer, according to Cobb, an alternative to 'the dominant dualisms of soul and body, spirit and nature, mind and matter, self and other.'<sup>15</sup>

## **FEMINIST THOUGHT AND THEOLOGY**

### **From Liberal Feminism to Ecofeminism**

Certain New Age theorists recognize the significant role to be played by women and feminism in the emergence of a New Age. In 1985, at the 'New Paradigm Symposium' held at the Esalen Institute, all proponents agreed that the most encouraging shift that was taking place in society was the shift to 'feminine' forms of thinking.<sup>16</sup> According to Ferguson in the Aquarian Conspiracy - a work which many regard as the 'manifesto' of the New Age movement - the 'power of women is the powder keg of our time.'<sup>17</sup> Capra argues that feminist spirituality is 'creating a new self-image for women, along with new modes of thinking and a new system of values,' and will have a 'profound influence not only on religion and philosophy but also on our social and political lives.' Its aim is a 'thorough redefinition of human nature, which will have the most profound effect on the further evolution of our culture.'<sup>18</sup> Feminist thinking is associated, as Eaton puts it, with 'an ecological

point of view ... the understanding of persons as psycho-somatic unities, unities which ... have been torn asunder in patriarchal culture.'<sup>19</sup>

Given this, it seems surprising that many involved in researching the New Age movement appear to show little or no interest in feminist theory. Chandler for example, after his analysis of channeling, UFOs, the 'Harmonic Convergence,' 'crystal consciousness' and 'pyramid power,' manages to make room for a truncated seven-paged account of ecofeminism, Paganism and 'feminine consciousness.' This is all summarily dismissed as 'the Edenic longing for godhood through a certain and secret wisdom that disperses limitations and suffering with the wave of a wand.'<sup>20</sup> Miller's account is even more startling in its brevity. His analysis - which runs to one sentence - reads: 'there is a growing attraction in New Age circles to an "earth mother" deity, as opposed to a heavenly father.'<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this reflects a genuine lack of interest in feminist thought (it is not for nothing that the mythological figure of Cassandra has become an emblem of the feminist cause<sup>22</sup>). Perhaps it reflects Spangler's contention that the New Age Movement 'is being defined by its inwardly oriented elements - and particularly by the most sensational and bizarre of these.'<sup>23</sup>

In truth, feminists have self-consciously identified themselves with the symbol of the New Age since the 1970s. In her keynote address to the 1976 Boston festival on women's spirituality, Barbara Starret declared that 'The New age will be the age of the Female.' In the same year, Beatrice Bruteau delivered a paper at Wilson College in which she



connected the rise of 'feminine consciousness' with the end of an old era, and the beginning of something new:

We feel that we are living at the end of an era, on the threshold of a new age ... There are many ways of approaching a speculation about the new consciousness, but one of the places in which the veil that hides the future from our eyes has worn thin and become partially transparent is the area of the rising feminine consciousness of the world. Indeed, perhaps of all the shadows that the coming age is casting before itself, this is the most revealing ...(24)

This link of course has become increasingly tenuous as feminists have become more aware of 'incompatible elements' within the movement, and many no longer wish to be identified with it. A good example of this can be found in Monica Sjoo's New Age & Armageddon, where an attempt is made to drive a deep wedge between Neopagan Goddess spirituality and the New Age movement. Her work is grounded in the recognition that much of the New Age is not new at all, but merely the latest expression of patriarchal consciousness:

New Ager who persist in dualistic thinking yet again rend apart spirit and matter (mater/mother), this and the otherworld. To them, spirit is, as to all patriarchal men throughout history ... an omnipotent and disembodied transcendent male mind which controls matter.

I agree with Sjoo that 'major differences' divide the patriarchal New Age and movements like ecofeminism. Nevertheless, the inclusive stance adopted by this inquiry places feminism within the New Age spectrum on the grounds that it is clearly offering visions of a New Age, grounded in a new type of consciousness. Sjoo herself is New Age in this respect even though she equates its arrival with 'the Second Coming of the Goddess.'<sup>25</sup>

Even if it is accepted that feminism is making some significant contributions to contemporary visions of a New Age, it is necessary to differentiate between the variety of visions on offer. The contemporary feminist movement emerged from the counterculture ferment of the 1960s, and is usually divided into four main branches - liberal, marxist, radical and socialist. These divisions reflect the fact that while all feminists agree that the oppression of women exists and must be stopped, there is, as Warren notes, significant disagreement 'about how to understand that oppression and how to bring about the necessary changes.'<sup>26</sup>

Liberal feminism roots the oppression of women in the lack of equal rights in the public domain. The liberation of women requires 'the elimination of those legal and social constraints that prevent women from exercising their rights of self-determination.' The liberal position is criticized on the grounds that it endorses a very individualistic conception of human nature. Humans are seen as 'essentially separate, rational agents engaged in competition to maximize their own interests.'<sup>27</sup> This endorsement of individualism can be related to the fact that liberal feminism, as Ruether notes, 'assumes the traditional male sphere as normative.' Although it is critical of the ways in which women have been denied access to the male sphere of activity, once inside this sphere, it 'offers no critique of the modes of functioning within it.'<sup>28</sup> Elements of this can be found in Simone de Beauvoir's classic work - The Second Sex (1948). De Beauvoir calls all women to leave behind the static 'immanence' of the female ghetto and join males in 'transcendent' activity. She calls women to affirm their

'brotherhood' with men, accept masculine values, and 'dominate matter.'<sup>29</sup>

Like traditional marxism, feminist marxism roots oppression in class-based society. The specific oppression of women 'is due to the sexual division of labor.' In marxist feminism, the liberation of women 'requires that the traditional family be dissolved as an economic (though not necessarily as a social) unit.'<sup>30</sup>

Radical - or sometimes romantic, cultural or spiritual - feminism is the branch of feminism most usually associated with the New Age movement.<sup>31</sup> For radicals, unfair legislation and the sexual division of labour are merely symptomatic of a more deep-rooted problem - reproductive biology and a sex-gender system. As Warren notes:

According to radical feminists, patriarchy ... oppresses women in sex-specific ways by defining women as beings whose primary functions are either to bear and raise children ... or to satisfy male sexual desires ... Since the oppression of women is based on 'male control of women's fertility and women's sexuality,' the liberation of women is to 'end male control of women's bodies' by dismantling patriarchy.(32)

The liberal perspective defines human existence in terms of rationality and autonomy; the marxist in terms of productive, social activity. The radical perspective by contrast defines human existence in terms of 'embodiment':

We are not (as the Cartesian philosophical tradition might have us suppose) bodiless minds, i.e., 'mental' or thinking beings whose essential nature exists independently from our own or others' physical, emotional, or sexual existence. By taking women's bodies, and, in particular, women's reproductive biology, as indispensable to women's nature, radical feminism brings child-bearing and child-rearing

functions into the political arena. It makes women's sex politically significant. It is in this way that for the radical feminist, 'the personal is (profoundly) political.'(33)

Radical feminism explores strategies which aim to correct 'the distortions of patriarchal ideology.' Towards this end, elements within this perspective (often associated with the wider 'womanspirit' or feminist spirituality movement), have concerned themselves with the deconstruction and transformation of patriarchal religion. This concern is grounded in the belief that Western religion has legitimized a sexist society. As Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow put it: 'Feminists have charged that Judaism and Christianity are sexist religions with a male God and tradition of male leadership that legitimate the superiority of men in family and society.'<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it is assumed that its sexist influence has informed the attitudes of those who consider themselves to be 'post-religious.' In the words of Spretnak:

The lies about the nature and function of woman that are intrinsic to patriarchal religion have informed the legal, educational, political, economic, and medical/psychiatric systems of our society and are accepted as 'natural truths' by even the most modern and/or atheistic citizens.'(35)

Where feminist spirituality departs from other forms of feminism is in its conviction that patriarchal religion must be transformed rather than abandoned. The sexism, classism, and racism which characterizes mainstream religion, argue Christ and Plaskow, 'does not invalidate human need for ritual, symbol, and myth.' More importantly, if the social subordination of women finds its basis in a particular religious symbol system, real transformation may only occur through the adoption of a new symbol system, and not by simply abandoning religion. Thus

feminist spirituality asserts that 'religion must be reformed or reconstructed to support the full human dignity of women.'<sup>36</sup>

Radical feminism is much associated with 'Goddess spirituality.' In its radical form, Goddess spirituality celebrates a perceived connection between women and nature. As Merchant notes:

Radical feminism ... celebrates the relationship between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals centred on Goddess worship, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system. A vision in which nature is held in esteem as mother and Goddess is a source of inspiration and empowerment ... Spirituality is seen as a source of both personal and social change. Goddess worship and rituals centred around the lunar and female menstrual cycles, lectures, concerts, art exhibitions, street theater ... and direct political action ... are all examples of the re-visioning of nature and women as powerful forces.(37)

A key feature of Goddess spirituality - as with Neopaganism in general - is its unity-in-diversity. Some forms of Goddess spirituality as Spretnak notes, are 'free-form,' created and/or deriving inspiration from a plethora of sources, including the artifacts, myths and other remnants of Goddess worship in European Witchcraft, ancient Greece, biblical lands, Africa, Asia and the pre-Columbian Americas. But, this apparent diversity is drawn together with a number of 'common threads.' These include a belief in the immanence of the Goddess, the view that spirituality has little to do with transcending the body, and also a high regard for ritual, used to generate personal empowerment and 'to strengthen bonds of communion in this fragmented atomized society.'<sup>38</sup>

The 'Goddess,' as mentioned above, is not conceptualized as the female equivalent of the God of male monotheism, not 'Yahweh with a

skirt.' She is an inner psychological force. She is also a symbol of natural, holistic processes in the world. The Goddess is the dynamic and immanent ground of the cosmos. All forms are part of the Goddess and are 'continually renewed in cyclic rhythms of birth, maturation, death.'<sup>39</sup> In other words, Goddess spirituality reconceptualizes the nature of divinity. The platonic realm is emptied, and the Goddess is found nowhere else but in the constant flux and flow of the world. This divine immanentism or 'numinous materialism' is clearly expressed by Christ for whom

the divine/Goddess/God/Earth/Life/It symbolizes the whole of which we are a part. This whole is the Earth and sky, the ground on which we stand, and all the animals, plants, and other beings to which we are related. We come from our mothers and fathers and are rooted in community. We come from the Earth and to the Earth we shall return ... The divinity that shapes our ends is life, death, and change, understood both literally and as metaphor for our daily lives.(40)

Because Goddess spirituality images the divine as female, it has, according to Goddess worshippers like Starhawk, restored 'a sense of authority and power to the female body and all the life processes.' The Goddess 'imparts both to women and to nature the highest value.'<sup>41</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Goddess spirituality revolves around rituals which celebrate a felt connection between nature and women, and which promote the vision of women as powerful forces of social transformation.

Radical feminist spirituality is a good example of constructive or reconstructive postmodernism. On the one hand it is engaged in the process of deconstructing patriarchal religion and theology. 'The

feminist movement,' declares Goldenberg, 'is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh'; 'We women are going to bring an end to God.'<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, it is opening up new possibilities through a radical re-visioning of divinity and of the spiritual life. Also, like creation spirituality, it is prepared to incorporate elements of 'new science' within its framework.

One important criticism raised against some elements of radical feminism - particularly Goddess spirituality - is that it seems to perpetuate the very dualities it seeks to overthrow. 'Critics,' observes Merchant, 'point to the problem of women's own reinforcement of their identification with nature that Western culture degrades.'<sup>43</sup> Also implicit in Goddess spirituality, according to Ynestra King, cofounder of the Womanearth Institute, is more division rather than integration - the separation of society into male-defined culture and 'a separate feminist culture and philosophy from the vantage point of identification with nature.'<sup>44</sup> Critics also point to the lack of social analysis inherent in radical feminism's perception of oppression. This takes us on to the fourth branch of the feminist movement, namely, the socialist.

Socialist feminism attempts to bring together the insights of both radical and marxist feminism. Here, it is asserted that the full liberation of women requires the disintegration of patriarchy and capitalism. While marxists emphasise praxis, and radicals, embodiment, socialists argue that 'humans' are historical and cultural creations, created through the 'dialectical interrelation of human biology, physical environment, and society.' Differences between men and women

are 'social constructions, not pre-social or biological givens ... even if human biology is in some sense determined, it is none the less also socially conditioned.'<sup>45</sup> Feminists who view gender-differentiation as a historical and cultural construction deplore the appropriation of ecology as a feminist issue, seeing it as 'a regression that is bound to reinforce sex-role stereotyping.' The woman/nature connection celebrated by radicals is seen by socialists as one more 'sexist ploy to define women as beings who are closer to nature than men.'<sup>46</sup> However, there have been a number of important criticisms raised against the socialist perspective from a growing force within the feminist movement - ecofeminism.

The term 'ecofeminism' was coined by French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to represent women's potential for bringing about an ecological revolution. According to bioregionalist Judith Plant, the fundamental question of ecofeminism is not whether women are closer to nature than men, but this one: 'Why does patriarchal society want to forget its biological connections with nature?'<sup>47</sup> Although ecofeminism is not a 'religious' movement per se, many ecofeminists ground their aspirations in this short passage found in Ruether's New Women/ New Earth (1975):

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this society.(48)

Ecofeminists hold that there are important conceptual connections



between the oppression of woman and the oppression of nature. But as Val Plumwood notes, ecofeminist opinion differs greatly over some important issues. For instance, whether nature-woman oppression has its roots in dualistic religion and philosophy, or in the rise of mechanistic science, or if it is simply a function of a different personality formation that occurs between the sexes. Opinion also differs over the issue of whether this link is purely a product of an oppressive patriarchal system and should therefore be abolished, or a link, as radicals maintain, which provides a potential source of empowerment for women.<sup>49</sup> In spite of such differences, it is possible, according to Warren, to outline 'a minimal condition account of eco-feminism which captures the basic claims to which all eco-feminists are committed.' This is as follows:

(i) there are important connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (ii) understanding the nature of these connections is necessary to any adequate understanding of the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (iii) feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective; and (iv) solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective.<sup>(50)</sup>

For ecofeminist thinkers like Warren and Ruether, oppression can be traced to a patriarchal conceptual framework characterized by a dualistic value-hierarchical consciousness. It is this framework which links the oppression of women to the oppression of nature. Warren goes further and argues that this framework lies at the root of all forms of oppression - classism, racism, sexism and naturism. Ecofeminism - in clarifying the link between all forms of oppression - therefore leads to the reconceiving of feminism 'as a movement to end all forms of oppression.'<sup>51</sup>

There are different ways of conceptualizing the link between ecofeminism and the other four branches of feminism. According to Spretnak for example, ecofeminism is a perspective which has emerged directly out of radical feminism. Indeed, Goddess spirituality is often seen as the primary example of ecofeminist spirituality. Scholars like Merchant on the other hand argue that the four branches of feminism have all been concerned with improving the human/nature relationship in different ways, and to this extent they are all 'ecofeminist' to some degree.<sup>52</sup> Finally, there are those like Warren and King who argue that 'real' ecofeminism appropriates from but at the same time moves beyond all earlier forms of feminism. The proper task of ecofeminism argues King is 'the organic forging of a genuinely antidualistic, or dialectical, theory and practice ... to reconcile humanity with nature, within and without.' This project will entail borrowing from the other four perspectives; but it also entails recognizing that these previous perspectives have all in their own way 'capitulated to dualistic thinking.'<sup>53</sup> Both liberal and marxist feminism are dualistic in that they retain an instrumental view of nature - it is valued only insofar as it serves human ends. Radical feminism is dualistic in that it draws a distinction between women/nature on the one hand and men/culture on the other. Socialist feminism is dualistic in that while socialists have addressed domination between persons, 'they have not seriously attended to the domination of either nonhuman nature or inner nature [that is, internalized or psychological oppression].'<sup>54</sup> A truly non-dualistic ecofeminism argues King would appropriate elements from previous feminisms - particularly radical and socialist - and abandon others. Along with socialist feminism it affirms that there is no

nature/culture split and that ideas of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are cultural constructions. Ecofeminism however is critical of the socialist tendency to ignore the dialectical relationship between human and nonhuman nature, and its failure to incorporate a spiritual dimension within its perspective. And this is where ecofeminism dialogues with radical or cultural feminism: 'We share with cultural feminism the necessity of a politics with heart and a beloved community, recognizing our connection with each other - and with nonhuman nature.'<sup>55</sup> Thus ecofeminism says 'yes' to the woman/nature connection celebrated by radical feminists, but with one significant qualification - it makes such a connection in order to bring to birth, not a separatist feminist culture, but a new society beyond dualism. The woman-nature connection can be used

as a vantage point for creating a different kind of culture and politics that would integrate intuitive, spiritual, and rational forms of knowledge, embracing both science and magic insofar as they enable us to transform the nature-culture distinction and to envision and create a free, ecological society.(56)

To sum up, there are three possible ways that feminists deal with the woman/nature connection. The first is to see it as a patriarchal invention and form of oppression, and one that needs to be abandoned if women are to stop being devalued. The second, the radical stance, reaffirms the connection, but turns patriarchal assumptions on their heads by valorizing this connection, making it into a source of power. The third, proposed by King, Warren, and Ruether, is to use the female/nature connection as a means of transcending the (false) dualism

between nature and culture itself, and thus provide the basis for a new society.

### Themes in Feminist Theology

Feminist theology begins with the recognition that what in the past has been presented as 'human' or 'universal' theology is male theology disguised as the normatively human. And this of course raises important questions: does traditional theology speak to women's experiences, and if not, does it have to be reviewed and reworked in the light of women's experiences? The view that traditional theology did not resonate with the experiences of women was first explored in 1960 by Valerie Saiving in her influential essay 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View.' Saiving begins her essay with an idea which, although revolutionary then, would be taken for granted by most feminist theologians today; namely, that the theology of the theologian is affected by his or her experience of being male or female. Saiving develops this perspectivalism in relation to the theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Anders Nygren, and argues that their shared interpretation of sin as pride and self-assertion, and grace as sacrificial love, are alien to the experiences of women. In fact, the male interpretation of grace as sacrificial love would in fact encourage women to embrace more fully their own 'sin' - the 'underdevelopment or negation of the self.'<sup>57</sup>

Saiving's analysis underscores the question asked by many feminist theologians today - do the articles of faith of the Christian church reflect the experiences of women, and if not, do women need to develop alternatives? Feminist theology is therefore a very experiential and

experimental type of theology, where interpretation of biblical passages may overlap with insights from psychology, women's dreams, and women's poetry. In the expansive area of feminist theology, the 'liberationist' (or 'radical revisionist') and 'rejectionist' (or 'post-Christian') stances come closest to the New Age idea of a 'new consciousness.'<sup>58</sup> The liberationist position - advanced by theologians like Ruether and Grey - holds that the Judeo-Christian tradition contains a theology of sexual liberation. The task of the liberationist is to locate this message within the canon of scripture and proclaim it. For rejectionist 'thealogians' like Naomi Goldenberg, Mary Daly, and Carol Christ, the Judeo-Christian tradition was, is, and always will be an androcentric model for female subservience. Sexism is intrinsic to its conceptual framework; it is beyond redemption. Rejectionists are critical of the stance taken by the radical revisionists. For example, Goldenberg argues that Ruether and other revisionists

minimize the patriarchal bias they find in their research by overemphasizing glimmers of dignity granted women within the Jewish and Christian traditions ... No matter how carefully ... worded, we cannot help being impressed with the data these feminist scholars have amassed to show that Judaism and Christianity have always been chiefly concerned with the welfare of males and the exaltation of a male God.

To develop a real theology of liberation, she concludes, 'feminists have to leave Christ and Bible behind them.'<sup>59</sup> Christ agrees:

I am not convinced that one can change the way images of Christ have functioned in Christian imagination through theological, that is, intellectual, assertion. Images of Christ exalted as well as crucified remain embedded in the Christian Bible and liturgy and continue to mould and shape the Christian imagination.'<sup>(60)</sup>

Major rejectionist works - like Goldenberg's Changing of the Gods (1979) and Daly's Gyn/Ecology (1979) - have contributed to the quest for alternatives to Judeo-Christian religion, the most powerful being Goddess 'thealogy' and spirituality. Despite such apparent antagonism between the revisionists and the rejectionists, there is, as Woodhead comments, 'nothing substantive in her [Ruether's] vision with which the post-Christian feminists really want to disagree.' The only real difference between the two is that revisionist theologians are 'happier than post-Christian ones to use the Jewish and Christian traditions as a fruitful source of symbols and stories.'<sup>61</sup>

Feminist theology - both in its revisionist and rejectionist expressions - is holistic in intent. 'It criticises,' explains King, 'all dualistic separations, whether of body and spirit, heaven and earth, woman and man, man and God.'<sup>62</sup> In Goddess spirituality, as noted earlier, the Goddess is seen as being immanent in nature and in the body, and liberation is reconciliation with this world and this life. In a similar fashion, Ruether speaks of the 'God/ess' who is the 'mother-matter-matrix,' and of liberation as being 'rooted in the foundations of being rather than as its antithesis.' It should be noted that feminists like Ruether are not simply attempting to replace transcendence with immanence, but to move beyond such dualisms. In a patriarchal context the immanent Goddess is equated with 'static immanence,' with the extinguishing of 'the free flight of transcendent consciousness.' And it is this vision of 'immanence' which makes patriarchal consciousness hostile to the notion of an immanent Goddess. It is this dualism of nature and transcendence that must be overcome,

where the God/ess is seen as leading us neither to 'a stifled, dependent self or ... a spirit-trip outside the earth.' Instead, God/ess is equated with 'the harmonization of self and body, self and other, self and world ... the Shalom of our being.'<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Christ points out the problem in attempting, from a patriarchal perspective, to equate both humanity and God with nature, because, given past interpretations of 'nature,' it would suggest that both God and humanity are irrational, immoral and inarticulate. What is advanced in feminist theology is not simply a shift towards 'immanence,' the neglected side in the dualism of immanence and transcendence, but 'a deconstruction and reconstruction of both theology and language,' of 'God, man, and nature.'<sup>64</sup>

As regards new ideas about the relationship of the self to other, feminist theology does place emphasis upon the 'relational' capacities of women, which it is believed, can bring to society a new 'ethic of inseparability.'<sup>65</sup> 'Eros,' to use Jung's expression, has come to unite what 'Logos' has torn asunder. On the other hand, feminists are also concerned with the development in women of capacities that have been denied to them in a patriarchal context - autonomy, self-assertion, will, 'Logos.' To do this, feminist theology - as with creation spirituality, liberation theology, and even humanistic psychology - begins by affirming women's worth, rather than their 'sinfulness.' Moltmann-Wendel explains why this transition from 'sinner' to 'child of God' is so important for feminist theology:

If in our present traditional church theology we speak of people as the starting point for theological reflection, we are speaking of the introverted - sinful - seeker after God, the person who rebels against God or the person in his or her duality, as a partner, who is directed towards the other and

only in that way fulfils his or her humanity. Feminist theology is interested in another process: the process of liberation, the developing wholeness of the woman in a social, patriarchal alienation and the overcoming of that alienation. So the basic presupposition of feminist theology is not the existence of the individual as a sinner ... the accent is on the complete recovery of the status of being a child of God, a status which is lost in oppressive structures ... We are God's good creation.(66)

Although the affirmation of one's essential 'goodness' is of some importance for women who in a patriarchal context have been taught to devalue themselves, there is a danger here. This danger is evident particularly in the human potential movement, where self-affirmation takes place within a context where alienation, individualism, and 'oppressive structures' are taken as normative, and where self-affirmation, instead of leading to liberation, becomes a means to the alleviation of responsibility for others. Self-affirmation may lead to social transformation, but it can also lead to techniques which attempt to help the individual operate more successfully within a competitive, individualistic environment. More of this in Part Two.



P A R T   T W O :  
P A T R I A R C H A L   S P I R I T U A L I T Y

INTRODUCTION

Part Two is concerned with the patriarchal spirituality of the New Age Movement. As outlined in the General Introduction, 'patriarchal' is understood as indicating a particular conceptual framework characterized by value-hierarchical dualisms. It is further accepted that this conceptual framework is intimately linked with a particular model of selfhood. For the male, this is the separative self, the self that aspires to be autonomous, static and enduring; the anti-ecological self. The female counterpart to this is the fluid 'no-self.' It was argued - following Ruether - that patriarchal consciousness is deeply embedded in the religious heritage of the West, where value-hierarchical dualisms have been drawn between all things 'spiritual' and all things 'material.' Liberation here is a rather separative affair - 'the flight of the alone to the alone' - and is linked with the notion of transcendence out of matter, flux, and finitude. Gnosticism was offered as a good example of how patriarchal consciousness functions in a religious context. The example of Gnosticism is a very relevant one, as many researchers have noted connections between Gnosticism and the New Age movement. However, it is important to note that different scholars mean different things when they make this connection.

For Peters, the connection between ancient Gnosticism and the New Age is a shared concern with 'gnosis.' Although the New Age is 'reminiscent of gnosticism in the ancient Roman Empire both in what it teaches and in its competitive position vis a vis Christian orthodoxy,' the term Gnosticism is employed primarily 'because the term gnosis ... is here [in the New Age] the basic category for understanding the nature of the human predicament and for solving it.'<sup>1</sup> This is a tenuous association for at least two reasons. Firstly it fails to indicate two very different types of gnosis - both world-affirming and world-denying - sought after by the New Age movement. Peters is certainly making an over-generalization when he argues that the gnosis advocated by 'contemporary new age thinkers' does not involve 'antipathy toward the physical or natural world.' Even if this were the case, we are faced with the further problem that such gnosis stands very much in opposition to the gnosis of ancient Gnosticism, as Peters himself acknowledges:

Although the ancient practitioners believed in personal advance and development in consciousness, such advance carried with it renunciation of the material and ephemeral world. The attainment of saving knowledge (gnosis) for the gnostic of antiquity meant escape from the physical world of darkness into the intellectual or spiritual world of light.(2)

Given this, it seems fair to argue that Peters' description of the New Age as 'Gnostic' is misleading, even incidental. Secondly, it fails to note that the primary feature of ancient Gnosticism was, as Jonas has argued, its devaluation of life in this world. 'Gnosis' is simply the means to an acosmic end. Moreover, in some Gnostic systems - Marcion's for example - all emphasis is placed upon 'faith' rather than gnosis. Commenting on this, Jonas remarks:

he [Marcion] does not claim possession of a superior, 'pneumatic' knowledge or the presence in man generally of that divine element which could be its source or recipient ... he makes faith and not knowledge the vehicle of redemption. The last circumstance would seem to put Marcion squarely outside the gnostic area, if this is defined by the concept of gnosis. Yet the anti-cosmic dualism as such, of which Marcion is the most uncompromising exponent, the idea of the unknown God opposed to that of the cosmos, the very conception of an inferior and oppressive creator and the consequent view of salvation as liberation from his power by an alien principle are so outstandingly gnostic that anyone who professed them in this historical environment must be counted as one of the Gnostics.(3)

For Richard Bergeron, a theology lecturer at the University of Montreal, the New Age - or the 'New Religiosity' as he calls it - is Gnostic in that it shares with its Hellenistic forbear a number of cosmogonical, anthropogonical and soteriological assumptions. Bergeron actually divides the 'new religions' into two distinct 'spiritual families.' The groups in the first family ground their ideas in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and regard the Christian Bible as their ultimate source of reference. These groups 'speak the language of decision and conversion and protest strongly against the permissiveness of society and the compromises of the established Church.' They are millenarian and apocalyptic, and profess 'a radical discontinuity between the order of creation and the order of grace and an absolute disconnection between the empirical world and the kingdom of God.' It is however with the second spiritual family that Bergeron is chiefly concerned. The groups in this family, according to Bergeron, 'appear to be syncretist amalgamations or aggregates of elements borrowed from the most diverse religious, philosophical and spiritual traditions' including the 'eastern esoteric tradition,' parapsychology, humanistic psychology and science fiction.<sup>4</sup>

Bergeron goes on to offer a 'theological interpretation' of this second family grouping. He suggests that all members of the second family 'share a fundamental commonality of attitude, world-view and religiosity,' and for Bergeron the 'fundamental commonality' is Gnosticism. He takes note of many similarities between this spiritual family and 'ancient gnosticism.' The groups in this family are monistic and 'propose a vision of the world which considers the multiplicity of beings to be an illusory manifestation of absolute metaphysical unity' - All is one. Despite this, they are also dualistic by way of their emanationist, hierarchical ontology: 'The world proceeds by emanation. The latter is seen as an involution, a descent, a fall of the divine spirit into matter.' Within the material world, 'the spirit remains imprisoned in the world of illusion (maya) and crucified upon matter.' As with ancient Gnosticism, this spiritual family also holds that the levels between humanity and divinity are populated by a number of supernatural entities: 'Usually there is the postulation of the existence of innumerable super-terrestrial spiritual beings who inhabit the space that separates man from divinity.' Salvation is facilitated by inner knowledge: 'Primacy is given to the inner life ... The disciple is invited to meditate ... to have psycho-spiritual experiences so that he may know himself.' The proposed goal is 'to reach divine consciousness. This consciousness is called "cosmic", "supra-normal", "Christic", "superior", "Buddhic", or "transcendental".' At the same time, this is also a return to the divine source: 'Man's spiritual journey consists in ... evolution, return, elevation of the spirit.' Millenarianism is another feature of this family. Its members 'claim to exist in the twilight of an evil age and at the dawn of a new age. The

age of darkness, Kali Yuga, the Age of the Fish ... is over. The golden age ... the Age of Aquarius ... is about to arrive.' Groups which Bergeron associates with this family include Theosophy, the Rosicrucian Association, Eckankar, the International Gnostic Association, the Divine Light Mission, ISKCON, Scientology, and the Church Universal and Triumphant.<sup>5</sup>

One obvious criticism of Bergeron's 'theological interpretation' of New Age religious movements is the sharp division he makes between his two groupings. He asserts that although the families have developed side by side, 'the antagonism they show one another suggests deep divergences between them.'<sup>6</sup> It is surprising that Bergeron fails to see any connection between Gnosticism and those who profess 'a radical discontinuity between the order of creation and the order of grace and an absolute disconnection between the empirical world and the kingdom of God.' Christian fundamentalist critiques of the New Age movement are not, on close inspection, antagonistic towards Gnosticism - that is, dualistic supernaturalism - but towards the New Age brand of Gnosticism. This is a point that will be returned to in the conclusion.

In New Age spirituality, according to Bergeron, 'Primacy is given to the inner life.' This is a point which occupies a central position in the work of Carl Raschke, a humanities professor at the University of Denver. His critique of 'modern Gnosticism,' written in 1980, does not refer explicitly to the New Age Movement as such, but to the 'New Religious Consciousness.'

Raschke views ancient Gnosticism - and its more recent variants - as a kind of aristocratic spirituality. In its original form claims Raschke, Gnosticism found much appeal among the upper ranks of society and in particular, among 'the conventicles of the disinherited nobility.' Its aristocratic symbolism and its division of mankind into the spiritual elite and the vulgar, carnal horde, betray not only intellectual exclusivity, 'but also an undercurrent of social prejudice for the proper peerage.'<sup>7</sup>

Variations on Gnosticism continues Raschke emerge during periods of social ferment and anarchical change. They express an elite's concern with future societal positions. In short, 'Gnosticism represents an ideology peculiar to the latter stages in the demise of the ruling-classes throughout history.' An anxious, disinherited elite, in response to a loss in social power and prestige, go 'within':

A social elite gradually surrenders its leadership functions and devotes its energies to letters and learning ... their painful isolation from the culture of the masses leading to a self-enforced pariah mentality, expressed in both their contempt for legitimate authority and their creation of a closed symbolic universe which only those with the proper credentials can penetrate ... the safekeeping of magical lore reflects a vicarious exercise of power which in reality has slipped away from them.(8)

For the Gnostic, salvation means flight from the vulgar social order (the 'source of spiritual discomfort'), and escape, by one's own resources, into the sphere of the timeless. The Gnostic's passion 'is not for a life lived within all the ambiguities of human time, but for salvation beyond the plane of the temporal, in eternity.'<sup>9</sup>

It is Gnosticism, claims Raschke, which lies at the root of the new religious consciousness (i.e., the New Age movement). And, given Raschke's interpretation of Gnosticism, it is not difficult to see why he thus considers the New Age Movement to be 'a sign of the end of middle-class culture laid waste by the forces of modernity.' He writes:

The new religions constitute a Gnostic escape for the masses of individuals in our society who, thrown out as the detritus of crumbling communal groups and institutions, including the family, are desperately looking for some kind of salvation by their own resources ... The only social imperative remaining is to delve further into 'inner space.'(10)

The Gnostic's concern with 'inner space' signifies for Raschke precisely what kind of 'salvation' is being advocated: a solipsistic and narcissistic one, devoid of any social conscience. In reference to the worldview of 'est,' a human potential training programme, he comments:

'You are responsible for your own evolution' becomes the radically individualistic ethical inference to be drawn from the solipsistic world view as stated in the maxim of est: 'You are the creator of your own universe.' Such a standpoint invites its adherents to affect a mindless indifference to other people's misfortunes.

The modern Gnostic, according to Raschke, does not reach out; but, basking in the glow of his expanded consciousness, he 'tucks himself away like a mollusk against the battering tides of history.'<sup>11</sup> For Raschke, as for Bellah, Danforth and others, the hallmark of the 'New Religiosity' is a 'cynical privatism.'

In the final analysis, I have two major criticisms of the link made by scholars like Raschke and Bergeron between Gnosticism and the 'New Religious Consciousness.' First, the hallmarks of Gnosticism -

alienation from the surrounding world, a separative view of the self, a desire for transcendence - are only applicable to certain aspects of the new religious consciousness. Advocates of an ecological spirituality are fundamentally opposed to Gnosticism. This is even acknowledged by Peters, who notes in reference to Fox that he

overtly rejects gnosticism. He does so on the grounds that creation-centred spirituality has a high regard for the created physical world, whereas gnosticism in its ancient form rejected the physical so that the soul could escape. The soul was torn away from matter and sought its salvation through an ascent into the realm of the divine. The gnostic God was an acosmic God, and the soul was an acosmic soul.(12)

Second, that the hallmarks of Gnosticism are much more diffuse and mainstream than is acknowledged. The view of the world and the cosmos as a barren, meaningless place from which the human subject is essentially absent, and the conceptual division between the mind and the body, is as much a feature of the mechanistic philosophy of the Scientific Revolution and the nihilism of existentialism as the spirituality of the ancient Gnostics. Fox is certainly close to the mark when he says that 'it seems abundantly clear that the spirituality that mechanistic science spawns is indeed a gnostic spirituality. This dualism is at least as much a part of us in the twentieth century as it was in the second century when Marcion lived.' 'To what extent,' asks Fox, 'is the scientism that isolated humanity from nature, and now the exaggerated Personalism that continues this isolation, in fact a mere repeat of Gnosticism in our day?'<sup>13</sup> In this thesis, 'Gnosticism' is seen as being more-or-less indicative of the West's outlook upon life in general, and symptomatic of a more deep-rooted problem - alienated patriarchal consciousness, with its separative view of the self, its



organization of the world via value-hierarchical dualisms, and its quest for transcendence out of the world of finitude and flux. 'Patriarchal' goes much further to the heart of the matter than 'Gnosticism.' Nevertheless, many of the similarities between ancient and New Age Gnosticism are very interesting indeed, and these will be highlighted as the inquiry develops.

For the sake of clarity, an attempt has been made to differentiate between five different strands of New Age patriarchal spirituality, and these are discussed in separate chapters. The five strands have been termed 'Western Esoteric,' 'Channeled,' 'Eastern,' 'Psychological,' and 'Evolutionary.' These divisions are heuristic, and reflect an attempt to make some sense out of the general amorphousness of New Age thought. The chapters are by no means exhaustive - a short introduction is followed by a few examples of the type in question. The final chapter in this section - Chapter Fourteen - makes some reflections concerning the significance of patriarchal spirituality.

## CHAPTER NINE : WESTERN ESOTERIC

'Western Esoteric' indicates those New Age groups and theorists who, although perhaps borrowing elements from Eastern religions, present themselves on the whole as inheritors and proponents of some esoteric Western religious tradition. New Agers operating within this framework make much use of Christian imagery, whether it be from the New Testament or from classical Gnostic sources. Two good examples of this form of New Ageism - which are outlined below - are to be found in the writings of George Trevelyan and in those of the 'Lectorium Rosicrucianum,' a contemporary Rosicrucian organization.

### Trevelyan's New Age

It is appropriate to begin our discussion of New Age spirituality and theology with Trevelyan, for he is regarded by many as a very influential New Age spokesperson and theorist, so much so that he has been labelled the 'father' of the British New Age movement. Trevelyan was responsible for the setting-up of the 'Wrekin Trust' in 1971, an organization whose activities have included adult education courses and conferences, and a wide range of meditation and other 'spiritual' activities. Trevelyan's writings on the New Age have been described by one enthusiastic reviewer as 'an indispensable source of wisdom for everyone concerned with the emergence of our contemporary planetary culture ... a keystone in the Temple of New Age Thought.'<sup>1</sup>

According to Trevelyan, his New Age worldview is nothing new; it is one 'implicit in esoteric Christianity.' This is a worldview which 'was

driven underground as heresy when the Church became universal in the Roman Empire'; but nevertheless, one which 'was carried forward by the Knights Templar, by the Cathars and Albigenses ... and later by the Rosicrucian impulse and the Freemasons.' This is not exactly true, for while looking to the past for roots, Trevelyan does at the same time appropriate present concerns, particularly present concerns with the environment. Indeed, he describes his New Age vision as being part of an emerging 'ecological worldview,' and it is this appropriation of the environment as a spiritual issue which results in much dialectical tension. On the one hand, he calls for 'holistic vision' and for a recognition of 'the sacredness of all life and the divinity within all things.' He holds that such vision will result in a world-affirming type of spirituality in which we 'begin living again with Gaia.' Trevelyan's spirituality seems to be concerned with simplifying lifestyles, environmental conservation and community living.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, there appears to be nothing substantial in Trevelyan's belief system that would support such a spirituality. In fact, the main thrust of Trevelyan's New Age thinking is concerned with transcendence, with escape from matter. His environmentalism does not appear integral to his belief system, and seems to be more a concessionary gesture than anything else.

For Trevelyan, the material world is the creation of a single nonmaterial principle that has divided itself into a hierarchy of levels. Earth matter constitutes the 'lowest, densest vibration' of this single source. Trevelyan considers this hierarchical division of reality to be 'holistic' on the grounds that the 'subtler planes

traverse and interpenetrate the denser.'<sup>3</sup> It would actually be more accurate to say that Trevelyan's framework is 'dualism on a monistic background.' Through its descent into matter, humanity 'lost all knowledge, all recollection, of the reality of higher worlds and of the hierarchy of planes of being.' It 'lost both spirit and God.'<sup>4</sup>

In the hierarchical scheme of things, humanity stands as the 'Tenth Hierarchy,' created 'a little lower than the angels.' It is the 'Idea' of God, a 'spark of the Divine Fire,' 'immortal and imperishable.' The Tenth Hierarchy has descended into the dense plane of matter for a reason: 'We are here to experience separation from the Divine Will and thus to develop self-consciousness, ego-consciousness, and the beginnings of free will in creative action.' As an embodied soul, separated from its true source, the individual represents 'the great experiment of God,' and the earth itself is 'the chosen training ground of the soul.' Of course the 'great experiment' is equally a great risk, in that it 'inevitably allowed the right to err and deviate from the Law.' Deviation from the project is made possible through the activities of two demiurgical entities: Ahriman and Lucifer. Ahriman is the 'Lord of Darkness,' the 'darkness of matter' and the 'denier of the spirit.' His purpose is 'to get hold of the human intellect and personality and build a culture which entirely denies the Spirit.' The 'Ahrimanic impulse' can be found 'in all reductionist thinking.' Lucifer's role is to encourage 'ego-aggrandizement so that men strive to be as gods.' The Luciferic impulse lies 'behind the lust for power so apparent today.' These entities, according to Trevelyan, have thwarted the divine experiment, and humanity lies in a state of fallenness. It

has become engrossed in the 'fascinatingly beautiful realm of matter.' Human birth has become 'a kind of death, a descent into the prison or tomb of the body and personality and the five senses ... a drastic limitation of the free-ranging spirit.'<sup>5</sup>

The emerging New Age of Aquarius will mean human liberation from demiurgical power. In part, this New Age will emerge through human activity, and especially through attempts at consciousness transformation ('the gateway to the New Epoch'). Through disciplines like meditation, 'the transformation can begin.' Meditation offers 'an adventure into inner worlds. And it aligns us with the immense operation now afoot for building the world anew.' Meditation provides a way of uncovering the 'Higher Self': 'Our personal "I am" can open itself to Him who said I AM THAT I AM. And we learn to know that the I AM, the great Cosmic Being, the Beloved, is personalized for us through our Higher Self.' Through 'surrender to the Higher Self in service of the whole,' the individual subordinates the animal self and becomes 'a responsible instrument for working with the Divine Idea'; an active channel for the 'creative source.' This openness to the will and plans of higher disembodied entities is 'the ultimate purpose of man's sojourn upon earth.'<sup>6</sup>

However, for Trevelyan, the 'angelic powers' receive the leading role in the creation of a New Age. Indeed, the hope of a New Age actually begins with the historical 'incarnation of the Cosmic I AM'; that is, the descent of the Christ into the world of matter. Of great significance for Trevelyan is the death of the Christ:

When on the Cross He cried out the words, 'It is finished,' it amounted to a triumphant declaration that matter had been fully mastered, the complete incarnation was achieved and death conquered ... At that moment, the Christ Impulse entered into earthly evolution and continues to work as a leaven to redeem the human soul and body ... The descent of the Christ meant the entry of an Impulse into the dying body of the earth. It checked the tendency of overhardening and condensing which was present in evolution through the working of the adversary forces ... Had Christ not descended, souls upon earth would have become so deeply embedded in matter that all knowledge of the spiritual worlds would have been lost.

In short, the Christ deed 'reversed the Fall of Man ... [and] starts the Ascent of Man.' But this ascent ends with another significant display of divine intervention: the 'Second Coming.' On the one hand, reasons Trevelyan, the angelic powers respect human free will; but on the other, 'we cannot expect the higher worlds to stand by and watch indefinitely while we pollute the planet.' When the Second Coming to usher in the New Age does take place, Trevelyan warns that humanity should expect the worst: 'events in the coming two decades are likely to be [of an] apocalyptic nature.' An apocalypse is perhaps even necessary for the birth of a New Age: 'tribulation and cleansing change are a prelude to a new dawn.' At any rate, 'The holistic vision certainly shows us that there is no difficulty for the beings directing human destiny to stage events of a calamitous nature.' The only consolation that Trevelyan can offer is that the extent of this 'cleansing' operation 'depends entirely on the degree of human cooperation with the forces which are bringing about the changes.' It appears though that Trevelyan would not mind an all-out catastrophe. Why? - because 'We know that death for the true entity of man is an illusion, for the "I" is immortal and imperishable.' Therefore:

Let us admit that a great tidal wave would be the quickest way to the New Jerusalem! For the immortal soul, it will be much more comfortable to be on the higher plane and released from the restrictions of earth life!

It is clear that for Trevelyan, humanity's spiritual destiny cannot be contained within any 'New Jerusalem' established on earth. Matter is a restriction to promethean ambition; a 'drastic limitation of a free-ranging spirit.' Humanity's true destiny lies elsewhere: 'We are called on to take the step [an apocalyptic one?] which reunites us with the Source.'<sup>7</sup>

Trevelyan's New Age vision is an excellent example of the patriarchal concern with transcendence. He repeatedly asserts that within the world humanity is subject to 'drastic limitation,' and that it does not really belong to this 'darkness of matter.' Even when it is acknowledged that humans share much in common with other animals, it is suggested that animality itself must be transcended; we must 'eject the animal nature from our soul.' The corollary to these promethean ambitions is the inevitable devaluation of bodily existence and the natural world. This is where Trevelyan is at his most deceptive. On the one hand he calls for 'holistic vision' and for a recognition of 'the sacredness of all life and the divinity within all living things.' This must be weighed against his understanding of matter as 'frozen spirit,' of animals as failed humans, of life as a 'morass of illusion in the world of appearance and form,' and of the goal of life as the 'release [of] the soul/spirit from its imprisonment in matter and form.' Despite his call to 'begin living again with Gaia,' it is clear that Trevelyan values the earth only to the extent that it contributes to

humanity's unearthly destiny; towards our 'development into a species no longer merely earth-bound, but capable of sense-free thinking that can consciously enter the realms of spirit and work with the great angelic beings.' It is of no surprise that Trevelyan can cite with approval the following statement from a friend's 'spiritual journal':

'Understand these things, for man's purpose now is to move out into his divine Destiny and away from the disintegrating mooring to an old and dying world.'(8)

#### The Lectorium Rosicrucianum

The Lectorium Rosicrucianum, or International School of the Golden Rosycross, is a Dutch New Age organization with centres in Holland, England, North America and New Zealand. The Rosycross Press publishes a wide range of books (from The Nuctemeron of Apollonius of Tyana to The Gnosis in Present-Day Manifestation) and a bi-monthly magazine entitled Pentagram. This magazine 'aims to draw its readers to the new Era which has begun for mankind.' It describes how the Lectorium is reacting 'to the liberating impulses, which are being sent out to mankind.'<sup>9</sup>

Like Theosophy, the Lectorium argues that there is a perennial wisdom lying at the heart of every religious tradition. According to J. van Rijckenborgh, the school's founder and author of The Gnosis in Present-Day Manifestation, 'Taoism, Brahminism, Buddhism, and Christianity, as doctrines and ways of deliverance, are fundamentally one in the Gnosis.'<sup>10</sup> However, this organization really considers itself as the latest link in a long series of Western esoteric brotherhoods. Previous members of this great fraternity have included the early



Christian Gnostics, the Cathars, the medieval alchemists, and of course, the original Rosicrucians - the so-called 'fama fraternitatis.'

Paul Collins, in a brief article concerned with the New Age, suggests that at the heart of Gnosticism's 'profound hatred of matter' there lies a fear of death; a fear sidestepped 'by positing life-reality in the spirit and the body is relegated to being a container or even a prison for the soul.'<sup>11</sup> Feminists like de Beauvoir and Ruether would perhaps go further and argue that the Gnostic's fear of death is itself grounded in a fear and rejection of human finitude, viewed as a threat and as a rejoinder to the desire for perpetual transcendence and 'self-infinetization.' With this in mind, we turn to 'The True Meaning of Life' - the first in a series of five Introductory Letters issued by the Lectorium - which begins with the following statement of dissatisfaction:

Why do we live? Does life really have a deeper meaning? Even at birth we carry within us the seeds of death, so what is the purpose of living? ... Is the aim of life to be found in the field of humanism, or sociology, or idealism, or economics? Or is the aim of life to acquire possessions, or to gain a good position in society, or to maintain the human race by producing children?

Surely all these things cannot be the true meaning of life, for all these attainments in their turn are perishable; there is nothing in them that speaks of eternity. And yet the philosophers of all times have said: 'If there is a temporal existence, then eternity must also exist.' But where do we find it?(12)

The Lectorium's rejection of the 'perishable' forms the basis for a religious framework which has much in common with ancient Gnosticism. Reality it is asserted is divided into two distinct realms - the

transitory and the eternal. 'The transitory,' moreover, 'cannot lead us to God.' The transitory, or the 'world of wrath,' consists of the visible, material world and an invisible 'hereafter.' Within the hereafter are found 'numerous spheres' and 'aeonian powers.' After bodily death, the soul comes here prior to reincarnation.

Here, after the death of the material body, man spends the time necessary for his subtle bodies to dissolve. These subtle bodies are not visible to the human eye but are nevertheless of an unmistakably material nature. Only when the subtle bodies have dissolved is the microcosm empty and therefore able to take up a new personality through birth in the material sphere.

The hereafter, or 'realm of the dead,' is 'certainly not the Light-Realm, the original Kingdom of God; it is simply the other half of our world.'<sup>13</sup>

While in the material body, the individual is prey to archontic forces, which are held to be twelve strands of a single magnetic field: 'the magnetic system of the world of wrath.' These magnetic strands interact with 'the magnetic system in our brain,' and thus, like heimarmene (the Gnostic doctrine of cosmic fate), determine human consciousness and behaviour.

Mankind is being directed because: a magnetic state is a state of consciousness and a state of consciousness is a state of life. Whatever exists in the electromagnetic field projects itself in our brain and manifests itself as consciousness; that which exists in us as consciousness, propels towards manifestation of life. Therefore, according to nature we are completely directed. We have nothing to decide. Everything is decided for us.<sup>(14)</sup>

There is, according to the Lectorium, a religious tradition which

attempts 'to comply completely with the intercosmic electromagnetic directives.' This tradition is 'without any love, it is very selfish, hard and cold.' This tradition is found within the law of Moses and the Old Testament - the old 'electromagnetic dispensation.' Overall, this transitory realm is a 'house of bondage under the law.' 'We all live in one great prison' and desire liberation 'from the iron grip of this world.'<sup>15</sup>

'The true meaning of our earthly existence,' proclaims the Lectorium, 'is for man to return to his original domain of life, to the Light-Realm, the Kingdom of God.' To accomplish this arduous task 'An entirely new faculty is needed, a faculty that cannot be explained from our earthly nature.' Fortunately, every human being 'possesses this faculty in a rudimentary form, as an atom within himself.' This is the 'principle of Eternity' which unites humanity with divinity. In the material world, most humans are unaware that they possess this faculty; they 'do not know that they are of divine origin.' This faculty is called 'the Rose,' although it has 'been called by many other names, such as the Divine Spark, the Spirit-Spark Atom, The Proto-Atom, the Seed-Grain of Jesus, the Pearl of Great Price ... and so on.' The Rose needs to 'break open and bloom,' and this is achieved through gnosis. The opening of the Rose through gnosis results in a 'transformation of the personality' - a movement from 'the limited I-consciousness to the all-encompassing, all-pervading, all-knowing, original, divine, universal consciousness.'<sup>16</sup>

However, the Lectorium warns that 'in his nature-born state man is not able to find this way [to gnosis and thus to God] by himself, and that is why helpers come to him from the Divine Realm.'<sup>17</sup> Many of these helpers are 'Hierophants of the Light' residing in the 'Vacuum of Shamballa.' The most important helper is Sophia, who brings with her a new magnetic field (the gnosis field) to compete with the twelve archontic strands of the old magnetic field (in ancient Gnosticism, Sophia is sometimes referred to as the 'thirteenth aeon').

In 1953, claims van Rijckenborgh, the old and the new fields drifted apart, and will stay apart until the year 2001. The 48 years between these two dates constitute the interim period between the Piscean and Aquarian Ages. This interim period, during which the divine gnosis is freely available to all, offers the possibility of a new era, and with it, a new race:

Let it suffice to confirm that such a moment in world history has now begun. The two magnetic fields existing in our nature-order have been drifting apart since a certain date we have already passed. Therefore, we shall see particular groups of men completely change with regard to the ordinary dialectical type. One group goes the ordinary course of mankind, the other goes the course of the exceptionals, the course of the new race.(18)

Some Gnostics - as the Nag Hammadi texts reveal - divided humanity into hylics, psychics and pneumatics. A similar division is found in the Lectorium, which differentiates between three states of consciousness. The first state is that 'of the ordinary dialectical man [hylic]'; the second 'of the pupil of the Spiritual School [psychic]'; and the third 'of the new race, of the one who enters the new life-field

[pneumatic].<sup>19</sup> For the ancient Gnostics, as Walker points out, 'psychikos' describes one who 'can identify either with the upper realm and be transformed by it, or with the lower and perish as a result.'<sup>20</sup> Similarly, according to Rijckenborgh:

This second state of consciousness is a true bridging-consciousness ... One moment you are linked to the field of nature, the next moment the Gnosis touches you ... In such a situation everything is possible; you can either return to the old state of being, to revert to the previous, ordinary life of nature, or to progress to the new state of being, the breakthrough to a total soul-rebirth, the entrance into the new life-field.(21)

During the transition from hylic to pneumatic consciousness - a process referred to as the 'Trigonum Igneum' (Flaming Triangle) - the 'Rose' unfolds itself, allowing the stream of gnosis to complete the work of transmutation. The gnosis field proceeds to the 'fourth candelabrum' or cerebral cavity which is ignited. This ignites the 'tower' above which in turn ignites the pineal gland. The gnosis-fire then rushes down the right-hand side of the 'sympathetic nervous system' to the 'sacral plexus' where it does battle with the 'serpent' (kundalini). In the practice of kundalini yoga, the left and right channels (nadis) of the so-called sympathetic nervous system are known as pingala and ida. The experience of enlightenment involves breathing exercises (pranayama) which manipulate the flow of energy (prana) in the pingala and ida nadis. This awakens the spiritual energy (shakti) which lies asleep at the base of the spine. This energy - depicted as a serpent - is then said to wind its way up the central nadi (the susumna nadi) of the cerebro-spinal system, activating a number of energy centres (chakras) on its journey.<sup>22</sup> In the Lectorium however, the

kundalini serpent must be destroyed rather than liberated. It represents the sexual energy that 'connects us with the karmic past.' When 'the serpent begins to speak to us, the possibility of our liberation disappears.' 'Everything Luciferian ... is to be found in the snake of the kundalini.' When the serpent is destroyed, the gnosis ascends, activating the chakra centres; this is the 'glorification on the mount.' The initiate, having reached the third and highest level of consciousness, is now a 'participant of the new race ... one who enters the new life-field.'<sup>23</sup>

It should be noted that according to the Lectorium, the 'new race' of the Aquarian Age will not be established here on earth. After the interim, the new race, along with the Spiritual School, will 'disappear from sight.' After September 2001, 'the new race will begin to leave the dialectical regions in the sense of time and space.' Their destination is 'the Lord in the clouds of heaven.' For the Lectorium Rosicrucianum, the New Age, and the gnosis that will bring about its arrival, have little to do with this world:

It is essential that the dialectical, that is, the earthly consciousness, be overcome in order that the new, heavenly consciousness may take its place. That is an inescapable requirement, for the presence of the one precludes the existence of the other. Where there is light, there cannot be darkness at the same time; where there is friendship, there cannot also be enmity. That is a very simple law. One cannot on the one hand strive diligently for the goods of this world, and on the other expect to inherit the Kingdom of God.(24)

## C H A P T E R   T E N :   C H A N N E L I N G

'Channeling,' according to John Klimo in his analysis of this New Age phenomenon, should be seen 'primarily in terms of an identity (the source), apparently foreign to that of the channel, exercising control over the perceptual, motor, cognitive, or self-reflective capacities of that person once he or she has relinquished or altered control or sense of self-identity.'<sup>1</sup> The channel's (or channeler's) relinquishment of control ranges from a 'light trance' (where the channel may be partially aware of the present situation) to 'incarnation' (where the channeled source has completely 'possessed' the mind and body of the channel).

The art of receiving communications from 'spiritual' sources, is, as Melton et al. point out, not a particularly new phenomenon. It was 'the craft of the oracle, the seer, the shaman and the prophet.' Indeed, the craft of all those who have 'functioned as the intermediaries between this realm and the unseen realms of the spirit.'<sup>2</sup> Yet, some distinctions can be made between New Age channeling and earlier forms of mediumship. The rise of contemporary channeling, according to Miller, began in 1963 with the appearance of 'Seth,' an entity channeled by Jane Roberts. Whereas earlier 'New Age' mediums like Blavatsky and Bailey were keen to encourage the notion of spiritual communication as a prerogative of the spiritually-advanced few, 'Seth,' and the 'Seth Material' (the voluminous collection of writings dictated by Seth), set in motion a trend that would result in the contemporary understanding of channeling. That is, as 'a natural human potentiality that could be awakened and cultivated by all.' Another feature which

distinguishes channeling from earlier forms of mediumship is public coverage. Contemporary entities are no longer restricted to the confines of the parlour-room or the Spiritualist church, but appear in front of large audiences, can be heard on radio stations, and even provide their own counselling services.<sup>3</sup>

New Age channels or channelers receive spiritual revelations from a wide range of sources; including spirit guides, ascended masters, discarnate animals, devas, fairies, angels, extraterrestrials, the 'Akashic records,' and even 'Barbie doll,' described by her channel as 'the polyethylene essence who is 700 million teaching entities.'<sup>4</sup> Melton et al. point out that the sole purpose of some channeled entities is that of guiding humanity towards its 'awakening,' and link such entities with 'the Buddhist tradition of the Bodhisattva.'<sup>5</sup> Another comparison would be with the ancient Gnostic doctrine of the saviour or illuminator - the one who descends from the world beyond and into this one, in order to reveal the gnosis that will liberate humanity from its bonds to physical existence. It is to a few of these entities of liberation that we now turn.

#### The Church Universal and Triumphant

The Church Universal and Triumphant was founded in Colorado in 1966 by Mark and Elizabeth Clare Prophet. Although Mark 'ascended' in 1973, Elizabeth, in the words of Peters, 'has continued on to become one of the most articulate and powerful leaders of the new age.'<sup>6</sup> Membership of this New Age organization is currently estimated to be in the 'tens of thousands.'<sup>7</sup> Its teachings can be traced to the earlier 'I AM' religious



movement, itself an offshoot of Theosophy. The Church Universal, like its I AM predecessor, holds to the Theosophical view that there are a number of 'ascended masters' guiding humanity's spiritual development. The most important of these is Saint Germain - 'Lord of the Seventh Ray, Hierarch of the Aquarian Age' - who will guide humanity out of the Piscean and into the Aquarian Era.

According to the ascended masters channeled by this organization, humanity exists in a state of isolation from the divine source. Through ignorance of 'the divine plan,' humanity was separated from God, and 'entered into a lesser vibration'; one filled with 'shadowed concepts and murky ideas.' Humanity has fallen from the 'higher octaves of perfection' to the 'lower octaves of human imperfection.' Here, 'every human condition is the perversion of a divine condition.' Here, humanity lives under the archontic shadow of the 'Lords of Karma' who direct the ceaseless process of reincarnation. Archontic religious traditions that uphold the 'idea of a man groveling before his God' are no more than reflections of 'man's descent from an awareness of immortal Selfhood to one of mortal selfhood.' In the bondage of ignorance, humans have 'persisted in thinking of themselves as mere mortals.'<sup>8</sup>

Liberation from 'the very dark, dank energies of human bondage' is achieved by awakening the divine spark, the 'threefold flame': 'there is within you a point of contact with the Divine, a spark of fire from the Creator's own heart which is called the threefold flame of Life.' The threefold flame is 'the spark of man's divinity, his potential for Godhood.' The role of the ascended master is to bring humanity into the

liberating gnosis of its divine status signified by the presence of the inner flame. Saint Germain declares:

I AM come to salute the light of the I AM THAT I AM within you and to give to you a vision to forge your God-identity ... I bring to you the knowledge of the sacred fire and the threefold flame that beats your very own heart.(9)

According to the Church Universal, the self is divided into three levels. The highest level of the self is the 'I AM Presence,' 'Divine Monad,' or 'God Self.' The next level down is that of the 'Christ Self' or 'Christ consciousness.' The lowest level is that of the 'lower self.' The lower self consists of 'the soul evolving through the four planes of Matter [fire, air, water, and earth] in the four lower bodies [etheric, mental, emotional, and physical].' Through awakening the threefold flame, the chela can transcend the limitations of the lower self and attain Christ consciousness: 'The flame within ... is your opportunity to become the Christ.' This is possible because the Christ is not simply the 'only true heir of God,' but 'your own true identity'; an identity which 'the carnal nature has rejected ... since the Fall of Adam and Eve.' The Christ is the one and only begotten son; but he is also 'the body of God which is fragmented and repeated again and again and again for every incoming soul.'<sup>10</sup> This notion of a 'fragmented Christ' recalls a similar doctrine in ancient Gnosticism, whereby the saviour descends, not to empty himself, as in the kenotic Christology of Christianity, but to gather in parts of himself that have been lost in the world of matter. The Gnostic saviour, in the words of Filoramo 'does no more than recover that part of himself, his spiritual substance, that had fallen prisoner to the darkness.'<sup>11</sup> In other words,

'liberation' in Gnosticism is a movement away from diversity and differentiation to 'oneness,' or as Jonas puts it, 'a process of gathering in, of re-collection of what has been so dispersed, and ... the restoration of the original unity.'<sup>12</sup>

In the Church Universal, the process of consciousness expansion does not stop at the recovery of Christ consciousness. The divine spark must return to its original source and become 'a permanent atom in the body of God.' This movement from the lower self, to the Christ Self, and then to the God Self, is known as the 'ritual of the ascension.'<sup>13</sup>

How does the chela awaken the threefold flame and begin the process of ascension? The ascended master Lord Maitreya recognizes that yogic systems of meditation 'offer methods whereby the mind of man can be stilled and a greater attunement with the Divine be achieved.' However, liberation, continues Maitreya, can be attained more easily by Westerners through the recitation of 'decrees.' Decrees 'direct the attention and the energies of the decreer to his own I AM Presence.' They also invoke the spiritual hierarchies to 'anchor their energies ... in order to amplify ... the action of the decree as it is fulfilled in the world of time and space.' Here is an ascension decree revealed by the ascended master El Morya:

I AM ascension light,  
Victory flowing free,  
All of Good won at last  
For all eternity.

I AM light, all weights are gone.  
Into the air I raise;  
To all I pour with full God-power  
My wondrous song of praise.

All hail! I AM the living Christ,  
The ever-loving One.  
Ascended now with full God-power  
I AM a blazing sun!(14)

The Church Universal and Triumphant does appear antagonistic towards the material world of 'shadowed concepts and murky ideas'; but it does not display the same degree of contempt as evidenced in ancient Gnosticism. The world is to be 'transmuted,' rather than rejected; although this is perhaps a more subtle form of rejection, or at least of devaluation. Through the attainment of Christ consciousness, the chela raises the vibration rate of surrounding matter; he or she raises 'all earth to heaven above.' This results in the appearance of some nonmaterial paradise modelled after the lost continents of Atlantis and Lemuria. All problems relating to this material plane will in fact be eradicated, not by direct political action or social analysis (this New Age organization links communism and the 'black power movement' with the forces of darkness), but by going within. As Saint Germain declares: 'all problems of the economy, the ecology, and the government can be solved if you will take only ten minutes each day to go within and ... find your own God Self.' There is 'only one activity that can resolve the crisis of division ... throughout the earth, and it is the violet flame.'<sup>15</sup> But why, in the last analysis, should an Aquarian heaven on earth matter anyway? For the Church Universal, as for the Gnostics, the ultimate goal of earthly existence is to escape from the 'dank energies of human bondage' and be reunified with the nonmaterial Absolute. What relevance does an Aquarian heaven on earth hold for one who has been transmuted into 'a permanent atom in the body of God?'

## Ramtha

One of the most popular and controversial entities to have appeared in the contemporary channeling renaissance is 'Ramtha,' a 35,000-year-old warrior of Lemurian descent, channeled by J. Z. Knight. Knight was first contacted by Ramtha in Washington, 1977. He explained to her: 'I am Ramtha, the Enlightened One, and I have come to help you over the ditch.' Since his incarnation Ramtha has become part of the Great White Brotherhood, and Knight serves as his channel. In the mid-1980s, Knight set up Sovereignty Inc., a profit-based organization which coordinates Knight's appearances, and publishes a selection of Ramtha books, cassettes, and videotapes.<sup>16</sup>

'I am here to remind you of a heritage you forgot long, long ago,' declares Ramtha, remaining faithful to his role of cosmic illuminator. What humanity has forgotten is its true nature: 'you are, indeed, divine and immortal entities who have always been loved and supported by the essence called God.' But this God has 'never been outside of you; it is you ... the supreme intelligence that lies forgotten but ever-present within man.' Every individual is a light fragment, a 'particum' of the Absolute. For millions of years these light fragments have been returning to the material plane, incarnation after incarnation. Why?: 'Because you became so immersed in the illusion of this plane that you forgot the awesome power that flows through you.' In the space of ten million years,

you have gone from being sovereign and all-powerful entities, to where you are now - utterly lost in matter; enslaved by your own creations of dogma, law, fashion and tradition; separated by country, creed, sex and race; immersed in jealousy, bitterness, guilt and fear. Through groveling for

survival, you forgot the greatness that you are.

This teaching, continues Ramtha 'is not a religious understanding ... This teaching is simply knowledge.'<sup>17</sup>

It is here that Ramtha introduces a new twist in the Gnostic drama; humanity is not a helpless recipient of material tyranny - it is the creator of it. The divine particums themselves were responsible for creating human forms through which they could experience a material realm of their own making. Through continued attachment to these created forms, humans have been conditioned to think of themselves as limited, finite beings, victims of fate and circumstance. Yet the truth is that 'through your divine intelligence and freedom of will [you] have created every reality in your life.' This also means that with 'that same power, you have the option to create and experience any reality you desire.' The power that has enabled individuals to create their own limitations can be used to 'create unlimitedness.' The logical conclusion of this is that there are no real 'victims' in life; no one 'is ever born a victim of fate or circumstance. Entities born directly into sickness, impairment in their bodies, or wretched conditions, have chosen that for themselves.' This is each entity's 'divine right.'<sup>18</sup> It is obvious that Ramtha's Gnosticism, as with its ancient counterpart, professes a radical devaluation of the material world. But, whereas the ancient Gnostics at least acknowledged the reality of their surroundings, Ramtha views the external world as being merely an extension of consciousness. Ramtha, can also affirm the Gnostic doctrine of the divine self. But, whereas the classical Gnostics

desired its extrapolation from the world of matter, Ramtha calls on its ability to manipulate, control, and even create this same world. The 'puny cell of the creator' (Marcion) has been transformed (and further denigrated) into the pliable extension of mind.

Another conclusion of Ramtha's solipsistic worldview is that there is neither law nor truth in the phenomenal realm. Only humans living in a state of illusory limitation create 'the regulation of laws to govern the actions of entities.' Ramtha goes on to declare: 'Everything is true, because whatever one thinks ... is reality in his kingdom ... Everyone is right, because everyone is a god who has the freedom to create his own truth.' Truth 'is optional ... all are gods who create truth according to their freedom of will.' Two forces responsible for the retardation of this 'freedom of will' are mainstream Christianity and an evil entity by the name of Jehovah. These forces have taught that 'God is an angry, judgmental, and fearsome entity who exists outside of man.' Through dogma, laws, regulations and other means of suppression, these forces have turned 'man the god' into 'man the enslaved.'<sup>19</sup>

Ramtha's streak of antinomianism is of course not new to the spirit of Gnosticism. For some classical Gnostic sects, Yahweh, the demiurge, is not only an incompetent craftsman but a celestial despot. He is 'just' (dikaios) in the sense of being a ruthless and uncompromising deity. He imposes his law (nomos) to the full, unhindered by any element of forgiveness or love. The law in fact is designed to keep humanity in a state of ignorance. The antinomian Gnostic takes note of

the law, and then by deliberately 'running between the extremes' (enantiodromia) of asceticism and libertinism, undermines it. Opposite as these types of conduct are, they both derive from the same antinomian root; as Jonas observes: 'The one repudiates allegiance to nature through excess, the other, through abstention.' Not all Gnostic sects were antinomian to these extremes, but as Jonas again comments: 'Generally speaking, the pneumatic morality is determined by hostility toward the world and contempt for all mundane ties.' Gnostic antinomianism may simply express itself in a 'general toning-down of all relations to the things of the world, in reducing their hold upon the soul and keeping a cautious distance from them.'<sup>20</sup> For those that were antinomian in the extreme, libertinism was viewed as a natural birthright, a prerogative of the pneumatikos. The 'man of spirit' is, as Walker points out, '"saved by nature", and his divine spirit will remain unpolluted by any "evil" act he may commit.'<sup>21</sup> Not so the sarkikos, the puppet of heimarmene, whose only option is to live and perish by the law.

Like Saint Germain, Ramtha foresees the imminent arrival of a New Age on earth - this will be the 'Age of God' when 'disease, suffering, hatred, and war will no longer be on this plane.' This age will witness the second coming of Christ; but this Christ will be 'the realization by each of you that you are a divine and immortal principle ... what is termed God.' Yet, it would be fair to say that Ramtha's commitment to a global utopia on earth is somewhat compromised given his previous allegiance to selfist ethics, and of course, to the belief that the



'true kingdom is not this plane of matter, but the kingdom of thought and emotion that created and gives meaning to this plane.'<sup>22</sup>

### Emmanuel

Ramtha's teachings are similar in style and content to those of other popular entities. Take for example 'Emmanuel' channeled by Pat Rodegast. Emmanuel, as Melton et al. report, first appeared to Rodegast 'clairvoyantly' as a 'being of light.' Emmanuel's teachings are recorded in the 'immensely popular' Emmanuel's Book: A Manual for Living Comfortably in the Cosmos. For Melton et al. this work is of a 'reassuring tone,' offering 'assurances that there is nothing to fear in the universe.'<sup>23</sup> Beyond this however, there is nothing particularly new, challenging, nor - from an environmental standpoint - 'comforting' in Emmanuel's revelations.

'I am here,' declares Emmanuel, 'to direct you Home.' For humans do not really belong to the earth, 'a transient place'; 'Heaven is your home.' The physical universe is but 'the smallest of dimensions in the eternal greatness.' From the overall perspective it is also the least 'spiritual,' least 'real': 'all things that exist in your world first existed in spirit. The concept comes first, then the physical, which is denser matter, follows.' Humans themselves are creatures of two worlds: 'you are here as a spirit being to function within a physical reality.' In Emmanuel's dualistic theology bodies are no more than 'chosen vehicles that souls are inhabiting ... rather like space suits.'<sup>24</sup>

Humans have fallen from their nonphysical home to learn, and to achieve gnosis: 'you have stopped at this level of consciousness to remember who you are.' They have forgotten that they are already one with God. Gnosis is the means of recovering transcendent identity: 'know yourself and you will know God.' Through the discipline of meditation (a list of exercises is printed at the back of the book) the individual can become 'self-realized,' which at the same time is God-realization, for 'You and God are one.' Once this has taken place the individual is liberated from the physical cosmos; free to 'discontinue the reincarnational cycles and follow ... [the] soul's desire to higher levels of consciousness.' Such liberation is not an option, but the focal point of human progress: 'I honestly cannot think of anything more unpleasant than to remain forever locked in your schoolroom ... You are here to visit not to remain.'<sup>25</sup>

For Emmanuel the earth serves as a platform from which humans can progress and return to their invisible home. It is 'not your prison but your schoolroom,' and it provides many 'wondrous and valuable' learning experiences. Moreover, as with Ramtha, Emmanuel does not consider the earth to be a schoolroom outwith the individual's control. The earth is 'a physically symbolized reality,' and every human situation is the 'illusory creation of the soul's consciousness.' In other words, you are the 'creator of everything in your life'; 'This is not a world of victimization.' So in control are we of this pliable extension of consciousness that 'Anything that can be envisioned can be brought into your physical reality'; 'You can create for yourself a garden of bliss if you desire it.' An ecological sensibility has little significance in

Emmanuel's spirituality for the world is really an illusory manifestation of consciousness. Thus the accumulation of wealth or the destruction of life-systems 'is not taking something away from someone else.' As a manifestation of consciousness 'Your universe is boundless. There is more than enough of everything for everybody.'<sup>26</sup>

Emmanuel's Book claims to be a manual for 'living comfortably' in the cosmos. Although this might be disputed, it is certainly a manual for helping the 'comfortably living' to feel less responsible for those who have 'chosen' not to generate their own 'garden of bliss.'

#### Saviours from the Stars

To be included in this chapter on channeling is the growing interest in receiving communications from extraterrestrial saviours. Here, as in channeling, there is, in the words of Robert Ellwood et al., the 'conviction that against the backdrop of an ultimately monistic and impersonal universe range powerful and generally innumerable friends, superior to man.' These celestial creatures have 'come to warn us and aid us in our folly.'<sup>27</sup> After making physical contact with the unsuspecting human (the contactee), the extraterrestrials share their wisdom, and warn of catastrophes which will overcome the earth if humanity does not change its ways. The contactee has been chosen to deliver this celestial wisdom to the world, and remains in telepathic communication with the aliens after they have departed.

One such contactee is Ken Carey, who has received 'neurobiologically' transmitted messages from alien sources. According

to Carey's interstellar saviours, humans have no identity distinct from the Absolute. When humans first took on material forms, they were still able to oscillate between their 'pre-manifest state' and 'species role-form.' However, present humanity has fallen into the illusion of separation, through a lack of faith in 'the absolute perfection of the universal design.' It is stuck in its species-role form, no longer able to oscillate back to the pre-manifest state. This illusory separation has cut humanity off from direct nourishment by the 'divine energy,' which in turn has lead to an era of global crisis. 'It is important,' the communications continue, 'that you return to a consciousness of your true self'; to the 'primal void where all exists in a state of potential.'<sup>28</sup>

According to Gabriel Green of the Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America (AFSCA), the present world crisis will culminate in some form of battle between the 'Forces of Darkness' and the 'Light Forces.' If the latter gain the upper hand, then Christ will come again, and the Kingdom of God will manifest itself. There will be '"a new beginning, a New Order of the Ages ... the establishment of the Golden Millennium Age of Mankind ... a reuniting with our space brothers from the stars."' The space brothers will in fact be responsible for this victory: '"in the throes of social and political upheaval ... on the brink of self-annihilation,"' the space brothers have come '"to show us the way out of our crisis and the solutions to our problems."' The celestial saviours also bring with them the promise of '"personal journeys beyond the stars"'<sup>29</sup> perhaps fulfilling Trevelyan's vision of humanity's liberation from its 'disintegrating mooring to an old and dying world.'

## CHAPTER ELEVEN : NEO - EASTERN

### Eastern and Neo-Eastern Spirituality

The New Age movement is saturated with concepts and practices derived from Eastern religious traditions. At the level of social analysis for example, theorists like Capra locate a contemporary malaise in the West's preference for 'Yang' values over 'Yin.' At a more experiential level, Eastern ideas find their way into the movement via meditation and yoga classes. Yoga activities, according to Johannes Aagaard, 'engage millions of people in all parts of the world.' He adds - with more than a hint of conspiratorial reasoning - that such practices, nolens volens, 'put them [those who practice yoga] under the influence of this or that yoga tradition and make them objects of a yogic ideology.' The true significance of such exercises may be the prerogative of a few 'illuminati,' but nevertheless, 'the yogic worldview/cosmology gradually becomes part of the life-style of the participants.'<sup>1</sup> Elements of Eastern thought can also be found within a variety of holistic health therapies (acupuncture, reiki, etc.), and psycho-therapies (for example, Jungian, humanistic, and transpersonal psychology). Even groups like the Lectorium Rosicrucianum - which views itself as the latest link in the Western esoteric tradition - does not hesitate to incorporate elements of kundalini yoga within its framework.

Beyond this level of syncretistic borrowing, there exists a number of New Age groups and movements which display a deeper level of intimacy with Eastern traditions. Many of these - like ISKCON and the

Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement - sprung up in the 1960s under the influence of newly-arrived teachers from the East. Other movements are of a more 'home-grown' nature, combining, say, traditional Buddhism with feminist and systems theory.

Nevertheless, according to researchers like Peters and Harvey Cox, New Age groups and movements which express this level of intimacy with traditional Eastern religions should be categorized as neo-Eastern (or neo-Oriental) rather than simply Eastern. What we find in the New Age argues Peters is a 'distinctively Western version of things Eastern.' Neo-Eastern religions he claims are shaped by the powerful biblical symbol of the 'kingdom of God'; a symbol which declares that it is 'God's intention that this world be different from what it is.' It is this symbol, he asserts, which is 'the driving force to establish a global society that will put an end to poverty, oppression, and war.' The New Age is, overall, an 'attempted marriage of East and West.'<sup>2</sup> Cox's analysis is similar; 'neo-Oriental' groups

are far more 'neo-' than 'Oriental.' Their leaders have stirred in such generous portions of the occult, of Christian images and vocabulary, and of Western organizational patterns, that trying to understand them in relation to an older "mother tradition" can ultimately be quite misleading.

Cox's analysis of the Sikh-based 'Happy, Healthy, Holy Organization' (3HO) highlights the difficulties in attempting to relate New Age groups to some 'mother tradition.' As in classical Sikhism, this group prompts its members to wear turbans. However, whereas in classical Sikhism the turban is worn to indicate one's membership to the Khalsa, 'in the 3HO movement the long hair is gathered on the forehead and covered by a

turban to protect a particularly sensitive area of the brain from malignant cosmic rays.' 'Obviously,' as Cox concludes, 'studying this group in terms of classical Sikhism would cause more confusion than clarification.'<sup>3</sup> A similar point could be made about Macy's 'Despair and Empowerment' movement. This combines key Buddhist doctrines (like anatta and Pratitya-Samutpada) and meditation practice with systems and feminist theory.

A further consideration is made by Cox, who recognizes that certain neo-Eastern groups are more 'Western' than others, and he proceeds to differentiate between groups on the basis of their 'adaptation' to Western culture. Some, like the Transcendental Meditation movement and Maharaj Ji's Divine Light Mission (now called 'Elan Vital'), 'which has its own Telex system and public-relations firm,' exist at the level of 'high adaptation.' Others, like ISKCON, whose members not only wear traditional Indian dress and try to learn Sanskrit, but attempt to create an authentic Indian ethos, exist at the level of 'nonadaptation.' Most groups, like the Zen Buddhist movement, exist somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, and 'appear able to adapt very well in the realm of outside forms while retaining an impressive "inner" authenticity.' Most neo-Eastern groups, concludes Cox, are a 'hodgepodge of "authentic" and "adaptive" elements.'<sup>4</sup>

### Eastern Religions and an Ecological Sensibility

Over the last twenty-five years there has been growing interest in the contribution that Eastern religions can make to the cultivation of an ecological sensibility. This interest dates back at least to White's

historic essay on religion and the environment. He argued that the environmental crisis was at heart a religious problem, demanding a religious response. Yet as Christianity had in large measure caused the problem in the first place, the religious solution lay either in a reconstruction of the Christian tradition or by looking elsewhere. And this elsewhere was the East:

More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion or rethink our old one. The beatniks, who are the basic revolutionaries of our time, show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view.(5)

White's views are reiterated in more contemporary works. According to Sri Sewaki Saran in the recently published Hinduism and Ecology,

'History has shown that those cultures which are not respectful to nature do not last long: they bring about their own downfall. Vedic culture, on the other hand, has lasted for many thousands of years and is still visible even now. It is called sanatan dharma - the way of life which lasts for ever, self-perpetuating and regenerating.'(6)

At a more sophisticated level of analysis Macy has attempted to show that the Buddhist doctrine of anatta is an excellent resource for the development of an 'ecological self.' Environmental ethicist J. Baird Callicott makes a similar claim in regard to Confucianism. Echoing the words of many feminists, he argues that 'The prevailing modern Western concept of the human individual is not only other-worldly and dualistic (the Pythagorean-Platonic-Cartesian heritage), it is atomistic ... as well.' 'Confucius,' by contrast,

understood the individual to be exhaustively defined by his or her unique social relations ... Who am I - the son of my



parent , the father of my son, the husband of my wife, ... and so on and on. I am nothing apart from my context ... Now if we move up a level from the human community to the biotic community, it will also be the case that each individual person and mankind as a whole are defined, exhaustively, by our respective individual and collective relationship to the natural environment. Therefore, if we adopt this generalized Confucian idea, it will be impossible to think of oneself or of mankind either as outside of or as opposed to or as transcendent of nature. The well-being of mankind and the well-being of the environment, the future of mankind and the future of the environment, the richness and complexity of human life and the richness and complexity of the environment will be inconceivable apart from one another.(7)

Some past assessments have however been simplistic to the point that Western religion is presented as some unified anti-ecological entity, and Eastern traditions as the converse. Huston Smith, a professor of philosophy at MIT, has written:

'Asia retained a deep, unquestioning confidence in nature, appreciative of it, receptive to it. Had the Chinese and Indians not risen above the natural plane at all, they would not have spawned civilizations. The way in which they did transcend it, however, was by confirming it. They dignified it by affirming it consciously. By contrast the West oppositioned [sic] herself to nature in a stance that was reserved and critical. Its civilization receded progressively from the natural and instinctive and set up against them ...'(8)

McDaniel is perhaps closer to the mark with his observation that 'like Christianity, individual Eastern religions are often ambiguous. They contain strands of thinking that are resourceful for a life-centred ethic and strands that are not.'<sup>9</sup> The Upanishads are an obvious example of such ambiguity. Ranchor Prime cites the following verse from the Isa Upanishad as representative of Hinduism's ecological wisdom: "Everything in the universe belongs to the Lord. You should therefore only take what is really necessary for yourself, which is set aside for

you. You should not take anything else, because you know to whom it belongs.'" The message of this verse, according to Prime, is that 'everything, from a blade of grass to the whole cosmos, is the home of God ... the whole creation is sacred.'<sup>10</sup> If this is reflective of the Vedantic tradition as a whole, it would be interesting to hear Prime's thoughts on this verse from the Maitri Upanishad: 'Foul-smelling, insubstantial is this body, a compact mass ... of bile and phlegm ... We see this whole [world] decay ... Save [me from it], I pray thee.'<sup>11</sup> Callicott himself has raised doubts concerning the ecological wisdom of the 'Asiatic' traditions. The 'philosophies of the Indian sub-continent,' he contends:

seem to share a pragmatic emphasis on either personal transcendence of or detachment from nature - at least as phenomenally manifested. That autistic indifference to natural phenomena does not provide, to my mind, the sort of affirmative, actively engaged moral attitude toward nature required for a proper environmental ethic.(12)

Many commentators would disagree with such a harsh assessment. Hackett for example has this to say on the world- and life-affirming message of Buddhism, based on the example of its founder:

if separate release for each person is the goal, should an enlightened person ... not find the most appropriate expression of his new state of living release in a life of withdrawal and meditation, rather than in a life of compassionate love and devotion to others still in a state of ignorance and bondage? For the Buddha, such outgoing concern seemed to be an essential expression of enlightenment, rather than merely an open possibility: though it is the responsibility of each person to seek deliverance, the release that comes broadens his vision to see that his new state of freedom is precisely a bondage of love, so that he does not regard the promise of nirvana as an individual goal, but as a destiny that one achieves in loving unity with all suffering beings ... the nirvana that one enters alone is ... not the true nirvana: in fact, the notion ultimately dawns that nirvana is not separation from samsara ... but instead it is

the realization of devoted oneness with others in an inclusive outreach for which the ethical difference between nirvana and samsara simply dissolves. Such a person [who realizes this] is a bodhisattva ...(13)

Indeed, for ecofeminists like Macy, the Buddhist doctrine of anatta seems to provide an excellent resource of ecological wisdom, freeing the self from the delusion of its atomistic impenetrability, allowing it to expand into wider fields of identification. And it is this expanded sense of identity - rather than mere ethical obligation - which underlies the compassion of the Bodhisattva. As one Buddhist text declares:

By constant use the idea of an 'I' attaches itself to foreign drops of seed and blood, although the thing exists not. Then why should I not conceive my fellow's body as my own self? ... I will cease to live as self, and will take as my self my fellow-creatures ... [and] so exercise the spirit of helpfulness and tenderness towards the world ...(14)

Nevertheless, McDaniel's remark that Eastern religious traditions - when taken as a whole - remain 'ambiguous' is hard to dispute. A similar comment can be applied to New Age neo-Eastern groups and movements. While some appear to be particularly conducive to an ecological sensibility, some do not, and indeed, seem to fit very well into the patriarchal/Gnostic framework. It is to two examples of the latter that we now turn - ISKCON and Eckankar.

#### ISKCON

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded in North America in 1966 by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896 - 1977). This movement traces its roots back to the Vaishnava

theology of the sixteenth-century Bengali mystic Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Its central scripture is the Bhagavad Gita. During the 1960s and 1970s, ISKCON 'was to become one of the most visible NRMs [New Religious Movements], its devotees, with their shaven heads and brightly coloured Indian dress, dancing and chanting their mantra.' Before his death, Prabhupada appointed eleven 'initiating gurus' and charged them with the responsibility of maintaining the movement's spiritual standards. Within ten years of his death however, 'about half of the original gurus ... had left or been expelled from the movement.' Some contemporary devotees 'have left ISKCON, while still espousing Krishna consciousness; others have tried to keep the movement in order by remaining inside.'<sup>15</sup> Some commentators may disagree at my inclusion of ISKCON in the New Age movement, suggesting it is more properly seen as a type of NRM. On the other hand it can just as easily be seen, to use Geisler's interpretation, as a 'cultic manifestation' of New Age thought. The reason why ISKCON has been included in this thesis is because it is a movement which proclaims an immanent shift in consciousness - brought about by the chanting of its devotees - which will bring to an end the 'Old Age' and the old social system of 'Kali Yuga.' As one devotee has recently said:

'Society at the moment is falling to pieces ... But when Krishna is awakened in the hearts of everyone through the practice of devotion, in the hearts of all society's leaders, then there will be peace. Once the leaders become aware that everything is God's property rather than trying to steal and exploit it, we will have the Golden Age. Through the sublime chanting, transcendental consciousness will be revived.'<sup>(16)</sup>

The material world, according to ISKCON, is an emanation of Krishna (Krsna), the 'Supreme Personality of Godhead': 'Krsna is the

fountainhead of everything, of all emanations. He [a wise man] knows that whatever he sees is but an emanation of Krsna.' This, argues Prabhupada, is verified in the Bhagavad Gita (10: 8) where Krsna declares to Arjuna: '"I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me."' However, as in Gnosticism, this monistic cosmogony is actually 'dualism on a monistic background.' The material world is a shadow and distortion of the 'spiritual' one. As Prabhupada comments: 'Whatever is found in this material world can also be found in perfection in Krsna. The difference is that in the material world everything is manifest in a perverted form.' Thus 'sex play' on earth 'is but the perverted reflection of the love that is found in the spiritual world.' Indeed, love of anything in this world 'is a perverted reflection of our love of God.'<sup>17</sup>

The material universe is governed by Brahma from his residence in 'Brahmaloka':

In the material world the topmost planet is called Satyaloka, or Brahmaloka. Beings of the greatest talents live on this planet. The presiding deity of Brahmaloka is Brahma, the first created being of this material world. Brahma is ... the most talented personality in the material world. He is not so talented that he is in the category of God, but he is in the category of those living entities directly dominated by God.

Brahma has at his disposal a number of astrological powers. These powers control an individual's 'imprisonment' on earth: 'every part of our body is influenced by the respective stars ... [our] terms of imprisonment [are fulfilled] by the manipulation of such astronomical influences.'<sup>18</sup> (Compare this with the Gnostic doctrine of the astrological archons who determine heimarmene.)

For some unknown reason humanity has fallen into the material world: 'Somehow or another ... we have fallen into this material ocean, and as the waves toss, we suffer.' We suffer as a result of karma; the universal law of cause and effect that forces each individual to return to earth, incarnation after incarnation. It is ignorance that binds us to the karmic wheel - ignorance of what we are, and where we have come from. Some however are less ignorant than others. During its fall, the soul descends into one of three strands (gunas) of matter - dullness/ignorance (tamas), energy/passion (rajas), or goodness (sattva). A soul embedded within tamas is 'completely forgetful of his spiritual nature' (compare with the Gnostic sarkikos); one embedded within rajas is 'almost forgetful, but still has an instinct of spiritual nature' (the Gnostic psychikos); one embedded within sattva is 'completely in search of spiritual perfection' (the Gnostic pneumatikos).<sup>19</sup>

'The aim of the Krsna consciousness movement,' declares Prabhupada, 'is to bring all living entities back to their original consciousness.' This entails anamnesis: 'our aim is to awaken mankind to its normal condition.' It also entails liberation from the material environment and corporeality: 'the more one advances in Krsna consciousness, the more he becomes free from bodily designations and this material entanglement.' The process of liberation, of returning to Krsna consciousness, begins with knowledge: 'The knowledge is both jnana and vijnana, theoretical wisdom and scientific knowledge. If one becomes well-versed in this knowledge, liberation is certain.' It is essential that humans attain the knowledge of what they are, and what they are

not. They are not the body: 'The very first step in self-realization is realizing one's identity as separate from the body.' The body is 'a bag of stool, urine, blood and bones ... whoever accepts this body as the self ... is illusioned.' Behind the body is the real self, the eternal soul. True knowledge is the realization, not only that the soul is the essential self, but that it is a part of Krsna, a fragment of the divine: 'we are originally pure spirit soul, part and parcel of Krsna, and therefore our original constitutional position is as pure as God's.' According to Prabhupada this is verified in the Bhagavad Gita (15:7), where Krsna declares: '"The living entities in this conditional world are My fragmented parts, and they are eternal."'20

Once we realize what we are, and what we are not, it becomes clear that the purpose of our earthly existence is to 'regain paradise and return home, back to Godhead.' In the present age, the age of Kali, this is easier said than done. In 'this age of kali, an age characterized by ignorance and chaos, liberation is out of reach of practically everyone.' Fortunately, Krsna, in his role as divine saviour, descends periodically to earth in order to liberate humanity from the bondage of matter and ignorance: 'Krsna comes to the material universe out of His love for us to deliver us from the miseries of birth and death.' According to ISKCON, Krsna's last incarnation was as the medieval mystic Caitanya Mahaprabhu. As Caitanya, Krsna revealed the soteriological scheme appropriate for this present age - devotional service (bhakti) to Krsna through dance and chant: 'hare krsna hare krsna krsna krsna hare hare/ hare rama hare rama rama rama hare hare.'21

Through devotion to krsna, the soul is liberated from 'this endlessly mutable world' and returns to Godhead. But ISKCON is also convinced that devotion to Krsna can lead to an earthly utopia. Although the age of Kali will last for another 400,000 years, there will be an interim period of 10,000 years in which '"this congregational chanting will become dominant all over the world and usher in a worldwide social change that will affect all areas of corporate society.'" 'If the world takes up this Krsna consciousness,' asserts Prabhupada, 'the planet is certain to be peaceful.' The establishment of such a New Age on earth by ISKCON is compromised in at least three respects. Firstly, everything material is regarded by ISKCON as the antithesis of everything spiritual: 'Either we love matter, or we love God.' The practice of Krsna consciousness is viewed as an 'antimaterial activity.' Secondly, the whole purpose of our earthly existence is to escape from it: 'living entities must return home, back to Godhead ... They must not remain to rot in this miserable land of material existence.' Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, the practice of Krsna consciousness is a spirituality that enjoins the termination of social responsibility:

national duties, social duties and humanitarian duties are obligatory only to those who are bereft of spiritual duties. As soon as a man takes his birth on this earth, not only does he have national, social and humanitarian obligations, but he also has obligations to the demigods who supply air, water, etc. ... He has obligations to all kinds of living beings, to his forefathers, family members and so forth ... But as soon as one engages himself in the one single obligatory duty - the duty of spiritual perfection - then he automatically liquidates all other obligations without having to make separate efforts.(22)



## Eckankar

Eckankar was formed in 1965 by Sri Paul Twitchell. The teachings of Eckankar are said to have been handed down from an unbroken line of Eck (spirit) Masters. Twitchell - the 971st Eck Master - received his mantle from the Tibetan Master 'Rebazar Tarzs.' When Twitchell 'translated' to the spirit realms in 1971, he was replaced by Sri Darwin Gross. The movement's present Eck Master is Sri Harold Klemp, otherwise known as 'Wah Z.' Eckankar is said to be a form of 'surat shabda yoga'; a yogic system 'which concentrates on physical techniques and spiritual exercises that enable the soul to travel beyond the physical limitations of the body to the higher spiritual realms of the "Sugmad" [the Absolute].' Membership to Eckankar is by annual subscription. As members, chelas receive a series of ECK discourses and further monthly correspondence by mail. The chela is expected to practice a number of spiritual exercises at home on a daily basis. Members 'do not live in communities. No hard and fast rules for behaviour are laid down, although moderation in life-style is encouraged.' Eckankar's membership was estimated to be between 40,000 and 60,000 in the early 1980s.<sup>23</sup>

In Eckankar, the material universe is viewed as the lowest emanation of the supreme God, 'SUGMAD': 'All life flows from the SUGMAD, downward into the worlds below.' As in ancient Gnosticism, this is again 'dualism on a monistic background.' A sharp division is made between the realm of the SUGMAD ('Anami Lok') and the 'three lower worlds' ('Pinda,' 'Anda,' and 'Brahmanda'). Pinda is the material universe. Anda is the 'astral plane' which contains a number of sub-planes, heavens, purgatories and spiritual entities. The highest of the

three lower worlds is Brahmanda, governed by an entity called 'Kar Niranjan.' Kar Niranjan is

creator of the physical universe and lord of all there is contained within it. He is the Lord God that all the old prophets speak of in the Bible ... the Jehovah of the Jewish faith, Allah of the Mohammedans, and the Brahm of the Vedantists.'

He is the creator of karma and reincarnation. It is his wish 'to keep us here as long as he can, in relationship with our karma.' Many on earth, not knowing any other God, worship Kar Niranjan as the supreme deity. In truth, he is 'only a subordinate in the hierarchy of the universe; neither is he free of imperfection.'<sup>24</sup>

Human beings descended voluntarily into the material world for a purpose: to gain 'experience in conscious awareness to become co-workers with God upon returning to that heavenly realm.' Unfortunately, humans have forgotten this, and are now trapped in matter. Twitchell, like the ancient Gnostic treatise called the 'Hymn of the Pearl,' uses the analogy of the 'prodigal son' to explain humanity's predicament:

While living in this physical body, we are like the prodigal sons who are sent forth from our father's house. We have forgotten who we are and what we are, and who and what the Father is ... We have fallen and hurt ourselves, darkened the lamp of intuition, so that we no longer know why we are here.(25)

The aim of earthly existence is 'liberation from the world of matter, energy, space and time'; liberation from 'the bondage of flesh.' This is possible because humans possess a soul - the 'Atma Sarup' - which is distinct from the body. The Atma Sarup is the real self; it is

also a fragment of the SUGMAD:

each of us has in consciousness a spark of God ... It is this God-spark which we come to know as the real self within all people ... This is the part of man that leaves the body, goes into another state in the spiritual world, and sees itself as being immortal. It is this part of man that makes the contact with God, recognizes itself as being part of the divine plan, and operates free of the lower worlds and their materialism.

Eckankar is the 'Ancient Science of Soul travel.' Its principles enable the Atma Sarup to 'leave the physical body, [and] travel through the higher spiritual worlds.' Its ultimate destination is the 'true heaven, wherein dwells the SUGMAD, God.' As Twitchell writes:

The spiritual purpose of ECK is simply to be able to reach that realm of spirit which is known as the Kingdom of Heaven, where God, the SUGMAD, has established His fountainhead in the universe of universes. Hence, soul travel is the means that we use as the vehicle of return to our true home.(26)

Members of Eckankar utilize a number of disciplines in their attempt to 'lift the soul upward into the highest world.' These include the recitation of mantras, and meditation exercises in which the chela visualizes the soul leaving the body via the crown chakra on the head. In doing so, the chela eventually comes, not to the SUGMAD, but to 'the gate of the first cosmic world.' In ancient Gnosticism it is believed that the liberated soul must confront the archontic powers of the fallen cosmos before it gains admittance to the pleroma. This idea is also found in Eckankar. The primary obstacle faced by the chela in his or her ascent to the SUGMAD 'is that of meeting the lord of each [astral] world.' The chela will hear a 'great humming sound similar to the roll of thunder,' and a voice 'will speak out of the silence.' The voice asks the chela a riddle; for example: '"I am He, whom you know as

God, but I am not God. I am in every man, but I am not in every man. My love is in you, but not in you." When such riddles are solved, the chela may 'pass on to the higher world.' In the upper regions of the three lower worlds, the chela may encounter a number of disembodied entities, including soul guides and ascended ECK Masters. These beings are 'agents of God,' sent 'into the lower worlds from time to time to help lead us out of the morass of humanity and back to him.' Even the SUGMAD, in his role as divine saviour, 'descends to the human level, on occasions, to perform the duty of directing souls back toward His realm again.'<sup>27</sup>

As with other Gnostic variants, the aim of Eckankar is to escape from 'the body with its narrow limitations'; to leave behind 'all these mortal worlds where all things sooner or later perish.' It expresses well the Gnostic's promethean urge towards self-infinetization, which has its corollary in the rejection of everything associated with finitude: 'death is only an appearance, an illusion that every person can overcome.' Any spiritual renaissance brought about by Eckankar will certainly not manifest itself on this lowly plane: 'Oil and water do not mix, and neither do divine spirit and the materiality of thought.'<sup>28</sup>

## C H A P T E R   T W E L V E :   P S Y C H O L O G I C A L

What is light to the 'average sensual man' has become the dark of the gnosticist. The external world was clean outside his Pleroma, his All: hostile to it and irreconcilable with it. Absorbed in his lightsome world of phantasy, the world of fact was his shadow. For the gnosticist, it would seem, there was but one misfortune, and that was involvement in this material world. There was but one sin - any further involvement in this material world. There was but one repentance required, and that was to turn from the false light of the eyes to the true light of interior illumination.

Victor White<sup>1</sup>

### The Dualistic Side of Jungian Psychology

In Part One it was suggested that Jung's spirituality of psychological individuation shares much in common with the ecological dynamic of New Age spirituality - an abandonment of the dualism between the material and the supernatural, and a desire to integrate into conscious life the neglected and repressed aspects of personality - the feminine, the instinctual, the 'shadow.' Again, Jung's belief that dreams can serve as a source of divine revelation and spiritual development has made much impact upon feminists and others who no longer see institutional creeds and organizations as offering much in the direction of personal wholeness. Dream exploration or 'dreamwork' has become a feature of ecological spiritualities like feminist Wicca. On the other hand, feminists claim that Jung's psychology represents another patriarchal religion, and the reasons for this will now be discussed. One way into this discussion may be to consider the relationship between Jung's psychology and Gnosticism, although, as we shall see, there are more certain grounds for making the connection between Jung and patriarchal consciousness.

In ancient Gnosticism 'liberation' is liberation out of matter; escape from the realm of the demiurge; the ascent of the divine spark through the archontic planetary spheres and a return to the pleroma. According to Jonas however, in a 'later stage' of development, the Gnostic drama was to be 'internalized,' 'psychologized.' He writes:

In a later stage of 'gnostic' development (though no longer passing under the name of Gnosticism) the external topology of the ascent through the spheres, with the successive divesting of the soul of its worldly envelopments and the regaining of its original acosmic nature, could be 'internalized' and find its analogue in a psychological technique of inner transformations by which the self, while still in the body, might attain the Absolute as an immanent, if temporary, condition: an ascending scale of mental states replaces the stations of the mythical itinerary.(2)

Without a doubt, Jungian psychology is a clear example of such 'psychologized' Gnosticism. In his autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Jung describes his need to find historical antecedents to his psychology of individuation: 'If I had not succeeded in finding such evidence, I would never have been able to substantiate my ideas.' Jung found what he was looking for in alchemy, which for him was the medieval equivalent of ancient Gnosticism. In the experiences of the alchemists

I had stumbled upon the historical counterpart of my psychology of the unconscious. The possibility of a comparison with alchemy, and the uninterrupted intellectual chain back to Gnosticism, gave substance to my psychology.(3)

Robert Segal, a professor of Religious Studies at Louisiana State University, notes that Jung considered alchemy to be 'a more important prefiguration of his psychology than Gnosticism.' Whether it was in response to Gnosticism's otherworldliness, or to the paucity of materials available to him, 'Jung found Gnosticism too distant a

phenomenon to be tied directly to modern psychology and saw alchemy as the medieval nexus between the two.' Yet, despite his preference for alchemy over Gnosticism, Jung interprets them both identically. As Segal comments:

For Jung, the alchemical process of extracting gold from base metals is a continuation of the Gnostic process of liberating fallen sparks from matter. Both processes are seemingly outward, physical or metaphysical ones which in fact are inner, psychological ones. Both represent a progression from sheer ego consciousness to the ego's rediscovery of the unconscious and reintegration with it to forge the self.(4)

In Jung's psychology, the Gnostic process of emanation is viewed as representing the emergence of ego from the unconscious. The Alien God is the unconscious; the creation of the material world is the genesis of ego-personality. The demiurge represents the unfoldment of this personality. The demiurge, unaware of the pleroma above and of the divine spark within, signifies the psychological predicament of 'moderns' - in their attempt to be autonomous, in their identification with the ego, they stand alienated from the divine (or, as Jung would have it, the unconscious). Eventually, the demiurge becomes aware of the existence of higher powers than himself, and this causes him much anxiety. This suggests the condition of 'contemporaries,' who are aware of their alienated state, but perplexed about the solution to this problem. As Jung writes: 'The myth of the ignorant demiurge who imagined he was the highest divinity illustrates the perplexity of the ego when it can no longer hide from itself the knowledge that it has been dethroned by a supraordinate authority.'<sup>5</sup> For Jung, the descent of the divine saviour to liberate the divine spark from matter represents the breaking-through of archetypal images into conscious life to

liberate the human psyche from ego consciousness. It is here that Jung's psychological reinterpretation of Gnosticism breaks down.

In Gnosticism, the divine spark is released from matter and reabsorbed within the Absolute. Given that Jung equates the Absolute with the unconscious, a consistent psychological reinterpretation of this would demand that the individual must surrender his or her personality to the unconscious. But according to Jung, identification with the unconscious is as lop-sided as identification with the ego. Such identification results in anything from ego-inflation to psychosis - the dissolution of conscious personality. The Jungian path does involve a break with the ego and a return to the unconscious; but the purpose of this is to raise the unconscious to the level of consciousness, and thereby construct a new centre of personality - the self. The goal of the Gnostic on the other hand is a return to the original undifferentiated state which exists prior to creation. In Jungian terms this means complete unconsciousness. In this respect, as Segal notes, Gnosticism advocates the opposite of Jungian psychology:

What for Jung is only a means to an end - return to the unconscious - is for Gnosticism equivalent to the end itself. What for Jung is the end - the integration of the unconscious with ego consciousness - is for Gnosticism the present predicament: the association of divinity with matter. Conversely, what for Gnosticism is the end - the severance of the link between divinity and matter - is the Jungian predicament: the dissociation of the unconscious from ego consciousness.

Where Jungian psychology and Gnosticism part ways is in how they attempt to resolve the divine/material or unconscious/ego consciousness dualism. The Gnostic answer is one of dissolution; the Jungian path is one of



integration. As Segal explains:

For Jungian psychology and Gnosticism alike, creation myths have a three-stage plot. Stage one for both postulates a preexistent monolith - for Jungian psychology, of unconsciousness; for Gnosticism, of either sheer divinity or else divinity isolated from matter. Stage two for both marks the beginning of creation and thereby of division - for Jungian psychology, into ego consciousness and unconsciousness; for Gnosticism, either into matter and divinity or, if matter is preexistent, into material world and divinity. Either immediately or eventually, the division becomes an opposition.

Stage three for both resolves the opposition, but in antithetical ways. For Gnosticism, there is a complete return to stage one, the time before the emergence of either matter or the material world. For Jungian psychology, however, there is, ideally, the establishment of a new state, one that completes rather than undoes the realization of consciousness begun in stage two. In sum, Jung's progressive ideal is at odds with the regressive one of Gnosticism.(6)

Jung's reinterpretation of Gnosticism - as a process of psychic integration rather than cosmic escapism - has gained many adherents, including Stephen Hoeller, Bishop of Ecclesia Gnostica and leader of the Sophia Gnostic Center in Los Angeles. He equates the pleroma with Jung's collective unconscious, and argues that the aim of the contemporary Gnostic is to become one with the collective unconscious through the destruction of psychological impediments symbolized by the demiurge and archons.<sup>7</sup>

It could be argued that Jung's Gnosticism is very 'un-Gnostic' in that a spirit-matter dualism and a concern with otherworldly transcendence has been replaced by something which appears to be more therapeutic and this-worldly. This at least is Segal's opinion who describes Jung's 'progressive ideal' as being 'at odds with the

regressive one of Gnosticism.' Others disagree, and argue that Jung's psychology incorporates other dualisms: between the self and others, inner and outer, the psychic and the physical. Moreover, it is argued that these are value-hierarchical dualisms in which the inner world of self and psyche is given more primacy and value than the outer world. This is the opinion of Religious Studies professor Maurice Friedman, who argues that Jung's psychology lapses into a kind of solipsism in which the external world is valued only to the extent that it offers a means to an end; namely, one's own individuation. In Jung's psychology,

self-realization is the goal and the means toward that goal is turning inward to a larger-than-life-size 'Self' to be integrated in the depths of the 'Objective Psyche,' or 'Collective Unconscious.' When one focuses on these inward processes, there is the danger that everything else and everyone else consciously or unconsciously become the means to the end of your individuation ... the function of your becoming. Jung, like other modern gnostics, emphasizes the inner in such a way that the outer becomes either an obstacle to or a function of the inner ...

When it was pointed out to me in connection with a criticism that I published of Jung, that Jung was enormously concerned with others because in others we find our own shadows, animas, and animus's, I replied that it was precisely this that I objected to: that he was not concerned with the other in his or her otherness, his or her uniqueness, but primarily in terms of the becoming of one's self.(8)

The dualistic nature of Jung's psychology is also criticized by Goldenberg. The starting-point of her critique is an opinion that is almost a given to the ecofeminist movement; namely, that 'Belief in transcendent entities may well encourage the devaluation of physical life.' Her convictions concerning the separation of divinity from matter are also extended to the separation of mind from body. Like Ruether, she argues that the attempt to separate the mind or soul from

the body is a 'well-established practice in Western thought,' and that 'body comes out as the thing valued less, while the mind or soul is seen as more permanent, more noble, and closer to the sphere of divinity.' She notes that recent ecofeminist critiques of mind/body dualism 'insist that thinking in terms of the separateness of mind and body has serious effects - effects that constrict freedom in human life and that are perhaps destructive to all life on the planet.'<sup>9</sup>

The specific focus of Goldenberg's attack is Jung's theory of the archetype, which she considers to be nothing more than a modern variant of the Platonic form. In Platonic thought, the forms are 'transcendent entities ... reflected in the physical world, but ... not of the physical world.' Concern is placed, not upon the flawed body, but upon the soul's comprehension of these divine forms. The twofold task of the Platonic philosopher was 'knowing the world of timeless perfection beyond body and all physical reality and then helping others to gain access to this glorious sphere.' Likewise, in Jungian theory, contends Goldenberg, 'the task of the psychologist is defined as leading others to see the timeless archetypal reality behind their personal psychological experiences.'<sup>10</sup> Jung himself recognizes the Platonic form as a forerunner to the archetype: 'I do not claim to have been the first to point out this fact [the archetype]. The honour belongs to Plato.'<sup>11</sup> And, like the Platonic form, Jung understands the archetype as transcending material reality; of being in but not of the world. The archetype is a transcendent, or, to use Jung's terminology, a 'psychoid' reality:

'The archetypal representations (images and ideas) mediated to

us by the unconscious should not be confused with the archetype as such. They are very varied structures which all point back to one essentially "irrepresentable" basic form ... it seems to me probable that the real nature of the archetype is not capable of being made conscious, that it is transcendent, on which account I call it psychoid.'<sup>(12)</sup>

For Goldenberg, Jungian archetypal theory is but one example of the West's continued preference for 'disembodied constructs.' She calls for an abandonment of all such ideas and for the development of 'theories and disciplines that see the body as the nexus of all human experience.'<sup>13</sup>

Other feminists have made similar criticisms of Jung, highlighting the way in which cultural stereotypes masquerade as contextless archetypes.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, feminists remain attracted to many elements of Jung's thought - his belief that humans have lost contact with nature in the form of human instinct and the psyche; his belief that all human qualities are part of the reality of human existence; and his reevaluation of qualities he labelled 'feminine' which he felt 'had become recessive in culture as well as in individuals.'<sup>15</sup> In these and in other ways, as we will discuss in Part Three, Jungian thought is making significant contributions to an ecological spirituality. In spite of the fact that Jung's psychology - particularly in the later stages of its development - forwards 'an adamantly nonphysical conception of the psyche,' there are, as Roszak notes, 'certain ecologically promising extensions of Jungianism.'<sup>16</sup> For the moment however, I wish to highlight another two examples of 'psychological Gnosticism' - the human potential movement and transpersonal psychology.

### The Human Potential Movement

As outlined in Part One, the human potential movement finds its roots in humanistic psychology. The term itself is used to embrace a number of 'psychoreligious' therapies (from rebirthing to primal therapy), institutes (for example, the Esalen Institute in California), and training programmes (The Forum or est, MSIA, LIFESPRING, and so on).

The ecological dynamic of the New Age stands firmly against the pessimistic assessment of human nature evident in much of mainstream Western thought. Humans are not a 'massa damnata' (Augustine), and neither are they characterized at the most basic level by uncontrollable and destructive impulses (Freud) that need to be controlled through external regulation (Durkheim). Instead, humans are seen as agents of divine creativity, 'co-creators' with God. The creative potential that lies within is viewed within ecological spirituality as being that which makes humans the *imago dei*. This positive assessment of human nature is also shared by the human potential movement. Behind the apparent eclecticism of the movement there are, argues Peters, a number of ideas that bind it all together, including the view that 'each of us has a great potential lying within us,' and that 'self-realization and self-fulfillment are the proper ends of life.'<sup>17</sup>

Another area of overlap between the human potential movement and ecological spirituality is the belief that social transformation must somehow dialogue with psychological transformation, that both are inseparable. Fox talks of the necessity for integrating social justice and psychic justice. In feminist spirituality it is argued that women

must engage patriarchy at the level of psychological structures in order to generate a level of self-confidence and self-esteem that will be necessary to sustain political and social activism. As Roszak says: 'Authoritarian politics roots itself in the guilty conscience.'<sup>18</sup> In a slightly similar way there is much talk in the human potential movement of personal transformation leading to social transformation. It is argued here that if enough people (a 'critical mass') realize their own creative potential, create a new form of personal consciousness, then this will somehow generate a parallel transformation in social structures - although, without actually having to challenge existing structures with direct political action. Such thinking is also characteristic of religious organizations like Transcendental Meditation. Through the widespread attainment of 'self-referral transcendental consciousness,' the Maharishi proclaims in his inaugural address to the 1986 World Assembly on Perfect Health,

We will see that the superpowers will naturally change their trends and there will be no terrorism, no threat of war, and no fear in the world family. Every nation will rise in fulfilment. Every government will experience real freedom ... What will prevail is goodwill, cordiality, friendship. Everyone will be helpful to everyone. Every nation will be loving to every other nation ... capitalism in the world will find fulfilment - all the people will have affluence in life ... our human race [will be raised] to a level which may be heavenly on earth.(19)

Despite the areas of overlap discussed above, the human potential movement can be distinguished from ecological spirituality in that the former lacks what Fox call a 'Via Transformativa' - basic principles for channeling human creativity into the task of building the new community. For Fox, as with liberationist thinking in general, human creativity

must be directed by the more fundamental concerns of compassion and justice-making, 'as Jesus taught.'<sup>20</sup> For Fox compassion and justice-making entail opening up to what Western society has repressed - a consciousness of interrelatedness. This means moving beyond 'egological' to 'ecological' consciousness, when we realize, as Jesus did, that 'to do to the least of these is to do to me.' It also means living out this consciousness of interrelatedness - and this may involve 'interfering' with existing social structures (the role of the 'prophet').

These concerns with ecological consciousness, compassion, justice-making and 'interference' appear to be absent in the spirituality of the human potential movement. Certainly, the movement does express a belief that personal transformation does lead to social transformation, but this is a particularly naive understanding of social reality. It presumes, as Danforth correctly perceives, that 'society is nothing more than a collection of individuals.'<sup>21</sup> Here Danforth puts his finger on the problem - the human potential movement advances a particularly atomistic form of spirituality; one which accords well with the patriarchal view of the real self as something distinct from the reality by which it is surrounded. It is a view of the self endorsed by Maslow when he says that the 'authentic' person 'transcends his culture' and 'resists enculturation.' The behaviour of self-actualizers is 'unlearned, created and released rather than acquired.'<sup>22</sup> It is also a view of the self expressed in the well-known words of the Gestalt therapy 'prayer,' used by the Esalen institute during the 1970s: 'I do my thing, and you do your thing.'<sup>23</sup> It is also interesting to note that

in some human potential therapies, the status of this separative self is elevated to the point where it is seen as being above, not only social reality, but the effects of physical reality too. Thus, according to Leonard Orr, the creator of rebirthing therapy, death is sinful and an affront to God, who created humans to be immortal. Death is the destiny of the 'weak-willed.'<sup>24</sup>

The human potential movement's separative view of the self has been noted and criticized for some time. In the new spiritual therapies, wrote Cox in the 1970s, we find the 'psychologized diminutive of the timeless uncreated soul of Neoplatonic philosophy':

We many be unable to see it now, so the teaching goes, because of the weight of the flesh, the darkness of the material world, or the blindness of childhood repression. But that inner essence is there, we are assured: the real you, waiting to be pursued until its now-hidden light is sufficiently uncovered to allow its glow to illuminate the darkness.

Cox uses the term 'concentric' to describe this type of self-model, and he considers it to be an impoverished one for two reasons. Firstly, although this inner self is connected with a new sense of creativity, in actual fact, it offers no sense of originality or development. The essential self may be uncovered, discovered, or allowed to grow; but its realization 'never does more than actualize a potential which is already there.' The concentric self

exhibits all of the qualities of a 'surprise-free' phenomenon ... the microscopic replication of a universe modern scientists would describe as 'entropic,' in which fruition within a form might be expected, but nothing unprecedented ever occurs.



The view of the real self as a 'finishable poem' contends Cox belongs nowhere ultimately but in a universe that lacks any sense of creativity or novelty: 'For the "concentric" view, time is a circle in which all things, despite their appearance of originality, ultimately return to an entropic status quo ante.' Secondly, as long as it is held that the real self can be found nowhere but within, just waiting to be actualized, there can be only 'peripheral interest directed toward the integral enmeshment of the self in its society, its cosmos and the other immense tracteries within which it lives.'<sup>25</sup> More recently, Roszak, while applauding the fact that the human potential therapies serve as a well-needed corrective to the overly-pessimistic view of human nature embraced by the psychoanalytic orthodoxy, nevertheless laments that the 'growth' and 'self-actualization' in which humanistic psychology/ human potential distinctively deal have 'no connection with the real world outside the mind. They are the private affairs of the solitary psyche.'<sup>26</sup>

It could be argued that this separative view of the self, one consistent with patriarchal consciousness, promotes introversion rather than social transformation as too much attention is drawn away from unjust social structures and onto the self, the locus of all creative potential. This is the view of Cox as highlighted above. It is also the view of Danforth, who says that the 'mysticized and psychologized individualism' of the human potential therapies directs all attention from 'specific economic, legal, and political institutions and policies' to 'personal growth and self-transformation.'<sup>27</sup> It is also the view of some within the sphere of humanistic psychology. In 1977 for example,

Rick Gilbert of the Humanistic Psychology Institute attempted to drive a wedge between humanistic psychology and the human potential movement on the grounds that the latter was becoming too introverted:

'In contrast to our public self-image as cosmic transformationalists, I see us as a slightly lost group of middle-aged well-heeled, paunchy seekers after a little fun and relaxation ... I believe our concern with individual transformation and the new consciousness causes us to turn away from the rest of the world ... Humanistic psychology has much to offer in helping to solve problems of the real world. If, however, we continue to shift the locus of our models of human experience into the cosmos, or deep into the "inner me," we will truly have failed the human potential. My concern is that the brutality of the 1960s, Watergate, Viet Nam, etc., has caused many of us to give up on the real world and turn inward, feeling that we are essentially powerless to change things. The human potential movement is leading the way in that direction.'(28)

Too much emphasis upon the self may also lead to the belief that it is the individual - and nothing else - that is responsible for creating its own reality. Self-responsibility and self-accountability replace concern for others. This is something argued for by Peter Marin in his article 'The New Narcissism,' in which he interviewed one woman who had just completed her est training. This woman, claims Marin, was convinced that the individual's will was omnipotent, and that she should feel '"neither guilt nor shame about anyone's fate and that those who are poor and hungry must have wished it on themselves."' This accords well with the maxim of est (and, as previously highlighted, the maxim of Ramtha and other channeled entities): 'You are the creator of your own universe.'<sup>29</sup> Similar criticisms of the human potential therapies have been made by Edwin Schur in his study The Awareness Trap: Self-Absorption Instead of Social Change. 'By inviting us to become preoccupied with our "selves" and our sensations,' asserts Schur, the

New Age 'is diluting our already-weak feelings of social responsibility.' He argues that preoccupation with the inner self combined with a highly subjectivized individualism leads to mystification concerning how oppression is socially structured and culturally reinforced. All responsibility is thrown back on the individual, with the obvious social and political implications:

Even in the most theoretical works on the new awareness ... [we find] the notion that we must all accept 'responsibility for ourselves.' We cannot expect other people to solve our problems ... we cannot solve theirs ... this represents a clear invitation to self-absorption. The latent political implication seems equally apparent: complacency for those who have succeeded; resignation or self-blame for those who have not.

Such a solipsistic worldview encourages those dissatisfied with their life-situation to turn in upon themselves. For Schur, such a conclusion 'focuses the dissatisfaction in the wrong direction':

Emphasizing change at first sounds radical, but why should we conclude that the failure to achieve potential is a personal one? Under this approach, as Russell Jacoby has nicely expressed it, 'the attention of the discontented is diverted from the source to the surface.' Preoccupation with personal growth masks the failure to confront directly the question of society's potential - on which individual growth so crucially depends.(30)

It should be noted that this self/society perspective is not limited to human potential programmes and therapies. For example, the recently deceased Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov, founder of the Universal White Brotherhood, a Western esoteric organization with centres in France, Britain, Ireland, Canada, Hong Kong, and the United States, gives the following counsel:

The question is not how to change the world we live in - that

is impossible - but how to improve our own inner conditions. We cannot transform the world, only God can do that; that is His work and no one will blame us if we don't do it. But there is one thing we can do, one task that we have been given: to transform just one creature in the world: ourselves.(31)

Such a response does not pose much of a threat to - in the words of Schur - 'highly entrenched social priorities' and 'a system such as ours that so venerates profit-making.' Schur concludes by suggesting that the 'new awareness' movement is nothing more than 'another version of the quasi-religious dogma of optimistic individualism.' It is 'politically innocuous,' 'socially complacent,' and 'appeals almost exclusively to the middle and upper classes.' The worst thing that could possibly happen warns Schur would be its adoption by the socially disadvantaged. For them, it would become a 'new opiate' - a 'smile button' to help them survive 'daily carnage and drudgery.'<sup>32</sup> In relation to this point, New Age researcher Rachel Storm notes that since the collapse of the communist bloc, a number of New Age organizations and gurus (including followers of the recently deceased Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Scientology, the Forum, ISKCON and TM), have set up residence there. 'Everywhere, say onlookers, citizens of the Eastern bloc are turning to meditation, visualization, spirit channelling and other such New Age practices.' Some suspect, she continues, that 'the Soviet authorities are importing the New Age as quickly as possible in the hope that it will turn people inwards and reduce their political activities.'<sup>33</sup>

The 'turn away from the rest of the world' (Gilbert) evident in the human potential movement may mean indifference to the well-being of

others, but it does not mean world-rejection. Human potential programmes have shown themselves to be quite at ease with an individualistic, capitalistic, consumer orientation. Storm reports that since the early 1980s, human potential training programmes like est or The Forum, LIFESPRING, Transformational Technologies, Programs Ltd. and the Business Network have brought 'self-religion' to the workplace in the form of management-training programmes. These programmes, blending salesmanship and positive thinking with self-religion, are designed to convince its recipients that they are 'the seat of ultimate power,' and creators of their own reality. Managerial converts break through 'the barriers of the mind to a utopian state where self rule[s] supreme.' And, as Storm notes, there have been many converts, including NASA, Rover, Procter & Gamble, Cunard Ellerman, British Telecom, British Midland, Clydesdale Bank, Olivetti, Courtaulds, Cathay Pacific, Esso, British Gas, American Express, Shell, BP, Whitbread, Ford, and British Rail. Through participating in such ventures, managers are shown how to let go of their 'blocks' about making money, and as one programme asserts, to '"conduct their lives in such a way that the creation of wealth becomes as natural and intrinsic a function for them as their own heartbeat."' <sup>34</sup> Such programmes are clear examples of what Wallis has termed 'world-affirming' religions. Taking the contemporary experience of alienation and fragmentation as normative, they attempt to unite utilitarian individualism with 'spirituality.'

This section on the human potential movement concludes with a detailed account of the teachings of one training programme - LIFESPRING - based on a participant-observation analysis of this organization

conducted by sociologist Richard Adams and psychologist Janice Haaken in 1987. Adams et al. believe that programmes like LIFESPRING promote what they call 'anticultural culture.' This refers to 'any meaning system or set of values that deny the legitimacy of meaning systems or values having their origin outside the individual.' Those participating in such a culture do not believe that 'real' values exist outside of the self: 'the prescriptions of others, of tradition, of experts, of religious texts, and all such external sources are not considered to be legitimate.' This stance, paradoxically, need not entail separation from society and the world. Indeed, as Adams et al. observe, 'what is of interest about the anticultural aspect of LIFESPRING is that it offers a means of achieving a sense of personal omnipotence while being fully and uncritically involved in the society.' Nevertheless, the external environment is still considered to be 'the enemy' to the extent that it prohibits the development of the inner self, which is viewed as distinct from the self generated by culture:

what is true or right for an individual can be known only by an awareness of 'inner' potential, needs, drives, and so on. That which is 'inner' is seen to be presocial and precultural; knowledge precedes experience. The inner self is thus set in distinction from the outer world. And to the extent to which the outer world is seen as restricting or repressing the inner self, culture is considered the enemy of the self.

In LIFESPRING, the 'real' self is viewed as some kind of inner essence that is fully separable from the process of enculturation or identity in the world. From this perspective, 'society and culture can best serve the cause of human potential by getting out of the way of the individual's intrinsic growth capacity.'<sup>35</sup>

LIFESPRING describes itself as '"a corporation offering experiential educational programs for promoting personal growth."' Between its inception in 1974 and 1987, over 100,000 people have participated in LIFESPRING training. LIFESPRING offers a number of training programmes, from 'Basic' to 'Leadership,' each lasting approximately 45 hours over a five day period. A number of procedures are used in the training, including one-to-one questioning, group activities, and guided fantasy.<sup>36</sup>

During the Basic course, according to Adams et al., participants are informed about a 'hierarchy of levels of knowing.' Some forms of knowing - mystery, belief, analysis and experiment - are 'illusory.' Real knowledge is 'Natural Knowing.' This is knowledge that 'did not arrive via enculturation or socialization,' and it is found by 'getting in touch with our real selves.' Beliefs, and indeed any form of knowing from without, are viewed as screens and filters that distort reality and the truly human. As Adams et al. note:

The subjective is seen as the essence of human existence. The LIFESPRING training conveyed the belief [presented as an unquestionable 'truth'] that beliefs and meaning systems are external overlays that distort realities and subvert the essential nature of human life. Only by escaping from culture can we be 'real.' As LIFESPRING attempted to convince us experientially, we can escape culture. Anticultural culture shows the way.(37)

One of the basic tenets of LIFESPRING is that culture does not provide a legitimate basis for one's choices of actions in the world. This, as Adams et al. comment, is 'a potentially revolutionary ideology'; one that 'could lead to virtually any degree of rejecting

values, structures, and roles of one's society.' But in LIFESPRING, the opposite is achieved: 'people who are told that their culture doesn't offer proper guidelines for them appear to become even more unreflectively enmeshed in their culture than before.' This paradoxical situation is brought about firstly, through LIFESPRING's subjectivist ideology, and secondly, through the processes by which individuals on the course come to perceive their new insights as being internally generated. In relation to the first point, LIFESPRING ideology takes attention away from 'critical thinking about external forces.' That which is 'real' is said to be found inside. Moreover, it is suggested that the external world is already perfect: 'All we have to do is accept it and fine-tune ourselves so that we can fit into this external perfection.' The net result of these two claims is to throw all accountability back onto the individual. It is the individual - not any unjust social structure - who is responsible for his or her own situation. As Adams et al. comment:

Nothing happens in your life that you do not intend. Poverty. Cruel parents. Rape. Privilege. Wealth. Everything that happens to you occurs as a result of your own intentions. Once again, the only reality is the subjective. You are totally accountable for your past, totally responsible for your future.

In relation to the second point, Adams et al. argue that the 'skillfully orchestrated process' of the training resulted in participants believing that what they had learned 'came from internal sources rather than from external ones ... participants appeared unable to perceive the beliefs and values articulated in the course as beliefs and values.' This in turn 'leads to a sense of the powerlessness and, therefore, irrelevance



of culture.' Thus, in LIFESPRING, two seemingly paradoxical views about the external world are fused together: on the one hand, 'The external world is not to be tampered with' because it is perfect; and on the other, that 'External sources of ideas seem impotent and unworthy of attention.' What is being offered, in sum, is a blend of highly subjectivist individualism and social conformity:

In essence, LIFESPRING provides a subjectivist and highly conformist message ... while at the same time identifying that message as a product of internal revelation. Thus the training pushes individuals to become more unreflectively rooted in their own culture while denying its impact on them.(38)

### Transpersonal Psychology

The primary interest of Transpersonal psychology, as highlighted in Part One, is the self beyond the biographical or egoic sense of selfhood. Although much of the interest has been at the levels of empirical and theoretical research, transpersonal psychology can also be regarded as a spirituality, as it is also concerned with, as Vaughan puts it, 'our growth towards wholeness, which means growing beyond the ego.'<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in transpersonal psychology it is recognized that the spiritual path cannot be undertaken in isolation from the rest of the world. A transpersonal perspective, comments Vaughan, recognizes that 'we exist embedded in a web of mutually conditioned relationships with each other,' and 'Any attempt to improve the human condition must therefore take global, social, and environmental issues into account.' A transpersonal perspective recognizes at this moment in time 'the necessity for both inner work and outer work.'<sup>40</sup> In line with this concern for the world at large, transpersonal psychologists are also

keen to avoid the dualisms inherent in other forms of self-spirituality. The transpersonal perspective warns Boucouvalis must avoid 'hyper-introspection' and 'relegating sensory and interpersonal experiences, as well as rational thought, to an inferior level.'<sup>41</sup> As highlighted in Part One, the field of transpersonal psychology covers a broad spectrum of interests, therapies, techniques and aims. Transpersonal interests include consciousness cartography, transpersonal experiences (from 'mystical states' to past-life regression), and the convergence of different movements/ideologies (from holistic medicine to ecology). Some therapies recognized as consistent with the transpersonal perspective include psychosynthesis, Jungian analysis, LSD-assisted therapy, and some forms of music and art therapy. Techniques considered conducive to 'transpersonal awakening' include meditation, yoga, psychedelic ingestion, hypnosis, sensory deprivation, biofeedback, and mental imagery training (visualization, guided fantasy, dream studies, and so on). The aim of transpersonal psychology, at the individual level, is 'to understand more fully the total human being in his/her external and internal worlds ... [and] To explore the variety of transcendent experiences and to nurture particularly the mode of being traditionally called "liberation."' At the societal level, 'To investigate and promote environments, organizations, institutions, and "communities" which facilitate growth-impulses of humankind to transpersonal levels of being and awareness.' At the planetary level, 'To better understand and contribute to the developmental process of consciousness, including humanity's place in the evolution of the planet.'<sup>42</sup>

Given that transpersonal psychologists are concerned with moving beyond the separative sense of self associated with patriarchal consciousness, wish to avoid the kinds of dualisms inherent in other forms of spirituality, and even believe that women will occupy a key role in the emergence of a new, more integrated type of consciousness, one may wonder why I have included transpersonal psychology under the rubric of patriarchal spirituality. The reason for this is that some models of transpersonal development - I will be looking at Ken Wilber's in particular - generate a number of value-hierarchical dualisms, whether it be through the quest for 'ultimate' states of consciousness which creates dualisms between the phenomenal and the transcendental, or through an evolutionary agenda that is extremely anthropocentric. Before looking at such criticisms, we will examine the model of transpersonal development proposed by Ken Wilber, one of the most respected theorists in the field.

In the mid-1970s Wilber, in response to growing interest in the 'philosophia perennis' - the supposedly universal doctrine of humanity and nature that lies at the heart of all major religious traditions - developed his own 'psychologia perennis,' which he describes as the 'universal view as to the nature of human consciousness, which expresses the very same insights as the perennial philosophy but in decidedly psychological language.' This model he terms the 'Spectrum of Consciousness,' and is the psychological equivalent of the medieval idea of the 'Great Chain of Being.' Human consciousness, he argues, is multi-leveled, and all levels are simply emanations of a single 'ultimate' consciousness which he refers to as 'Mind.'<sup>43</sup>

This ultimate state of consciousness is 'identical to the absolute and ultimate reality of the universe.' When the individual realizes this level of consciousness, his or her true nature is realized, and this is 'the universe, the All.' This level of consciousness is nondualistic - there are no divisions between the knower and the known. All lesser levels of consciousness are 'essentially illusions.'<sup>44</sup>

The lesser levels of consciousness indicate a narrowing of personal identity. The next level down from that of Mind is the 'transpersonal.' Here the individual is no longer aware of his or her identity with the One, but nevertheless, identity is not simply restricted to the boundaries of the individual organism. However, when Wilber talks about this expanded sense of selfhood he does not mean identification with the natural environment surrounding the organism - a point which deep or transpersonal ecologists like Warwick Fox are critical of - but identification with Jungian archetypes and supernatural powers, like 'out-of-body experiences, astral travel, traveling clairaudience, and so on.'<sup>45</sup>

The next level down, referred to as the 'existential,' indicates a further narrowing of identity, to the point where it is confined to the psychosomatic organism, the mind and body. This level indicates the first clear demarcation between self and other. The next level is that of the ego where the individual is no longer identified with the organism as a whole but with a mental representation of this - that is, the ego. The egoic level indicates the dualism of body and psyche, where identity is confined to the latter. The final level is that of

the shadow, where identity is restricted further to merely a segment of psychic processes (the 'persona'), and the remainder, whether too painful or antisocial to be seen, is repressed (the 'shadow').

For Wilber, Mind is the only true and abiding reality, and all other levels are 'maya' which he interprets as any experience shaped by dualism. Dualism is the means by which Mind comprehends itself, but since there is nothing but Mind, dualism is ultimately illusory. At the transpersonal level dualism makes the primary split between the All and the other. At the existential level this primary split is extended to the demarcation of the organism from the environment. This level introduces another two dualisms - between life and death, and between time and timelessness. This is due to the fact that when the organism feels itself as distinct from the environment, it is left with the problem of personal being versus nullity, and in separating life from death, the individual becomes an historical creature. In its flight from death and time the organism begins to identify with an idealized image of itself - the ego. The ego, as Wilber comments, 'seems to promise man something that his mere flesh will not: the everlasting escape from death embodied in static images.'<sup>46</sup> The final act of dualism is where the individual identifies with only a fragmented and impoverished image of his or her entire being (the persona).

Wilber goes on to argue that the plethora of psychotherapeutic techniques that have been developed today can be used to address the problems encountered at the various levels in this spectrum of consciousness. For, the great divergence of psychotherapeutic

techniques and models suggest, not so much an internal difference in methodology, but 'a real difference in the levels of consciousness to which the various schools have adapted themselves.'<sup>47</sup> Ego level therapies would include Freudian and Jungian, where an attempt is made to expand identity to all facets of the psyche. Existential level therapies would include those often associated with the human potential movement - for example gestalt therapy, bioenergetic analysis, logotherapy and massage therapy - which all 'aim essentially at getting us in touch with the "authentic being" of our total organism by integrating the tertiary dualism [of mind versus body].' Yet such therapies do not meet the problems associated with the existential level of consciousness - the dualisms of self and other, life and death, time and timelessness, and these are problems addressed by transpersonal level therapies, of which Wilber again includes Jungian therapy. Jungian therapy, with its emphasis upon universal myths and transpersonal archetypes, 'suspends' the dualisms associated with the existential level by offering the individual a more universal picture of his or her identity as a human. Myth, as the direct embodiment of archetypes,

confers upon the individual an intimation of his universality, a direct pointer to his fundamentally joyous unity with all creation, a wholeness that whisks him far beyond the dismally petty affairs of day-to-day routine and plunges him into the vast and magical world of the transpersonal.(48)

The final type of therapies exist at the level of Mind and allow the individual to realize his or her identity as the Absolute, the All. 'Therapies' which Wilber links with this level in the Spectrum of

Consciousness include 'Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, Vedanta Hinduism, Sufism, and certain forms of Christian mysticism.'<sup>49</sup>

During the 1980s Wilber expanded his model of transpersonal development to include pre-egoic stages of human consciousness, and set the entire framework within an evolutionary context. To date, according to Wilber's theory, humanity has arisen out of its preconscious slumber (the 'uroboric' stage), moved beyond the early phase of conscious development when the psyche remained close to the mother, instinct, and the body (the 'typhonic' level), and now stands at the upper edge of the egoic level of development. This next stage in this evolutionary process will be that of 'centauric' consciousness which can be equated with what Wilber elsewhere refers to as the existential level, where the dualism between mind and body will be resolved, and the individual will identify with his or her entire organism. The end point of this evolutionary chain of being will be that of Mind or Atman, when humanity realizes its identity with the Absolute. 'History,' declares Wilber, 'is a slow and tortuous path to transcendence,' moving 'from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit.'<sup>50</sup>

Although the models of transpersonal development proposed by Wilber and others are certainly concerned with a movement beyond the egoic and separative understanding of selfhood associated with patriarchal consciousness, there have been a number of criticisms aimed against this transcendentalist-type of transpersonal framework. First, Wilber's developmental model is in the form of a hierarchical ontology which moves down from the Absolute or Mind to subhuman and subconscious

impulses. The purpose of evolution is to ascend the various intermediate levels of consciousness and return to the Absolute. In this hierarchical ontology - which as Warwick Fox notes is 'of a kind that is generally associated ... with the Renaissance and medieval idea of the Great Chain of Being and with Gnosticism'<sup>51</sup> - evolution is conceived as a movement beyond human stages of development in which there was close identification with the mother, nature and instinct (the typhonic level) and entry into the transpersonal level of Jungian archetypes, out-of-body experiences, astral travel, and so on. The problem here is that such an hierarchical ontology risks creating value-hierarchical dualisms between, on the one hand, everything associated with existence in the phenomenal world, and on the other, the transcendent realm of disembodied archetypes. This is a concern of Donald Rothberg in his critique of hierarchical ontologies, who notes that research has linked closely the 'core perennialist thesis of a hierarchical ontology' with 'the devaluation of the body, sexuality and nature, and to patriarchal and class-based social relations.' As a model of human development, he continues, hierarchical ontologies stand as 'a one-sided and potentially dangerous mode of expression, stressing, as it were, the more "masculine" qualities of differentiation, ascension to the heights, activity and movement, and transcendence.'<sup>52</sup> Similar concern is expressed by Haridas Chaudhuri, a professor of Integral Philosophy and Psychology. This scholar is not as simplistic to suggest that all forms of transpersonal experience are necessarily asocial and otherworldly. Indeed, he argues that 'Interpreted as increasing insights into the mystery of being or self, authentic transpersonal experiences - human experiences on deeper levels of consciousness - play



a vital role in our total self-development.' Nevertheless, he is highly critical of those in the transpersonal movement who use meditation techniques and other spiritual disciplines in the pursuit of 'ultimate states' and 'celestial perfection.' This he sees as a return to 'medieval mysticism and its other-worldly orientation.' He suggests that when mystical illumination is regarded as leading to a condition of absolute perfection - rather than being seen as 'a dynamic process of ever-deepening insight into the unfathomable mystery of being' - it promotes 'metapsychological dualism': 'the metaphysical dichotomy of the ultimate and the preparatory, the transcendental and the phenomenal ... the lower self and the higher self, the flesh and the spirit ... conditioned existence and unconditioned perfection'; in short, dualistic spirituality. Such a pursuit he further argues 'is bound to produce increasing indifference to the social, economic, political, scientific, humanistic, and international concerns related to the world,' and 'increasing apathy to the physical, instinctual, socioethical, intellectual, and genuinely existential aspects of man's total personality.' Personal alienation from the world and the so-called lower nature is reinforced by what Chaudhuri sees as the 'libido-withdrawal' that underlies the quest for 'ultimate states' in both the Western and Eastern paths of 'renunciation.' In Eastern religious traditions, he asserts, the path of 'graceful libido-withdrawal' leads to a vision of the world as maya. In the West, flesh-mortification or 'forceful libido-withdrawal' leads to a vision of the world as evil and satanic, or at least fallen. In both cases, energy is withdrawn from the world and redirected towards interior illumination. Chaudhuri concludes with the suggestion that the human perception of reality and

value - whether it be expressed in hierarchical ontologies or something more naturalistic - is a function of 'libido-investment':

When you love the world it becomes real and supremely valuable. When ... you stop loving the world, it becomes either a meaningless shadow-show of Maya, or a fearful dungeon of the Prince of Darkness. What is true of beauty is true of reality also: it is the lover's gift.(53)

Another problem with Wilber's evolutionary framework is that it is decidedly anthropocentric. It is, according to Fox, a form of 'gnosticized Darwinism' which sees God as 'pure consciousness' and regards 'humans as participating more in this ideal than other beings and, consequently, as superior to them.' Fox goes on to criticize Wilber for making such anthropocentric statements as '"cosmic evolution ... is completed in and as human evolution, which itself reaches ultimate unity consciousness and so completes that absolute gestalt toward which all manifestation moves,"' and for describing '"the very lowest levels of being"' as being '"the levels that are subhuman, such as matter, plant, reptile, and mammal."' For Fox such value-hierarchical thinking - where viruses, trees, flies, salmon, frogs, dolphins and humans are all placed on a single linear scale of developmental perfection - indicates 'a total lack of evolutionary (and, hence, ecological) understanding.' Evolutionary development appears more like a 'luxuriously branching bush' than 'a linear scale ... filled in by greater and lesser examples of some ideal end point.' Life forms are neither inferior nor superior to one another, but products of 'distinct evolutionary pathways' and thus, at any point in time, 'perfect (complete) examples of their own kind.' Wilber's belief that evolution is 'completed in and as human evolution' is, concludes Fox, as

scientifically bankrupt as it is a product of value-hierarchical thinking.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, Fox makes the observation that there is no reason why transpersonal theory - which basically speaking is simply about the self beyond the egoic level of selfhood - cannot be pursued 'in both a nonanthropocentric and a naturalistic direction (as opposed to the anthropocentric and transcendental direction that has been pursued by Wilber and some other transpersonal theorists).' Fox suggests that the terms transpersonal identity and self realization need not be linked with transcendent archetypes and the like, and can be simply thought of in terms of a 'this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible'; the realization of 'one's ecological, wider, or big Self.'<sup>55</sup> Such a naturalistic direction, as Fox himself notes is already being pursued at a theoretical level within transpersonal psychology by theorists like Vaughan. Vaughan articulates a 'systems' view of the self, in which self-realization is seen as a naturalistic expansion of the self into wider fields of ecological identification. Such an expansion may be achieved by conceptualizing the self as 'an ecosystem existing within a larger ecosystem.' She writes:

In personal growth individuals recognize that development apparently proceeds from dependence, through independence, to interdependence. Conceptualizing the self as an ecosystem existing within a larger ecosystem therefore can facilitate the shift from thinking of the self as a separate, independent entity to recognizing its complete interdependence and embeddedness in the totality ... Viewing the self as an open living system brings into focus the intricate web of mutually conditioned relationships that are essential to existence ... [it] challenges the assumption that we exist only as alienated, isolated individuals in a hostile, or at best, indifferent, environment. A systems view recognizes both our biological dependence on the environment and our psychological

interconnectedness.

The self to be realized is not some unchanging inner essence, a fragment of the divine Mind, but 'an open living system ... continually in flux.' The self to be realized is one that is 'continually changing, interacting, and joining with others in intersubjective exchange, in shared ideas and shared purpose.'<sup>56</sup>

Vaughan's naturalistic and nonanthropocentric understanding of transpersonal identity is reflected in the work of Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy. Writing from an ecofeminist perspective, Macy believes that a shift in our understanding of the self is crucial at this time for planetary survival. Like Vaughan she holds that humans are called to rediscover a more transpersonal form of identity, one 'coextensive with all life on this planet.' Humans are being called to rediscover the 'ecological self.' She sees the recovery of such transpersonal identity evident in the actions of Greenpeace or the 'Chipko' or 'tree-hugging' movement in India. In such cases, where people are putting their lives on the line for other species, 'customary notions of self and self-interest are being shed like an old skin or confining shell.'<sup>57</sup>

Macy believes that three factors in particular are contributing to this shift in identity. The first is the psychological and spiritual pressures exerted by the threat of mass annihilation through nuclear war. In the 'Despair and Empowerment Work' conducted by Macy and her colleagues in America, Europe, Asia and Australia, participants are allowed to confront the sense of numbness and powerlessness felt in the

face of planetary destruction. As their grief is expressed, those participants usually 'break through their sense of futility and isolation' into 'a larger sense of identity.' Participants come to realize that the source of the grief they express is not merely to do with the threat of the demise of the individual, but with 'apprehensions of collective suffering - of what looms for human life and other species and unborn generations to come.' The grief expressed 'is the distress we feel on behalf of the larger whole of which we are a part.' A shift in identity may come through the 'owning of pain,'<sup>58</sup> and this is something we will come across again in the 'Via Negativa' of creation spirituality discussed in Part Three.

The second factor for Macy is the emergence from science of a systems view of the world, which shows that there 'is no logical or scientific basis for construing one part of the experienced world as "me" and the rest as "other."' As open systems, all of our activities 'arise in integration with our shared world through the currents of matter, energy, and information that flow through us. In the web of relationships that sustain these activities, there are no clear lines demarcating a separate, continuous self.'<sup>59</sup>

The final factor contributing to the recovery of an ecological transpersonal identity according to Macy is the contemporary renaissance of nondualistic spiritualities, of which Macy highlights Buddhism for 'the clarity and sophistication it offers in understanding the dynamics of the self.' The Western and patriarchal notion of an abiding, atomistic self is challenged by the Buddhist doctrines of pratitya

samutpada (dependent origination) and anatta (no-self). The doctrine of pratitya samutpada presents reality as a seamless and dynamic web of interrelationships. Similarly the doctrine of anatta holds that there is no such thing as an enclosed, constant, self, but only 'an ephemeral product of perceptual transactions' where the experiencer is 'inseparable from his or her experience.' Indeed, the notion of an enclosed, constant self is regarded within Buddhism as 'the foundational delusion of human life,' the 'motive force behind our attachments and aversions.' Liberation from the egoic self is in Buddhism achieved through the threefold practice of wisdom (prajna), meditative practice (dhyana) and moral action (sila). Far from the nihilism often associated with Buddhist spirituality, concludes Macy, 'Buddhist practice can bring the world into sharper focus and liberate one into lively effective action.' Freed from the prison of the separate, competitive ego, we enter 'a vision of radical and sustaining interdependence,' where we live and work 'in active identification with all beings.'<sup>60</sup>

The model of transpersonal identity proposed by Vaughan, Macy and Fox - that is, as a naturalistic expansion of the self into wider fields of ecological identification - will, as we shall see, be encountered again in the types of ecological spirituality discussed in Part Three.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN : EVOLUTIONARY

'gnosticized Darwinism'

Warwick Fox<sup>1</sup>

If deep systems ecology has anything of value to teach us, it is that Teilhard's Omega is a bad idea about life raised to the highest power.

Theodore Roszak<sup>2</sup>

Whether life is visualized as secular and evolving from primeval compounds to the highly developed brain of Man, or whether life is visualized as religious and beginning with a top-down act of the divine who puts everyone and everything in its place, both views are equally and curiously clear that Man stands in a topmost position in the Up-and-Downness.

Elizabeth Dodson Gray<sup>3</sup>

The idea of 'evolution' occupies a key position in New Age thought. Peters makes 'evolution and transformation' one of the eight ingredients in his New Age 'eightfold path.' For New Agers he argues, evolution is teleological - constantly moving in the direction of increased complexity and integration. In the New Age, continues Peters, the development of self-reflective consciousness is praised for adding new momentum to the evolutionary drama. Through it, 'we humans have a chance to give the evolutionary development of the cosmos a boost ... We are steering the direction all of nature will take.'<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to read through any New Age work without coming across the term 'evolution.' Even radical feminists like Bruteau can describe the emergence of a postpatriarchal culture in terms of a 'mounting spiral of fluctuating but evolving consciousness.'<sup>5</sup> Similarly,

for Morgan, 'Feminism is, at this moment and on this planet, the DNA/RNA call for survival and for the next step in evolution.'<sup>6</sup> While it is recognized that a plethora of New Age works appropriate 'evolution,' often, it seems, the term itself is incidental to the work as a whole, or inappropriate to the context in which it is used. 'Evolution' is used where 'consciousness-raising' would suffice. In this chapter on patriarchal evolutionary theology and spirituality, our discussion is restricted to a few New Age theorists who make evolution a cardinal tenet of their belief systems. (Wilber's transpersonal framework could have been included in this chapter, for his developmental psychology is at the same time a model of evolutionary advancement. This indicates the kinds of problems involved in attempting to make a clear demarcation between different types of New Age belief systems. However, since Wilber's views were discussed in the last chapter, they have been omitted from the present. Nevertheless, the evolutionary models discussed in this chapter show clear similarities with Wilber's, and of course, are open to the same kinds of criticisms.)

The New Age movement forwards two very different perspectives on 'evolution.' Proponents of the first include Berry, Matthew Fox, and Swimme. They hold that ecological spirituality must be placed within the context of a new, living cosmology - the 'new story' to use Berry's phrase. The new story is of the universe as 'cosmogenesis' - as an ongoing creation. Within this new story, humanity, and indeed all life on earth, are seen as an integral part of the journey or the 'adventure' of a dynamic and creative universe. The new story, it is hoped, will foster a new sense of interconnectedness and 'belonging.' The second



perspective, and the one examined in this chapter, conceives of 'evolution' in a way that not only accords well with the patriarchal conceptual framework, but may even function as a spiritual rationale for the modern paradigm of technological 'progress.' An attempt to differentiate between these two perspectives is complicated by the fact that both draw heavily from the same source - the evolutionary theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

### Teilhard de Chardin

Teilhard has exercised much influence upon the New Age movement. In questionnaires sent out to 'Aquarian conspirators,' Ferguson reports that in response to the question concerning important influences, Teilhard was the one 'most often named.'<sup>7</sup> In Teilhard's scheme of things, there is but one 'evolutionary process,' and this process has passed through four stages - matter, life, thought and society. Each new level represents the actualization of the potentialities of earlier levels. Teilhard draws no clear distinction between living and non-living matter, and like Whitehead he holds that mind-like activity exists in all forms of matter. Teilhard also traces a directionality in the evolutionary process - an increasing trend towards organization and 'personalization' (the 'internal deepening of consciousness upon itself.'<sup>8</sup>) Yet Teilhard also sees a trend towards convergence, towards unification and interdependence. Evolution is tending towards the 'ultra-hominization' of humanity through a 'socialisation of compression'<sup>9</sup> - the 'Omega Point.' This represents the unification of consciousness into a single interthinking whole (the 'noosphere'). Teilhard maintains that this unification will be achieved without the

loss of personal identity because it will be based upon love. 'Omega' represents a future goal, but since all states already exist in potentiality, it is a present reality, urging humanity in a certain direction. It is also an eternal and ultimate state, beyond all notions of past, present and future: 'While being the last term of its series, it is also outside all series.'<sup>10</sup> What is Omega? - Teilhard remains ambiguous about this point, but New Age followers understand Teilhard's Omega as pointing to the future divinization of humanity. 'As ... Teilhard de Chardin knew,' exclaims Wilber, 'the future of humankind is God-consciousness.'<sup>11</sup>

There is much in Teilhard argues Berry which is conducive to an ecological spirituality. He was 'the first person to describe the universe as having ... a psychic-spiritual dimension as well as a physical-material dimension.' He also 'identified the human story with the universe story.' In addition, he 'stressed the importance of moving from excessive concern for the redemption process to greater emphasis on the creation process.' On the negative side however, Teilhard was extremely anthropocentric. He presumed - as Wilber does - that 'the evolutionary process was concentrated in the human.' More alarming is the fact that his anthropocentric evolutionism left him 'intensely committed to the technological world' and oblivious to the 'devastating aspect of the human.' Like some contemporary New Age evolutionists, Teilhard saw crisis and destruction as a platform for evolutionary growth towards Omega:

For him the worse things were, the better, because it meant that God had even more grand plans for things. Teilhard could not take seriously the destruction of the natural world.

Once, when someone pointed out to him the destruction of the natural world, Teilhard said that science would discover other forms of life.(12)

Teilhard's anthropocentrism and his commitment to Western technology is indicative of a patriarchal mentality which conceptually separates human from nonhuman and gives greater value to the former. It is also, as discussed in the last chapter, indicative of a pseudo-scientific approach to 'evolution.' Firstly, in that science recognizes no such thing as a single, evolutionary process, nor the belief that humans are the pinnacle of this process. 'Teilhard's picture of man as the cosmic standard-bearer, who alone can fulfill the purposes of evolution,' writes cosmologist Stephen Toulmin, 'rests less on the established results of science than it does on human pride.'<sup>13</sup> Secondly, it is pseudo-scientific in that it fails to make a proper distinction between endo- and exosomatic evolution. Endosomatic evolution refers to evolutionary modifications that occur within an organism. Exosomatic evolution is evolution without - i. e., cultural and social evolution. For example, the ability to fly via the development of wings is part of a bird's endosomatic evolution; while flying in an aeroplane is part of humanity's exosomatic evolution. In failing to articulate this distinction, Teilhard makes areas of technological advancement - like the detonation of the nuclear bomb, which he celebrated as an example of human 'super-creativity'<sup>14</sup> - appear 'natural.' Such a failure can be linked to his anthropocentrism. Yet it can also be linked to his understanding of evolution itself. For Teilhard, endo- and exosomatic evolution are simply parts of a much wider evolutionary continuum - the evolution of consciousness.

Another criticism of Teilhard is that he sees humanity's spiritual destiny as a movement towards a state of complete 'Oneness,' or 'Omega.' For Roszak, this is an image of human development which smacks of centralized totalitarianism. At the end of Teilhard's model of spiritual advancement,

One has the picture of a single and eternal compacted intelligence left to think one thought forever. Teilhard speaks of this condition as 'hyperpersonal,' but it is difficult to see that the personal soul, the most distinctive feature of Christian psychology, survives in the all-embracing divine persona. We have arrived at the highest stage of theocratic totalitarianism, an image of our destiny that might be used to sanction, lower, secular forms of regimentation ... 'Involution ... implosion ... unification ... convergence ... mega-synthesis ... unanimity ... centeredness.' This is the language of authoritarian centralization.(15)

For ecofeminists, such a picture of spiritual advancement is expressive, not only of centralized totalitarianism, but of the inability of patriarchal consciousness to accept and cope with diversity; a problem which some link to current issues of ecological degradation. The 'expectation of an end-time,' argues Keller in her exploration of the connections between eschatology and ecology, has 'defined the limits of Western patriarchal consciousness.' This expectation, conveyed in the apocalyptic imagery that concludes the Christian canon of scripture, has, all the more effectively because largely unconsciously, set 'a formative framework for the end of history.' In the process of Christianity's transformation from a movement of liberation to an institutionalized, patriarchal, and imperial ideology, the mythic imagery that concludes the Bible has become 'part of the understanding of time, nature, and history that has shaped the course of Western development.' We have, argues Keller, been 'programmed' to expect the

end of the world, and this explains not only why technology has brought us to the point of annihilation, but why Westerners 'do not rise up and make this end-of-the-world scenario stop.'<sup>16</sup>

The Book of Revelation speaks of military might, the destruction of the world, and the new heaven and earth to be inherited by God's 'sons' (Rev. 21:8). But it also speaks of an inability to deal with diversity. Revelation 20:11 describes the 'One' who sits on the throne from whose presence 'earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.' The vision here is of a 'cosmic minimalism' in which the universe 'seems to condense itself ... to a single unifying centerpoint.' The vision of the 'new Jerusalem' (21:23-25) is again one of a blinding, light-filled minimalism, in which the rhythms and phenomena of the natural world have been eliminated. The city 'has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it ... and there shall be no night there.' In the new creation 'the sea was no more' (21:1). The elimination of the sea comments Keller is no accident. The oceanic womb of life, connected in Babylonian lore with the female and with chaos, and in the Hebrew scriptures with a monster who must be controlled, 'is now eternally vanquished, replaced by the purely paternal creation.' Diversity is denied, called 'chaos,' and cast 'in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur' (21:8). The drive towards transcendent unity, argues Keller, exerts 'a profound impetus in all patriarchal spirituality,' where a crystalline minimalism is achieved 'at the expense of nature and multiplicity.' This drive to transcendent unity she concludes also 'pertains to the present ecological situation.' In the face of the

moral, environmental, and spiritual perplexities that confront our age, apocalyptic offers a simple, once-for-all, solution.<sup>17</sup>

Similar views are expressed by Daly who criticizes the patriarchal drive towards reunification with the single, transcendent 'father' for being 'necrophilous.' 'Necrophilia' as a term to describe a particular orientation towards life was first made popular in the psychology of Erich Fromm. According to Fromm, necrophilia indicates 'the passion to destroy life and the attraction to all that is dead, decaying, and purely mechanical.' Contemporary manifestations of necrophilia include 'worship of speed and the machine ... glorification of war; destruction of culture; hate against women; locomotives and airplanes as living forces.' The necrophilous character

turns his interest away from life, persons, nature, ideas - in short from everything that is alive; he transforms all life into things, including himself ... The world becomes a sum of lifeless artifacts ... the whole man becomes part of the total machinery that he controls and is simultaneously controlled by ...

For Fromm, the influence of the 'necrophiles' is all too readily apparent: 'The world of life has become a world of "no-life" ... Man, in the name of progress is transforming the world into a stinking and poisonous place.' Of a more disturbing nature is the fact that this transformation appears to be intentional:

He knows the facts, but in spite of many protestors, those in charge go on in the pursuit of technical 'progress' and are willing to sacrifice all life in the worship of their idol ... If he had no knowledge of the possible danger, he might be acquitted from responsibility. But it is the necrophilous element in his character that prevents him from making use of the knowledge he has.

Indeed, it is the necrophiles' intention to 'transform all that is alive into dead matter; they want to destroy everybody and everything; their enemy is life itself.'<sup>18</sup>

For Fromm, necrophilia is a 'character-rooted passion' that he links with the absence or distortion of an infant's erotic tie with its mother. For Daly by contrast, it is the essence of patriarchy itself and is rooted in male hatred of women and everything female. She asserts: 'male demonic destructiveness is clearly linked to hatred and contempt for women and all that men consider to be female'; 'Woman hating is at the core of necrophilia.' Necrophilia expresses a male fear and jealousy of women's 'biophilous' capacities, whether mental, spiritual or biological; in short, 'female creative energy in all of its dimensions.' One expression of such jealousy takes the form of attempting to prove and demonstrate the superior 'mothering' capacities of the male sex (from a male God who gives birth to a woman, to the 'multiple technological "creations" ... of the fathers'). Such male-mothering claims Daly has as its goal the death of all life. This is an assertion 'substantiated/documentated by the state of this male-controlled planet. If patriarchal males loved life, the planet would be different.'<sup>19</sup>

Not all feminists agree with Daly that necrophilia is rooted in hatred against woman. The perspective of Ruether and de Beauvoir is more reasonable and hopeful - namely, that the West's revolt against finitude is projected onto woman, because 'her animality is more

manifest.' Thus, necrophilia is aimed, not at women, but against what women have come to represent to the male - the reflection of his own carnality and contingency which he longs to transcend. This position leaves open the possibility of revisioning and restructuring relationships between the sexes. Daly's position on the other hand, as Mary Grey correctly observes, 'remove[s] all possibility of mutuality between the sexes.'<sup>20</sup> However, where it is possible to agree with Daly is that necrophilia, as a flight from life, and the attempt to end life, reveals itself not only in the making of nuclear warheads, but in a certain model of spiritual development. This framework will, as Daly argues, express a preference for the 'Afterlife' rather than 'Living now, dis-covering Life.' (This is certainly true of New Age body/soul dualists, but it is also true of Teilhard, who saw the Omega point as a final, static end-point, towards which all life was aimed.) She also suggests that this framework will, theologically speaking, be a circular process of devolution and evolution:

Patriarchal society revolves around myths of Processions. Earthly processions both generate and reflect the image of procession from and return to god the father. According to christian theology, there are processions within the godhead ... Moreover, all creatures proceed from this eternally processing god, who is their Last End ... Thus, in this symbol system there is a circular pattern/model for muted existence: separation from and return to the same immutable source ... What is ultimately sought ... is reconciliation with the father.(21)

All patriarchal processions, whether religious or military, have as their Last End the perfect world of static minimalism. To put it in more obvious terms, the circular framework evoked in everything from Trevelyan's desire to be 'reunited with the Source,' to Teilhard's



search for 'the Impersonal' which lies at 'the world's Omega, as at its Alpha,'<sup>22</sup> is, in the insightful words of Daly, 'a funeral procession engulfing all life forms. God the father requires total sacrifice/destruction.'<sup>23</sup>

It is possible, as will be shown in Part Three, to incorporate 'evolution' within an ecological perspective. But there is another side to New Age evolutionism; a side which replicates and rationalizes many of the worst features of patriarchal consciousness - its anthropocentrism, its desire to transcend biological limitation, and its course of environmental degradation. In exploring this side of New Age evolutionism in more detail, I wish to look at the views of one New Age theorist in particular - Peter Russell.

#### Peter Russell

Russell's The Awakening Earth brings together a number of views which seem to place it within both the patriarchal and ecological camps of the New Age. To begin with Russell agrees with the ecological dynamic that the earth is a living being, and he makes much use of the Gaia hypothesis to stress this point. Yet, despite this initial emphasis upon Gaian interrelatedness, Russell proceeds to elevate humanity to the pinnacle of evolution. Humanity is Gaia's 'brain' in which 'each of us are the individual nerve cells.' Our crucial and elevated role in Gaian organism is further reinforced by the suggestion that 'we alive today may be standing on the threshold of an evolutionary development as significant as the emergence of life on Earth some 3,500 million years ago.'<sup>24</sup>

As with Teilhard, Russell views evolution as a cosmic force driving towards ever higher levels of integration and complexity. Important stages in the evolutionary journey so far he argues have included the emergence of energy (the creation of the cosmos), matter, life, consciousness, and finally, self-reflexive consciousness. For Russell as with Teilhard, this process is heading towards the emergence of a 'noosphere' - the planet as a single, interconnected web of human thought.

The emergence of 'self-reflexive' consciousness is seen by Russell as a decisive stage in the evolutionary process. Consciousness has become the 'spearhead of evolution.'<sup>25</sup> A growing conviction that evolution is now working through human consciousness inspires fellow New Age evolutionist Barbara Marx Hubbard to write: 'We are at the dawn of "conscious evolution", when the creature-human first becomes aware of the processes of creation and begins to participate deliberately in the design of our world.'<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Ferguson argues that for 'the first time in history, humankind has come upon the control panel of change - an understanding of how transformation occurs. We are living in the change of change, the time in which we can intentionally align ourselves with nature for rapid remaking of ourselves and our collapsing institutions.'<sup>27</sup>

According to Russell, humanity stands on the 'threshold' of an evolutionary jump. This he argues is based on the fact that humanity is moving towards a high level of social complexity in terms of organization, diversity and connectivity - three prerequisites 'for the

emergence of new levels of evolution.' Rapid advances in mobility, communications, the colonization of space, genetic engineering, and so on, have all brought us to 'a phase that has no evolutionary precedent.'<sup>28</sup> Here it is clearly seen that Russell makes no distinction between endo- and exosomatic evolution - both are subsumed under a single evolutionary continuum described as the drive towards increasing complexity.

An obvious criticism against Teilhardian-type thought is that despite increasing social complexity, there is little indication that humanity is now somehow more 'interconnected' or even more cooperative. As Miller argues: 'In spite of what may be said for technological advances, an objective look at the world situation would seem to indicate that in many respects things are only getting more fragmented and out-of-hand.'<sup>29</sup>

It is at this juncture that New Agers like Russell and Ferguson appeal to two theories from the domain of new science. The first is that of 'punctuated equilibrium,' proposed in the early 1970s by paleobiologists Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldridge.<sup>30</sup> In its original context, punctuated equilibrium theory provides solutions to some problems associated with the Darwinian evolutionary model. The Darwinian model holds that evolution is a slow, gradual, and incremental process spanning long periods of time. However, the absence in the fossil record of transitional life-forms (for example, between reptiles and mammals) and the evidence for the co-existence of life-forms which should have lived at different periods, have obviously posed problems

for this model. The theory of punctuated equilibrium holds that evolution is characterized by long periods of stability punctuated by periodic rapid change. Evolutionary jumps are made by isolated groups within a species. These groups may become abnormally stressed, leading to a state of crisis which can only be resolved 'through a jump that establish[es] a new equilibrium at a higher level.'<sup>31</sup> (Which in turn explains 'missing links' in the fossil records and the co-existence of 'old' and 'new' species.)

Similar themes emerge in the theory of 'dissipative structures,' proposed by Belgian chemist Ilya Prigogine. As systems theorists point out, in contrast with closed systems (which move towards an entropic state of natural equilibrium), living or open systems maintain a state of high organization (or far from equilibrium state) through a 'metabolic' relationship with their surroundings. Energy is withdrawn from, and entropic waste is dissipated back into, the environment. Prigogine discovered that even if the energy flowing through a dissipative system fluctuates, a far from equilibrium state can be maintained as long as the fluctuations remain within certain limits. Beyond this limit, the system is driven into instability (a 'bifurcation point') where one of two things may happen - the system may collapse, or alternatively, it may move into a new level of organization. In short, a dissipative system is capable of evolutionary reorganization in direct response to critical fluctuations within its environment.

The relevance of such theories to evolutionary spirituality is quite obvious. Their general theme (crisis precedes evolution) provides

some hope that contemporary crises may lead to an evolution in human consciousness and society. They provide, as Miller puts it, a positive and optimistic context within which to interpret the negative realities of the present generation - 'a new world may be in the throes of birth.'<sup>32</sup> According to Ferguson, this time of deep social and psychological crisis means that 'transformation of the human species seems less and less improbable.'<sup>33</sup> Russell agrees: 'Never in the history of the human race have the dangers been so extreme; yet in their role as evolutionary catalysts, they may be just what is needed to push us to a higher level.'<sup>34</sup> 'Dissipative structures,' argues Wheatley, 'demonstrate that disorder can be a source of order, and that growth is found in disequilibrium, not in balance.'<sup>35</sup>

At the threshold of a New Age, argues Russell, it is not enough to know that social evolution is one of increasing complexity, or that crisis may result in evolutionary reorganization; something else is needed - 'inner evolution.' The new 'social super-organism' will not emerge until humans begin to evolve 'inwardly as much as we have done outwardly.' Humans 'will need to change some fundamental assumptions which lie at the core of our thinking and behaviour.' Here again Russell seems to share much in common with the ecological dynamic. What needs to be changed he states is a certain model of selfhood - of 'an individual self quite separate and distinct from the rest of the world'; the self as a 'skin-encapsulated ego.' The separative self must be given up for the 'unfolding of a deeper identity' - that of the timeless, Universal Self. This is the inner self which allows humans to experience 'an at-one-ness with humanity and the whole of creation.'

Through an awakening of the inner self comes the realization that 'I am of the same essence as you, and the same as the rest of the universe.' This argues Russell is the perennial philosophy of all religions, and a state of being which 'many spiritual traditions refer to as self-realisation or enlightenment.'<sup>36</sup>

What is needed, counsels Russell, is a spiritual revival. This will not come about through a return to conventional religious traditions, which are now mere 'fossils of enlightenment,' but through a revival of the techniques and experiences 'that once gave these teachings life and effectiveness.' A rediscovery of 'the practices that directly enable the experience of the pure Self and facilitate its permanent integration into our lives.'<sup>37</sup> This turns out to be a not-too-well thought-out jumble of human potential therapies, meditation techniques, and guruism.

Russell notes that most of these practices, whether or not they are actually effective, require much training, time and effort, and are usually the prerogative of an exclusive few. Yet, a rapid and widespread shift in consciousness requires something more simple and universal. Society must develop techniques and processes that are 'simple to practise, can be incorporated into most people's day-to-day live, are easily disseminated throughout society, and produce the required shifts in consciousness fairly rapidly.'<sup>38</sup> Enter 'mind-machine' technology; the realm of New Age electronic gadgetry which promises mass, swift, technological enlightenment. Mind-machine technology relies upon a mish-mash of ideas borrowed from brain research, new

science, and New Age ideas about social organization. To neurobiological accounts of brain-hemisphere specialization is added the belief that Western society has relied too heavily upon 'left-brained' rational modes of thought, to the detriment of the holistic right-brain; society must become 'whole-brained.' To this is added the theory of dissipative structures, although here it is related specifically to the brain. The brain, argues Hutchinson, author of Megabrain, a work devoted to mind-machine gadgetry, may be a dissipative structure. By employing transformative technologies which increase fluctuations in the brain, a critical stage will develop, and finally, the brain may emerge at a new level of organization.<sup>39</sup> Ferguson says much the same thing:

In normal consciousness, small and rapid brainwaves (beta rhythm) dominate the EEG pattern in most people. We are more attentive to the external world than to inner experience in the beta state ... psychotechnologies tend to increase the slower, larger brainwaves known as alpha and theta. Inward attention, in other words, generates a larger fluctuation in the brain. In altered states of consciousness, fluctuations may reach a critical level, large enough to provoke the shift into a higher level of organization.(40)

Through the use of various mind-machine gadgets like the 'Whole Brain Wave Form Synchro-Energizer,' or the 'Transcutaneous Electro-Neural Stimulator,' or the 'Computerized Automated Psychophysiological Scan,' brainwaves from both hemispheres are supposedly 'synchronized' leading to a new level of holistic awareness. Russell mentions sensory isolation tanks and biofeedback machines as two other psychotechnologies which 'could lead to a significant acceleration in the process of self-realisation.'<sup>41</sup>

Where is all this heading? A world-wide increase in self-realization will, argues Russell, produce a society characterized by 'high-synergy.' The practical outcome of this will be a movement towards ecologically-viable forms of living and international co-operation, with a correlative reduction in crime, violence, and international hostilities. A movement towards the high-synergy society suggests Russell, may also stimulate the development of paranormal faculties. This would be nothing more than 'a natural correlate of humanity moving towards a social super-organism.'<sup>42</sup>

As communication capacities become more complex, and as individuals become spiritually connected, humanity will eventually form a single, integrated, living system. This move to planetization will, claims Russell, not result in less human freedom, but more. No longer dependent on the world to reaffirm our sense of derived identity, 'we would be able to act more in accord with the overall needs of a situation rather than our ego's needs.' Russell takes his ideas a stage further and speculates on the emergence of a single planetary consciousness - the 'Gaiafield':

this planetary field would emerge from the integrated interaction of the billions of conscious beings composing humanity. As the communication links within humanity increase, we will eventually reach a time when the billions of information exchanges shuttling through the networks at any one time create similar patterns of coherence in the global brain as are found in the human brain. Gaia would then awaken and become her equivalent of conscious.

This process itself might result in the emergence of a galaxy-wide and then universe-wide network of Gaiafields. This is the final



evolutionary level - the emergence of a 'Universal super-organism ... a level we could call Brahman.' If this were the case argues Russell, then it brings the evolutionary process full circle, 'Beginning from a unity of pure energy ... to a final reunion in Brahman.'<sup>43</sup> The universe might then collapse in on itself, bringing one cosmic cycle to an end, before it starts off on another one.

Russell's evolutionary agenda is continuous with patriarchal consciousness in at least three respects. Firstly, it advances a separatist and anti-ecological view of self-realization. For Russell, everything from human potential therapies to sensory deprivation, are a means of moving beyond the 'individual self quite separate and distinct from the rest of the world.' Yet it comes as no surprise that in the 1990 postscript to the revised edition of The Awakening Earth, Russell observes that although 'Spiritual disciplines, personal growth workshops and books on inner development may abound ... individuals who have freed themselves from the dictates of ego are still very few and far between.'<sup>44</sup> The reason is clear - in spite of his desire to transcend the 'skin-encapsulated ego,' Russell's interpretation of self-realization, and the practices he relates to it, are both anti-ecological, or at the most, operative at what Wilber terms the existential level of consciousness, where little consideration is given to the sense of self beyond that of the separate organism. For the ecological dynamic by contrast, self-realization means the naturalistic expansion of self into wider fields of ecological identification. A process which moves the self outwards into the natural environment, to feel the life of the other. In the words of novelist Alice Walker,

often cited by ecofeminists:

She say, My first step from the old white man [God] was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet ... it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can't miss it. It sort of like you know what, she say, grinning and rubbing high up on my thigh.(45)

Such identification by way of sensual and erotic immersion seems far removed from the 'sensory deprivation' and 'pure' self advocated by Russell. How can deprivation of the senses lead to greater connection? It can for Russell, because the emerging noosphere signifies for him not an erotic connection, but a connection of 'consciousness.' He writes:

it is extremely unlikely that the human social super-organism will form itself on the physical level ... Just as earlier, after life had emerged from matter, evolution moved up from the physical level to the biological level, so it now has moved up to a new level - consciousness ... Humanity is growing together mentally - however distant we might be physically.(46)

This brings us on the second area of continuity between Russell and a patriarchal sensibility - an ambivalent attitude towards biological limitation and physicality. Peters claims that New Age evolutionary theory is 'naturalistic,' 'humanistic,' and non-dualistic in that it 'posits a single united reality in which matter and spirit are integrated.'<sup>47</sup> This may be true of the evolutionism of Berry and others, but in relation to the kind of evolutionism advocated by Russell, a more accurate analysis is given by John Cooper, who describes New Age evolutionism as 'evolutionary spiritual monism.' (By 'spiritual' Cooper is implying 'distinct from matter.') It is 'spiritual' because 'cosmic evolution is presumed to be engendering higher and more purely spiritual

forms of existence.'<sup>48</sup> It is clear that such 'spiritual' evolution is at the same time a devaluation of physical existence. It begins with Blavatsky who held that through evolution, humanity was 'growing out of its bonds of matter, and even of flesh.'<sup>49</sup> Russell merely continues this tradition by separating physicality from consciousness, and placing the latter at the pinnacle of evolution: 'Humanity is growing together mentally - however distant we might be physically.' Indeed, Russell gets less and less 'earthy' as his thesis proceeds. Gaia is to become 'conscious' only to become part of an interstellar consciousness. He also sees the 'colonisation of space' as indicative of humanity's evolutionary progress. This last point is of interest to ecofeminist and environmental ethicist Yaakov Jerome Garb. In contrast to Russell who puts space colonization at the pinnacle of human evolution so far, Garb views it as indicative of patriarchal thinking: 'the extraterrestrial project is a masculine one' and 'an oversized literalization of the masculine transcendent ideal.' He writes:

[The extraterrestrial project is] an attempt to achieve a self-hood freed not only from gravity but from all it represents: the pull of the Earth, of matter, dependence on the mother, the body. Out of the Cradle is the title of one book on space exploration, Breaking the Bonds of Earth, the subtitle of another ... 'Should man fall back from his destiny,' a NASA official warns us, 'the confines of this planet will destroy him.' Notice the three actors here: man, his destiny, and the Earth. The whole drama is enacted along an axis of verticality (up = growth = destiny = future = space [= man]; down = regression = failure = Earth [= woman]), and the Earth's role is seen as destructive, confining, pulling man back from his destiny. Indeed, the whole patriarchal cultural project has been seen as an enormous extraterrestrial enterprise through which 'man acquires a soul distinct from his body, and a superorganic culture which perpetuates the revolt against organic dependence on the mother.'<sup>(50)</sup>

Similar sentiments are expressed by process theologian McDaniel.

McDaniel believes it is possible to incorporate a 'sky spirituality' within an ecological one. The sky can be used as an 'imaginative perspective from which the earth is viewed ... gazing back at the earth, appreciating its fecundity, along with God, and preparing to descend.' A sky perspective can contribute to 'world loyalty'; we can 'imagine ourselves in the sky looking down upon the earth, and caring for all the earth's creatures, each in its particularity and in its relatedness to the other creatures, as does God.' A spirituality of the sky may also make us feel at home in the cosmos by providing a 'cosmic myth' and 'cosmic awe': 'An ecological spirituality feels the sky as perpetual reminder that life on earth is itself part of a larger divine story. It is infused with a sense of cosmic awe.' Nevertheless, McDaniel highlights the dangers and pitfall of this skyward orientation, and they appear particularly pertinent to Russell's vision of evolutionary development:

there can be a tension, and indeed a contradiction, between a spirituality of the sky and one of the earth. Certain skyward spiritualities can lead a person away from the earth and any concern for it. They can encourage other-worldliness and escapism. For this reason, early Christian leaders such as Irenaeus criticized Gnosticism. Irenaeus saw Gnosticism as a world-transcending spirituality that had lost touch with the earth and possibilities for its redemption ... The sky can be experienced as a place of escape from earthly limitations, as a place toward which, as the Gnostics recognized in their own ways, the soul ascends in pursuit of mystical union with God. As such, the sky represents the unbounded and unlimited, that domain which has escaped the bondage of flesh and which, in the language of the Gnostic traditions, is 'spiritual' rather than 'material.'(51)

Thirdly, Russell's evolutionary vision is continuous with patriarchal consciousness in that it offers no rejoinder to ecological degradation; indeed, it may support it. This is an issue explored in

some depth by Goldsmith. He argues that the 'most striking feature' of the living world has been 'continuity or stability,' rather than change. 'Stability' is of course one of the core principles of the Gaia hypothesis - homeostatic regulation is the way by which the planetary organism supports life. Stability within the environment, as Goldsmith comments, has changed little 'since the time that air-breathing animals have been living in the forests, or about 300 million years,' and fossil records indicate that earth's climate has 'changed very little since life first appeared 3500 million years ago.' This is also true of social evolution: 'the main feature of vernacular societies, within which man has spent well over 90 per cent of his experience on this planet, has been stability.'<sup>52</sup>

This is not to say that evolution does not occur. Yet, as Goldsmith argues, change occurs not because it is desirable, 'but because in certain conditions it is judged to be necessary, as a means of preventing predictably larger and more disruptive changes.' In other words, Gaian evolution is geared-up towards stability. Again, Gaian evolution does not exclude growing complexity and diversity; but here, 'Increasing complexity enables a system to assure its homeostasis in the specific conditions in which it lives, whereas increasing diversity enables it to hold its own in a wide range of conditions with challenges that are less probable in terms of its evolutionary experience.'<sup>53</sup> To support his views on evolution Goldsmith appeals to the theory of punctuated equilibrium - life is characterized by stability; change is infrequent, and organized to maintain stability. Thus we find in the New Age two very different interpretations of punctuated equilibrium

theory. For Ferguson, Russell and others, it means that change is preceded by crisis. For Goldsmith, it means that change is infrequent and that when it occurs, it functions to maintain stability.

Gaian evolution, as Goldsmith continues, is antithetical to the New Age evolutionism of Prigogine, Jantsch, Russell and others. For them, 'stability means stagnation, a bad word ... Discontinuities such as floods, droughts, epidemics, wars, pollution disasters, the erosion of the ozone layer and global warming are desirable, because out of such "fluctuations" emerge progress and order.' Indeed, Goldsmith views such evolutionism as consistent with the modern paradigm of 'progress'; a paradigm which utilizes the idea of evolution to support technological advancement. In making no distinction between endo- and exosomatic evolution, technological advancement is presented as natural, 'evolutionary.' Thus New Age evolutionists like Erich Jantsch can say that economic development '"forms a meaningful and integral part of a universal evolution."'54

In holding that the answer to global problems lies in an evolutionary jump preceded by intense crisis, the evolutionary spirituality of Russell et al. rationalizes the very policies responsible for those problems in the first place. In Goldsmith's words: 'instead of interpreting our problems as the inevitable consequence of economic development or progress ... we interpret them instead as providing evidence that economic development has not proceeded far or fast enough.' Progress, technological complexity, and crises do not lead to higher levels of organization; they lead to a

'global Biospheric disclimax'; the creation of 'an impoverished and degraded world that is ever less capable of sustaining complex forms of life such as man.'<sup>55</sup>

C H A P T E R   F O U R T E E N :  
R E F L E C T I O N S   O N  
P A T R I A R C H A L   S P I R I T U A L I T Y

Patriarchal Spirituality in a Patriarchal Society

In his A Spirituality Named Compassion Fox claims that the dualistic, hierarchical, Gnostic and patriarchal spirituality that characterized the 'now dead-age of pisces' is dead.<sup>1</sup> Nothing, as the last five chapters have demonstrated, could be further from the truth. Much theology and spirituality belonging to the so-called New Age of Aquarius is, it seems, quite 'Piscean.' Much in the New Age is continuous with, rather than against, the value-hierarchical thinking and separative view of selfhood that characterizes Western patriarchal consciousness. Much of the so-called New Age is, to use the perceptive words of Collins, 'the tag end of gnosticism, platonism and cartesianism,' and therefore 'nothing more than a transitional phenomenon, a manifestation of the decline and fall of a cultural epoch ... a sign of decay rather than the beginning of a new era.'<sup>2</sup>

If this is the case, then it seems likely that this area of New Age spirituality does not provide solutions to, and perhaps exacerbates, the problems associated with contemporary, patriarchal society, including a separative view of the self, the weakening of social responsibility, and environmental degradation.

In relation to the issues of social responsibility and activism, we see that certain New Age groups consider these to be irrelevant to the



task of personal transformation. For those who hold this position, the following observations made by Jonas in relation to ancient Gnosticism are apt:

To the Gnostics, 'looking towards God' ... is a jumping across all intervening realities, which for this direct relationship are nothing but fetters and obstacles, or distracting temptations, or at best irrelevant. The sum of these intervening realities is the world, including the social world. The surpassing interest in salvation, the exclusive concern in the destiny of the transcendent self, 'denatures' as it were these realities and takes the heart out of the concern with them where such a concern is unavoidable. An essential mental reservation qualifies participation in the things of this world, and even one's own person as involved with those things is viewed from the distance of the beyond.(3)

Some movements like the human potential movement do of course express the view that personal transformation leads to social transformation, but this as discussed earlier is a particularly naive view of social reality, presuming society to be no more than a collection of autonomous individuals. Moreover, in the human potential movement all emphasis is placed upon the creative potential of the individual, and this may encourage the view that both the socially-advantaged and socially-disadvantaged have somehow chosen to create this reality. This, as pointed out, is also a belief found within New Age channeling. Rather than providing a basis for constructive social change, the belief that the self creates its social environment encourages complacency and resignation. The problem is further compounded by the belief that the real self exists beyond the morals and values of its culture. When the higher self is realized, according to entities like Ramtha, it will be discovered that there is no such thing as good or evil. Such a view provides little in the way of moral directionality. Danforth agrees,

and comments that when the inner self is seen as the only arbiter of truth, then there can be nothing but moral normlessness. The contemporary New Ager thus finds him or herself in the same kind of social vacuum faced by the ancient Gnostic, wandering the realm of the demiurge, breaking all his rules. In the words of Danforth:

Firewalking [and other New Age therapies] offers people a liberating experience of self-realization and self-transcendence in a world where great value is placed on individual freedom of expression and self-determination ... This personal freedom and independence, however desirable it may be, is achieved at a high cost. The utilitarianism, psychologism, and mysticism that makes such freedom and independence possible can lead very easily to a situation in which isolated and alienated private selves wander aimlessly in a world that has been emptied of any specific moral content.(4)

The 'empty world' remains empty.

In the more millenarian and apocalyptic forms of spirituality - Trevelyan's for example - the view expressed is that social transformation into the New Age will occur, but it will not be achieved through the agency of humans, but rather through divine or extraterrestrial intervention. A good example of this type of passive expectancy was the 'Harmonic Convergence' of 1987. Organized by Jose Arguelles, a researcher of Mayan culture, this event pulled together at least 20,000 people to worship at sacred sites around the world. The goal of the convergence was world-peace and harmony through 'resonant attunement' with the cosmos. The convergence centred around Arguelles' contention that the Mayans were actually extraterrestrials, whose calendar was a blueprint predicting the emergence of a New Age on earth. Those gathered at the sacred sites would inaugurate a twenty-five year

Piscean earth-cycle. After a final four-year period, marking the end of the Piscean era, humanity would be 'collectively projected into an evolutionary domain that is presently inconceivable.'<sup>5</sup> Arguelles predicted that the convergence would cause a sharp increase in UFO sightings and in psychic activity. What actually happened, as one New Age critic observed, was not particularly unusual: 'The sun came up and made the day clear and bright ... Holding hands, singing, hoping together - that seemed to be the key offering that morning.'<sup>6</sup> The New Age vision of David Icke - a former spokesperson for the British Green party - offers another good example of this sort of passivity. Icke has been informed by ascended masters and extraterrestrials that the Earth is one grid-point in an interconnected energy system. This energy 'flows from a central source - the Godhead - and throughout the universe on a giant interconnecting grid.' On earth, this energy is distributed through ley-lines. (Icke knows all this because he happens to be an extraterrestrial himself: 'There are many souls who have lived on earth ... who originate from other planets. I am one of them.') The reason why the earth is going through such political and social upheaval is obvious: the ley-lines are being blocked and are 'in urgent need of restoration.' Spirit beings from other dimensions and planets are making big efforts 'to restore the flow of energy before it is too late.' Evil forces and negative thought vibrations are trying to prevent this, and this is why 'extra-terrestrials are arriving on earth in large numbers, to help us defeat these forces and make the giant leap in evolution into the Aquarian Age ... We need their help.' In the midst of social, cultural, and planetary disintegration, it is comforting to know that 'The Ascended Masters and their teams are

constantly meeting to discuss the next move in response to human events and behaviour'; and that 'there are groups of people throughout the world who are building a network of Light, sending out love and peace to the Earth, her people, and all her creatures.' Humans can help their multi-dimensional allies by joining this network, but beware: 'Just be careful ... of what organizations you get involved with. Check them out. Not everything that calls itself "New Age" is desirable.'<sup>7</sup> I agree. Such a passive interpretation of social change - of waiting for the disembodied hierarchies to descend into this lowly plane - is as Spangler puts it the 'old' idea of the New Age, rooted in the 'western cultural and religious tradition,' and 'identical in spirit if not always in language to many of the current millennial expectations of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian groups.' Despite the utopian rhetoric, argues Spangler, this type of New Age millennialism is ultimately 'disempowering.' It is based on a 'fundamental sense of powerlessness' - change can only occur through celestial intervention. All accountability is thrown 'onto the back of vast, impersonal cosmic forces, whether astrological, extraterrestrial or divine.' It therefore leads to passivity, of waiting for 'The Event' to happen, which in turn breeds 'a certain attitude of indifference to the world.'<sup>8</sup>

When it comes to providing solutions to environmental problems it also seems clear that the patriarchal spirituality of the New Age has little to offer. Time and time again the view is expressed that humans have descended from another world into this one, that the world is a discardable platform for human development and evolution, and that our destiny lies in return. Such views offer little hope in providing a

solution to environmental problems, when, as Haught comments:

The contemporary environmental crisis is closely connected to inherited ways of thinking that have fostered a feeling in us that we are not really at home in the universe. As long as we fail to experience how intimately we belong to the earth and the universe as our appropriate habitat, we will probably not care deeply for our natural environment.(9)

#### Some Factors in the Emergence of Patriarchal Spirituality

There is no single factor to account for this emergence and growth of dualistic and autistic forms of spirituality at this present time in the West, but I will at least mention five suggestions, all of which will need more investigation.

First, to some extent New Age patriarchal spirituality can be seen as a reactionary 'back to basics.' That is, a desire to return to Platonic supernaturalism, Platonic occultism - in response to the relativism, secularism and materialism of contemporary society. Such a reactionary stance, according to Cupitt, seems to be the course plotted by mainline Christianity in the West: 'Struggling to keep up her confidence, the church just at present clings all the more desperately to the supernatural beliefs that in the past gave her legitimacy and nourishment.'<sup>10</sup> The sentiments voiced by scholars like Edward Norman, Dean of Peterhouse, Cambridge, are affirmed in various degrees by most stripes of popular Christianity. Norman laments the fact that 'the prevailing emphasis upon the transformation of the material world has robbed men of their bridge to eternity,' and that 'the priest in the sanctuary no longer speaks ... of the evidences of the unseen world.' We have neglected those sturdy, solid and static 'materials of

eternity,' which remain 'ambiguous in relation to time, lucid as pointers to celestial realities.' He, like others, is calling for a return to a form of Christianity concerned primarily with the 'relationship of the soul to eternity.'<sup>11</sup> Similarly, it can be noted that New Agers like Trevelyan are extremely critical of 'the present materialistic world picture' which they wish to replace with, not the 'numinous materialism' of ecological spiritualities, but 'the spiritual worlds and the realms of elemental beings and nature spirits.'<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, while criticising modernity's materialism, New Agers like Trevelyan have no hesitation in adopting its relativism - the self is seen as the only real arbiter of truth and reality. This is something which distinguishes the Platonic occultism of the New Age from the Platonic occultism of evangelical and fundamentalist forms of Christianity, where the Bible functions as the communal locus of all truth.

The second suggestion is that there is a connection between dualistic spiritualities and the disintegration of the power and influence of the Western middle-class. This is a view expressed by Collins who sees channeling, out-of-body experiences and other forms of dualistic spirituality as products of a loss of power and influence experienced by the middle-class, when they recognize that hard work and good living no longer produce privilege, and where a sense of personal impotence prompts many to turn from the outer world to the world within. Collins agrees with Millikan that New Age spirituality offers a 'wondrous relief from the complexities and limitations of being a person of conscience in a world where nothing seems to respond to the things we

do to change it.' 'Create your own reality' is 'a message which falls easily on the hearts of people who have lost their sense of potency and significance.'<sup>13</sup> For Raschke, similarly, Gnosticism is an ideology 'peculiar to the latter stages in the demise of the ruling classes throughout history.' The 'New Gnosticism' is an escapist response to the problems of modernity. Thrown out as 'the detritus of crumbling communal groups and institutions,' the middle-class are left 'looking for some kind of salvation by their own resources.' In this pitiful situation, 'The only social imperative remaining is to delve further into "inner space."<sup>14</sup>

The third suggestion is that dualistic spirituality functions as a means of coping with life in late-capitalist society. This is the view of Christopher Lasch, for whom the New Age - or the 'new consciousness' as he calls it - is not an answer to, but instead, the logical product of capitalism in a state of decline. Every age argues Lasch produces its own forms of mental illness, mirroring the characteristics of that age. An earlier phase of capitalism produced hysteria and obsessional neuroses. Late-capitalism produces narcissism. The concern with the inner self asserts Lasch signifies the latest phase in a 'culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self.' Narcissism, argues Lasch, provides the means by which one copes in a hostile environment in which family life is hard to sustain, and relationships are shallow. For Lasch therefore, the quest for the inner self is not an answer to individualistic consumerism - but this pursued

to its end; a so-called '"cultural revolution" that reproduces the worst features of the collapsing civilization it claims to criticize.' The aim of the new consciousness he suggests is not a new society but 'the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health, and psychic security.'<sup>15</sup> One example of using spiritual disciplines as a coping strategy may suffice. According to a book issued by the Brahma Kumaris, an organization claiming the allegiance of at least 200,000 worldwide,<sup>16</sup> the following suggestions should be used by devotees to focus their thoughts during 'raja yoga':

I feel myself going deep inside, I tune with myself. I become aware of myself as a soul, a being of light ... I feel myself withdrawing from the awareness of the body ... Then I let go of physical experiences ... I am free of the influence of all sense experiences. In a state of total freedom. At one with myself ... I let myself fly through thought, far away ... All thoughts of the world are receding ... I am no longer aware of the material world but I am coming into another dimension ... I have reached my home the ultimate place the highest region ... The sweet silence home, this is the soul world ... I find myself in touch with the purest being, I am connected with the Supreme Soul ... I become energized, and like a bird I gently glide myself once again towards the earth, I return to this body totally filled.(17)

And the purpose of such an experience?: 'In an increasingly hectic and demanding world ... meditation alone has proved to be an antidote to the stresses and tensions of daily living.' Through communication with the 'Supreme Soul,' the individual 'receives the power to change and transform the self.'<sup>18</sup> All attention, as Schur has aptly commented, is diverted from 'source to surface' - from social structures to individual coping strategies.



The fourth suggestion concerns the relationship between environmental degradation and otherworldly hopes. As noted earlier, in the 'Despair and Empowerment Work' conducted by Macy and her colleagues, it was found that the threat of planetary extinction was met with a sense of numbness and powerlessness. It could be argued that the emergence of otherworldly (and innerworldly) spiritualities function as a solution to, or as a means of coping with, this threat. Although, as Ruether puts it, there has been a 'marked turning away' in modern post-Christian culture from beliefs about life and death, and in fact that modernity has signified 'a reclaiming of this earth as our home,' modern civilization is at the same time 'increasingly threatened by its own denouement in technological annihilation.' And from this threat, continues Ruether, 'there may be again a desire to turn away from this earth and cultivate the heavenly world.'<sup>19</sup> Are the otherworldly hopes of the New Age, it could be asked, examples of just this?

The fifth suggestion is that there is a certain amount of 'glamour' involved in the New Age rejection of mainstream Christianity for Gnosticism and other 'heretical' spiritualities. Palmer agrees and writes that Gnosticism has become a New Age 'fad' because it is seen by many 'as offering a form of Christianity which was suppressed and therefore must be valid.' Ironically, Gnosticism has been praised even by radical feminists like Sjoo for being 'holistic.' In truth, those who align themselves with Gnosticism are, as Palmer says, embracing 'one of the major forces responsible for having created our present anti-environmental world-view.'<sup>20</sup>

### Conclusion

The 'crisis of modernity' has forced individuals to make choices about the meaning of existence or face nihilism. One choice for many has been to return to an old way of thinking about the world - Platonically, supernaturally, dualistically. This is not indicative of anything 'new,' but the last gasps of a dying civilization; the 'tag end of gnosticism, platonism and cartesianism.' We need to switch from 'vertical' to 'horizontal' religion suggests Cupitt. Enter the ecological dynamic.

P A R T   T H R E E :  
E C O L O G I C A L   S P I R I T U A L I T Y

INTRODUCTION

We enter a period of enormous promise. The scientific-technological, Christian, masculine, individualistic, Northern European spirit joins with the ecological, animistic, feminine, communal native spiritualities in the creation of a new form of society whose significance towers over that of all other political or social events. The psychic interaction that has been proceeding in a lopsided, destructive, and unconscious fashion for five centuries has entered a new phase with the rise of the ecological, women's, Black, and Indian movements ... Out of the creative energy welling up from the diversity of traditions, we fashion a form of society that takes us out of a global reign of terror and into a renewed health, into a new quality of prosperity, and into a more basic delight in being human in the midst of all the life communities.

Brian Swimme<sup>1</sup>

In this part of the thesis I propose to discuss different expressions of the ecological spirituality of the New Age movement. Chapter Fifteen looks at an 'ecological' interpretation of Christianity. Matthew Fox's creation-centred (or 'centered') spirituality will serve as the focal point of this discussion. However, this does not exclude other creation-centred Christian thinkers - particularly feminists - from study. Fox himself recognizes that feminists are 'the principal group today who are recovering and recreating the creation-centered spiritual tradition.' In the works of Griffin, Ruether and Christ, he adds, 'I find all the themes of creation-centered spirituality.'<sup>2</sup> Chapter Sixteen will focus on Goddess spirituality, and in particular, the Goddess spirituality of feminist 'Wicca' or Witchcraft. Chapter

Seventeen looks at some of the criticisms which have been levelled against creation-centred spirituality and Goddess spirituality. Chapter Eighteen, the final chapter in Part Three, examines Native American spirituality.

Although these forms of ecological spirituality may differ greatly in terms of content, they all share in common that which this thesis has identified as the three components of the ecological sensibility (see General Introduction), which are: 1) an affirmation of the earth and cosmos as 'oikos,' our house, our home; 2) the belief that all things are interrelated and interdependent; 3) an acceptance and appreciation of diversity. These three components make ecological theology and spirituality not just different from, but practically antithetical to patriarchal theology and spirituality. The belief that the cosmos is not humanity's true home, an atomistic conception of the self, and the drive towards transcendent 'Oneness,' are all rejected.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN : CREATION - CENTRED CHRISTIANITY

Over the last decade the phrase 'creation-centred' spirituality has been firmly linked with the work of former-Dominican Matthew Fox, although in truth, his ideas resonate with those of other Christian theologians aligned with feminist and process perspectives. It should also be noted that certain themes in creation spirituality accord well with those found in the liberation theologies of the third world, including an emphasis upon God's commitment to justice for the oppressed and realized eschatology. Again, in both there is a rejection of hierarchical models of God and the notion of 'personal' salvation. The contemporary creation-centred or simply creation spirituality movement is truly international in scope, with 'regional connectors' in North America, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Nepal, New Zealand, and Peru. St. James's Church in London is the networking centre for Britain, and provides a list of more than 70 contacts, covering most areas.

The creation spirituality of Fox is structured within a framework of four interlinking paths. These are the Via Positiva, the Via Negativa, the Via Creativa, and the Via Transformativa. Together these constitute a deliberate shift from traditional Neoplatonic mysticism in which illumination and union emerge from purgation. In placing purgation first, as Bede Griffiths comments, Neoplatonic mysticism 'gave a negative turn to the spiritual life with its emphasis on sin and redemption, while rejecting the positive values of the present world, of

nature, the body, and the senses.'<sup>1</sup> In rejecting Neoplatonic mysticism, creation spirituality rejects its theological corollary - the 'fall/redemption' tradition which Fox traces back to Augustine. Fox is conscious of the fact that this is also a rejection of patriarchal religion; that is, a rejection of sexism, dualism, apoliticism, and otherworldliness.

By contrast, creation spirituality begins - not with purgation or original sin - but with the Via Positiva, the goodness and blessing of creation, the immanence of God, and humanity's royal personhood. The Via Positiva is balanced by the Via Negativa - suffering and pain, nothingness, and the God beyond 'isness.' Nevertheless, the recognition of the goodness of creation leads to the awakening and acknowledgement of our capacities to create and give birth - this is the Via Creativa. This leads finally to the Via Transformativa, where creativity is guided by the realization of interdependence into compassion, celebration, and justice-making. These four paths all present different although complementary perspectives on a number of themes, including God, nature, humanity, sin, salvation, and Jesus. Yet the paths do not just complement one another, but are as Fox suggests, very much interrelated. The Via Positiva and the Via Creativa are both about 'awe and wonder, delight and beauty.' The Via Negativa and the Via Transformativa are related because 'we cannot enter compassion ... if we have not entered the darkness of suffering and pain.' Moreover, because the Via Creativa puts us in touch with our imaginations and creativity, we can respond to the tasks of the Via Transformativa 'not just with anger but with creative, effective works that truly heal.'<sup>2</sup>

The four paths will now be discussed in detail. As indicated in the Introduction to Part Three, an analysis of Fox's framework does not exclude from discussion the views of other contemporary creation-centred Christian thinkers - for example Thomas Berry and Rosemary Radford Ruether. In fact, creation spirituality is neither tied down to the present, nor to Christian theologians and visionaries. According to Fox the Christian creation tradition is an historical tradition - not a recent invention - that has, through the ages, stood quietly in the shadows of a fall/redemption hegemony. Indeed Fox goes as far as offering a 'family tree' of creation texts and mystics. Included in this tree are the Hebrew Bible (particularly the works of the Yahwist, the Wisdom literature, and the prophets), the New Testament (the life and teachings of Jesus, and the 'Cosmic Christ' motifs of Paul's letters), St. Irenaeus, Scotus Erigenus, Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi, and the so-called 'Rhineland mystics' (including Hildegard of Bingen, Mechtilde of Magdeburg, Meister Eckhart, and Julian of Norwich).<sup>3</sup> Griffin says that constructive postmodern spirituality blends together elements of premodern thought with elements of contemporary science. This is especially true in the case of creation spirituality. Physics and the bio-sciences, declares Fox, are providing us with 'a keener awareness of interdependence of all beings' and 'are opening up to us today truths that are as mystical as they are scientific, as compassionate as they are useful.'<sup>4</sup>

### The Via Positiva

The Via Positiva, the first path of creation spirituality, is the 'path of affirmation, thanksgiving, ecstasy.' The first theme in the

Via Positiva is that the cosmos is not a fallen reality divorced from divinity, but 'Dabhar,' the creative energy or word of God. As such, the cosmos is not an impediment to divinity - as in Gnosticism - but 'the primary sacrament,' 'a source of truth and of revelation.'<sup>5</sup> This sense of the created order as divine revelation, as a 'primary sacrament,' is captured beautifully by Eckhart, who says that 'Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God.' Why? - because 'Isness is God. Where there is isness, there God is. Creation is the giving of isness from God.'<sup>6</sup> Eckhart would perhaps agree with Berry, who suggests that Christians should put away their bibles for a while, for 'This universe itself, but especially the planet Earth, needs to be experienced as the primary mode of divine presence.'<sup>7</sup>

What does this 'primary sacrament' of the cosmos teach us?; it teaches us that the divine word is ongoing and creative, not static. 'A creation-centered spiritual person' comments Fox 'is sensitive and aware, alive and awake to the ever-flowing, ever-green, unfolding of the divine Dabhar.'<sup>8</sup> One person alive and awake to the cosmic 'unfolding of the divine' is Eckhart, who proclaims: 'Now God creates all things but does not stop creating. God forever creates and forever begins to create and creatures are always being created and in the process of beginning to be created.'<sup>9</sup> Another person awake to the cosmic unfolding of the divine is physicist and cosmologist Brian Swimme. Contrary to the Newtonian/Cartesian framework, he argues that

The universe can no longer be regarded as a result of chance collisions of materials, nor as a deterministic mechanism. The universe considered as a whole is more like a developing being. The universe has a beginning and is in the midst of its development: a vast cosmic epigenesis. Everything that



exists is involved in this emergence - galaxies and stars and planets and light and all living creatures.(10)

Linked to the vision of the cosmos as Dabhar is that of the cosmos as 'blessing.' Blessing writes Fox is the 'desire behind the creation'; 'God loves her creation and that love which is an unconditional sending forth into existence is blessing.' Fox laments the fact that the fall/redemption tradition, with its emphasis upon sin, guilt, and fallenness, has left believers 'bereft of the rich tradition of life as blessing and of the God of blessing of the Bible.'<sup>11</sup> Theology professor Helen A. Kenik agrees with this assessment. She argues that theological reflection in the West has been chiefly motivated 'by the view of humanity in need of salvation.' God has been seen primarily as a 'saviour' God. She goes on to argue that the Biblical tradition offers a more balanced view: 'Yahweh is indeed the God who saves; but Yahweh also gives and preserves life. Yahweh is creator as well as savior; Yahweh is preserver of life as well as intervener in history.' And related to this notion of Yahweh as preserver is Yahweh the God of blessing. In reference to a Yahwist blessing passage (Gen. 12:1-4a), Kenik comments: 'The Yahwist worked out of the realization that God remains present in and with all of her creatures, caring for them and sustaining their life. The sign of that ever-present life is, according to the Yahwist, God's blessing. For this theologian, life is blessing and blessing is life.'<sup>12</sup>

For Fox 'blessing' is not merely descriptive of the story of Israel, but of creation itself: 'Original blessing underlies all being, all creation, all time, all space, all unfolding and evolving of what

is.'<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Swimme views the created cosmos as the act of 'Ultimate Generosity': 'the root reality of the universe is generosity of being. That's why the ground of being is empty: every thing has been given over to the universe; all existence has been poured forth; all being has gushed forth because Ultimate Generosity retains no thing.'<sup>14</sup> Because the creation tradition understands the cosmos as an act of generosity and blessing, human beings are viewed, not as 'blotches on existence, as sinful creatures,' but as 'original blessings.'<sup>15</sup>

Does this mean that creation-centred Christianity has no room for sin, or for a 'fall?' It certainly does not have any room for the fall/redemption doctrine of original sin which for Fox is alien to the spirit of Judaism and a product of bad exegesis on the part of Augustine. Moreover, this doctrine according to Fox has served as a starting point in the West's flight from nature, body and sexuality and is thus a crime against the Dabhar, the holiness of existence. Ruether agrees and highlights the extent to which sin in Augustine's theology is closely linked with passion and sexuality, which in turn are closely connected with women. She laments that 'Augustine's view of sexuality is the foundation of unfortunate views which have continued to shape Western Catholicism down to recent times.'<sup>16</sup>

Given these criticisms, why has the fall/redemption interpretation of original sin remained intact? It has, suggests Fox, because it is 'a veritable weapon in the hands of those bent on controlling others,' especially those 'whose self-trust and self-image are not supported by society at large ... The homosexual can quite easily understand his or

her homosexuality as an original sin; the woman is encouraged to look at her sex as an original sin; to the black in a white society, his or her blackness is an original sin.'<sup>17</sup> On a final note, there is a certain irony in the fact that in spite of its emphasis upon fallenness and original sin, the fall/redemption tradition does not take sin seriously. 'Sin' degenerates into talk of personal morality and ignores wider issues - sins against the planetary environment, sins of injustice and sins of oppression.

Creation spirituality does offer an alternative interpretation of 'original sin.' The 'sin behind sin' according to Fox is dualism: 'Take any sin: war, burglary, rape, thievery. Every such action is treating another as an object outside oneself. This is dualism. This is behind all sin.'<sup>18</sup> Hildegard of Bingen appears to agree with Fox, when she says that Satan's sin - which is, after all, the first sin - is that he 'sought to stand by himself.'<sup>19</sup> In a similar way, Ruether understands sin as the corruption of an authentic relationality into dualisms of superiority and inferiority. Redemption, she argues, is a 'conversion to relationality.'<sup>20</sup>

In addition to its interpretation of original sin, creation spirituality has also something to say concerning sins against each of its four paths. One sin, from the perspective of the Via Positiva, 'would consist in injuring creation and doing harm to its balance and harmoniousness ... all ecological damage is a sin against the Via Positiva.'<sup>21</sup> When the world is seen as God's body, comments theologian Sallie McFague, sin 'is the refusal to be part of the body, the special

part we are as *imago dei*.' In contrast to the dualistic and hierarchical kingship model of God offered by patriarchal theology, where sin is sin against a transcendent father, in a pantheistic sensibility sin is something 'against the world'; a 'refusal to realize one's radical interdependence with all that lives.'<sup>22</sup> Another sin, according to Fox, is that of 'omitting Eros or love of life from our lives.' Sin in this sense is a refusal to 'fall in love with life ... to savor life's simple and non-elitist pleasures, to befriend pleasure, to celebrate the blessings of life.'<sup>23</sup> Aquinas would agree. He says that 'God delights' and is 'always rejoicing,' and that love and joy 'are the only human emotions that we can attribute literally to God.' He insists that 'A person who chooses to avoid pleasure and thereby to omit doing what is a natural necessity would commit a sin of resisting the design of nature.' One who abhors pleasures simply because they are pleasurable 'is rightly called an ungrateful boor.'<sup>24</sup> The sentiments which lie behind Augustine's lamentations at the loss of a pre-fallen state in which 'the members of a man's body could have been the servants of a man's will without any lust, for the procreation of children'<sup>25</sup> would perhaps count as such an 'omission of Eros.' This sin is related to how the *Via Positiva* understands 'humility.'

In the fall/redemption tradition, according to Fox, 'humility' is identified with a spirit of submission to those higher in the order of things (the Christian is called to be 'humble' before the Lord). In creation spirituality humility means to be in touch with earth (*humus*), and to be 'in touch with one's own earthiness, and to celebrate the blessing that our earthiness, our sensuality, and our passions are.'<sup>26</sup>

In the creation tradition, earthiness and holiness come together; as Hildegard remarks: 'Holy persons draw to themselves all that is earthly.'<sup>27</sup> The holiness of our earthiness is captured beautifully by Julian of Norwich when she writes:

'A person walks upright, and the food in her body is shut in as if in a well-made purse. When the time of her need arrives, the purse is opened and then shut again in most fitting fashion. And it is God who does this ... For God does not despise what he has made, nor does he disdain to serve us in the simplest natural functions of our body ...'(28)

A celebration of our roots in the earth is at the same time a celebration of our roots in the cosmos. Contrary to the Gnosticism which teaches that humans are above or separate from the cosmos, creation spirituality affirms that the cosmos is home to the human. Berry for example reminds us that 'Everything in the universe is genetically cousin to everything else. There is literally one family, one bonding, in the universe, because everything is descended from the same source.'<sup>29</sup> Swimme makes a similar point when he asks us to reflect on the following issues of ownership and identity:

Look at your hand - do you claim it as your own? Every element was forged in temperatures a million times hotter than molten rock, each atom fashioned in the blazing heat of the star. Your eyes, your brain, your bones, all of you is composed of the star's creations. You are that star, brought into a form of life that enables life to reflect on itself.(30)

The cosmos is not only home to the human, it is implicated in the human, and vice versa. In the words of Fox: 'we are in the cosmos and the cosmos is in us ... all things are microcosms of a macrocosm.'<sup>31</sup> Hildegard agrees when she writes that 'Now God has built the human form

into the world structure, indeed even the cosmos, just as an artist would use a particular pattern in her work.'<sup>32</sup> This sense of the integrity of the human in the cosmos is likewise affirmed by contemporary cosmology. For example, if one were to produce a graph of the size-mass measurements of every item in the cosmos - from elementary particles to the largest galaxy structures - we would find, in the words of Seielstad, that '"humans are a rough mean between the near-infinitesimal and the near-infinite ... For the mathematically minded, a human's size is the approximate geometric mean of the sizes of a planet and an atom ...".<sup>33</sup>

Some have interpreted such findings as indicating the integrity of the human in the cosmos; others however push for the notion of 'centrality.' For example, Roszak argues that the enormous size of the universe is not indicative of a bleak, hostile, or meaningless backdrop in which humans appear as mere accidents, but instead, the necessary size needed for the cosmic evolutionary processes to develop complex organisms like the human. The universe, argues Roszak, 'is not essentially in the business of producing bigness, but of elaborating complexity.' Seen in this sense, 'our species assumes a strange, new centrality in that [cosmic] history.'<sup>34</sup> Swimme, like Roszak, seems to grant special significance to the human by way of its powers of self-reflexive consciousness: 'The human provides the space in which the universe feels its stupendous beauty ... Think of what it would be like if there were no humans on the planet: the mountains and the primeval fireball would be magnificent, but the Earth would not feel any of this. Can you see the sadness of such a state? The incompleteness?'<sup>35</sup>

Such views are related to what cosmologists call the 'anthropic cosmological principle' - the belief that cosmic evolution is geared up towards the creation of (human) life. The danger with this position is that it may degenerate into anthropocentrism and other kinds of value-hierarchical dualisms. The idea of human 'centrality' can easily become one of human supremacy - as it seems to do in the theology of Teilhard de Chardin (Chapter Thirteen), and in the transpersonal psychology of Wilber (Chapter Twelve). In an ecological spirituality humanity is celebrated and seen as an integral part of the cosmic web of life. But this is seen as being true of all other strands in the web. In the words of Berry: 'differentiation is the grandeur of the totality of things ... everything is elected, each in its own modality.'<sup>36</sup> An ecological spirituality will affirm, as Aquinas puts it, that 'God deliberately brings about multitude and distinction in order that the divine goodness may be brought forth and shared in many measures. There is beauty in the very diversity.' And that 'Divinity is better represented by the whole universe than by any single thing.'<sup>37</sup> It will reject, in the words of Spretnak, 'much of the "New Age" movement and the belief that humans are the epitome of creation rather than being part of the far more glorious unfolding universe.'<sup>38</sup>

A micro-macro cosmology moves towards the issue of justice (a central concern of the Via Transformativa). In the cosmos, argues Fox, there is a sense of balance and harmony, of justice. A cosmic spirituality is therefore a justice spirituality, because it seeks 'harmony, balance, and justice. Indeed, injustice is precisely a rupture in the order of the cosmos, a rupture in creation itself ...

Injustice then is a cosmic issue.<sup>39</sup> This was clearly recognized by the psalmist when he says that 'all the foundations of the earth are shaken' when the weak, and the orphaned, and the destitute are deprived of justice (Ps. 82:3-5).

In the Via Positiva Jesus is recognized as the embodiment of humility, Eros, the love of life. In teaching his followers to call God 'Abba' he indicates the intimate, erotic bond between Creator and created. In his parables of birds, lilies, fish, the fig tree, bread, mustard seeds and rain, he presents himself as 'the parable-maker who fashions a new creation out of the holy materials of the only creation we all share in common.'<sup>40</sup> In creation spirituality, the historical Jesus is the human embodiment of the cosmic Dabhar, which is also the Cosmic Christ. The Cosmic Christ is the Christ celebrated by Paul in Colossians (1:15-20). In the Cosmic Christ, as in the earthly Jesus, we note the celebration of Eros, the love of life. In the words of Fox: 'He is ... fully present to all of creation, drawing heaven and earth together in a celebration of the unity of all things.'<sup>41</sup>

If the cosmos is the word of God, and the home of humanity, it is also the Kingdom/Queendom of God, and humans are its royal citizens. Jesus, from the perspective of the Via Positiva, is the royal person who calls all to be royal people. First, this means reminding all of their royal dignity. As Fox comments: 'Jesus chose especially the poor and the sinners of society to give them a sense of their own dignity, their own royal personhood, that would in turn be a starting point to their being released from captivity.' Second, this means reminding all of the



responsibility that goes with the dignity - 'for justice-making and preserving creation.'<sup>42</sup> This highlights another sin against the Via Positiva - the refusal to accept our royal dignity and responsibility.

The Via Positiva assumes a panentheistic rather than theistic/deistic understanding of divinity. The divine - or at least part of the divine - is located within the interconnected and evolving web of the cosmos, not outside it. Eckhart articulates this sense of divine intimacy when he says:

God created all things in such a way that they are not outside himself, as ignorant people falsely imagine. Rather, all creatures flow outward, but nonetheless remain within God. God created all things this way: not that they might stand outside of God, nor alongside God, nor beyond God, but that they might come into God and receive God and dwell in God. For this reason everything that is is bathed in God, is enveloped by God, who is round-about us all, enveloping us.(43)

A panentheistic model of divinity gives rise to new ways of imaging God - images of static kingship are replaced by images of intimacy and process. Hildegard compares God to an all-embracing circle: 'Just as a circle embraces all that is within it, so does the God-head embrace all.'<sup>44</sup> Ruether names the divine as 'God/ess,' who is the foundation 'of our being and our new being,' and who 'embraces both the roots of the material substratum of our existence (matter) and also the endlessly new creative potential (spirit).'<sup>45</sup>

#### The Via Negativa.

In creation spirituality the Via Positiva stands in dialectical tension with the Via Negativa, the path of darkness and emptiness.

While the first path teaches the goodness and blessing of life, and of the cosmos, the second introduces the darker side of existence - pain, suffering, death, and emptiness. The Via Negativa throws up perspectives on the nature of sin, God, Jesus, and existence which contrast sharply with those of the first path.

For Fox, the Via Negativa is a return to the darkness of our origins and destinies - humans were conceived in the darkness of the womb, and will return to the darkness of the earth. He suggests that the so-called 'enlightenment' has been, at the same time, a rejection of the darkness, of mystery, of mortality and depth, and this has made spirituality superficial and surface-like. If we cannot 'befriend the darkness,' comments Fox, 'it shall return to haunt us and break into our light-of-day giddiness'; 'we will surely pay the price all those pay who repress the shadow.'<sup>46</sup> From a Jungian viewpoint 'befriending the darkness' means befriending the 'shadow' or repressed aspects of personality. Jung viewed such befriending as being necessary to the task of establishing a more authentic relationship with the environment. A person who fails to befriend the shadow is left to live in a world of distorted projections. Jung writes:

To become conscious of it [the shadow] involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real ... Although, with insight ... the shadow can to some extent be assimilated into the conscious personality, experience shows that there are certain features which offer the most obstinate resistance ... these resistances are usually bound up with projections, which are not recognized as such ... Hence one meets with projections, one does not make them. The effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment, since instead of a real relation to it there is now only an illusory one ... they [projections] lead to ... [a] condition in which one dreams a world whose reality remains forever unattainable ... It is often tragic to see how blatantly a man

bungles his own life and the lives of others yet remains totally incapable of seeing how much the whole tragedy originates in himself ... it is an unconscious factor which spins the illusions that veil his world.(47)

Befriending the dark aspects of human existence would include befriending pain, suffering, and death. The patriarchal response to pain and suffering as Fox comments has been denial - denial through a theological tradition that considers pain and suffering to be opposed to the work of creation; denial through 'drugs, alcohol, soap operas, or shopping.' The creation tradition understands the negative realities of existence, not as indicators of a fallen world, or the wages of sin, but integral to 'our dialectical living of both pleasure and pain. Eros does not come without a price.' What purpose does the befriending of pain serve? First, it is conducive to compassion because it 'helps us to understand other people in pain.' Second, pain helps us to make a distinction between real and false pleasures: it 'sensitizes us to what is truly beautiful in life.' Befriending and accepting pain does not of course mean glorifying pain: 'The purpose of letting pain be pain is precisely this: to let go of pain.' In the Via Negativa salvation is 'not a salvation from pain but through pain.'<sup>48</sup>

Befriending death would mean recognizing that it is not as Augustine teaches a punishment for arrogance and disobedience,<sup>49</sup> but an integral part of existence. Swimme reflects a creation-centred approach to death when he argues that it is an 'invention of evolutionary creativity.' Through it, the universe can 'feel its own staggering value ... Within human self-reflexion can be felt a glimmer of the supreme preciousness of being, and we would certainly not be able to

feel this were it not for our awareness of death.' Although 'we suffer tremendously in our role of carrying the awareness of life's precious and fragile beauty,' this awareness, which prompts our reverence for life, 'is our gift to the universe.'<sup>50</sup> The befriending of death is at the same time a letting-go of our immortality projections; projections which signify, as Ruether comments, a 'refusal to accept earth as our home and the plants and animals of earth as our kindred.'<sup>51</sup>

The Via Negativa befriends not only the darkness of existence, but the emptiness of existence. 'All creatures are a mere nothing' declares Eckhart; 'All creatures have been drawn from nothingness and this is why their origin is nothingness.'<sup>52</sup> Aquinas says that all creatures 'come forth from nothing,' and that 'If God for even a moment were to withhold the divine power from the things God established, all would return to nothing and cease to be.'<sup>53</sup> Swimme reminds us that we are permeated by 'plenary emptiness': 'You are more emptiness than anything else. Indeed, if all the space were taken out of you, you would be a million times smaller than the smallest grain of sand.' This emptiness he suggests is at the same time 'the source of all being,' 'the ultimate simplicity of the Godhead.'<sup>54</sup> Eckhart agrees when he describes God as 'a being beyond being and a nothingness beyond being.' The God of the Via Positiva is the 'cataphatic' God, the creator God. The God of the Via Negativa is the 'apophatic' God. The relation between these two poles of the divine is captured well by Eckhart, who makes a distinction between the creator God and the Godhead: 'God acts but the Godhead does not act. The mystery of the darkness of the eternal Godhead is unknown and never was known and never will be known.'<sup>55</sup> To some extent this

resonates with the process thought of Whitehead where a distinction is made between the primordial and consequent poles of the divine. Also, process theology, as discussed in Chapter Eight, does like creation spirituality express the belief that the created order rests upon emptiness. For process theologian McDaniel for instance, an 'ecological' Christianity will agree with the Buddhist view that 'Reality itself is ... an interconnected network of interdependent realities with nothing supporting it.' Ultimate reality is emptiness, or to put it another way, 'a beginningless and endless process of pure becoming,' and 'Ecological Christians ... can think of God as pure becoming, as no-thing-ness, as a beginning and endless process of self-creative emptiness.'<sup>56</sup> In contrast with Platonic thought in which the world of relativities is but a shadow of a more enduring realm, both creation spirituality and process thought affirm the ultimacy of becoming.

Why would an ecological spirituality - which is surely concerned with improving human relations within the cosmic web of creation - show any interest at all in the apophatic tradition? Why would it wish to contemplate the God beyond all images and symbols, and pray, as Eckhart did, for 'God to rid me of God?'<sup>57</sup> In an ecological spirituality, According to McDaniel, openness to the God beyond images need not be considered as reflecting 'a transcendence of all connections,' but instead, linkage with 'deeper' connections. And the point of this exercise will not be to escape the world, but to 'gather resources for strengthening our connections with the world.'<sup>58</sup> Fox agrees when he says that to experience the God of nothingness - achieved through techniques

like Zen meditation - is not to put down or forget the God of creation, but 'to experience the divinity in all creation to an even greater depth ... letting go and letting be are about a return to creation, not a flight from it.'<sup>59</sup> By letting-go of all our projected images of God, we come into a more authentic relationship with God and the created order. An obvious sin from the perspective of the Via Negativa is the refusal to let go of all images and projections: 'To let others be different, be surprising, be themselves' - including God. This sin disrupts - as Jung would agree - 'all authentic pleasure, all authentic communication, all authentic relating.'<sup>60</sup>

Finally, the Via negativa offers a unique perspective on Jesus and the cross. Fall/redemption Christianity, as Fox and other creation-centred thinkers have noted - has made 'the cross' the central symbol of the Christian faith. 'Orthodox Christological interpretations,' comments feminist ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison, 'imply that somehow the entire meaning of Jesus' life and work is to be found in his headlong race toward Golgotha, toward crucifixion.'<sup>61</sup> Yet, because it lacks a Via Positiva, this tradition distorts the meaning and significance of the cross in relation to the rest of Jesus' life. Although the creation tradition rejects such crypto-docetism, it can still provide a theology of the cross. It is, according to Fox, 'a symbol of the ultimate letting-go': 'Jesus says, "The person who saves her life will lose it; the person who loses her life will save it."' There is no Via Positiva fully lived without a Via Negativa, a deep letting go, an entry into darkness and doubt and uncertainty and danger.'<sup>62</sup>

The 'letting-go' of the cross is also about letting-go of warrior, kingship, hierarchical, and patriarchal projections of divinity. In her feminist midrash, 'The Kenosis of the Father,' Ruether, through the eyes of Mary Magdalene, offers an imaginative portrayal of Jesus' death and the letting go of such projections.

Mary glanced toward the sky. 'Where was Jesus' heavenly Father when he died?' she thought. 'He did not answer his cry. The heavens were silent. The angels did not appear to draw him out of many waters and set him upon the Mount of Zion to execute judgement upon his enemies and hold dominion forever, as was promised. Perhaps there are no heavenly hosts to appear in the clouds? Is the Cherubim throne empty? Perhaps it is this very idea of God as a great king, ruling over nations as His servants, that has been done away with by Jesus' death on the cross. With Jesus' death, God, the heavenly ruler, has left the heavens and has been poured out upon the earth with his blood. A new God is being born in our hearts to teach us to level the heavens and exalt the earth and create a new world without masters and slaves, rulers and subjects ...'

'Who will be ready to hear this message?' ponders Mary. With sadness, she reflects that 'Although Jesus had emptied the throne of God, even now Peter and some of the other disciples are busy trying to fill it again.'<sup>63</sup>

### The Via Creativa

The dialectical tension between blessing and darkness leads to the third path in creation spirituality - the Via Creativa. Creativity cannot take place when the cosmos is neither noticed nor celebrated. But neither can it take place when there is fear instead of reverence for the dark, for darkness 'is the origin of everything that is born.' The creation tradition has a high regard for human creativity. Indeed Fox argues that it is creativity 'which is the full meaning of

humanity's being "an image of God."<sup>64</sup> Aquinas says that 'There is in God perfect fecundity' and that 'God's wisdom is that of artists.' But he also observes that 'The dignity of causality is imparted even to creatures.' It is not from weakness that God extended creativity to all creatures; rather, 'from an abundance of divine goodness have creatures been endowed with the dignity of causality.'<sup>65</sup> 'God,' declares Hildegard, 'gave to humankind the talent to create with all the world.'<sup>66</sup> 'The essence of God is birthing,' says Eckhart, and 'the Creator extends this same power to you out of the divine maternity bed located in the Godhead to eternally give birth.'<sup>67</sup>

Given this high regard for creativity, it comes as little surprise that creation spirituality is highly critical of the fall/redemption tradition in which spirituality is divorced from creativity. "'The greatest tragedy in theology in the past three centuries,'" comments Dominican Father M. D. Chenu, "'has been the divorce of the theologian from the poet, the dancer, the musician, the painter, the dramatist, the actress, the movie-maker.'"<sup>68</sup> This sentiment is echoed by the Russian religious philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev who considers the schism between church and world, between salvation and creativity, to be 'The most central, the most tormenting, and the most acute problem of our epoch': 'The church is concerned with salvation; the secular world is concerned with creativity. The church does not justify and sanctify the creative works with which the secular world is concerned.' He finds the root of the problem in a theological tradition which teaches that salvation and creativity belong to different planes of existence, and that the plane of creativity is finally of little importance, in comparison with the



fate of the individual's soul after death. Such a divorce inhibits a creative outlook towards life: 'One cannot create when one is threatened with damnation.' He suggests that the Church move away from this 'degenerate' form of Christianity to one which places 'theosis' rather than personal, otherworldly salvation at the centre of its spirituality. Theosis, a concept embraced by the early Eastern Fathers, concerns 'the divinization of all creatures, the transfiguration of the world, the idea of the cosmos, and not the idea of personal salvation.'<sup>69</sup>

The creation tradition is so critical of the divorce of creativity from spirituality because it considers the human urge to create to be unquenchable. The divorce of spirituality from creativity leaves what Eckhart calls the 'fearful creative power of God' in the hands of those who would use it most destructively. If the Church cannot recover the sense of human creativity as *imago dei*, then, argues Fox, 'our creativity will destroy us, if not in the form of nuclear war, then in the form of multiplication of McDonald's hamburger stands and agribusiness conglomerates, of pornographic magazines and sentimental news broadcasts.'<sup>70</sup>

The central concern of the *Via Creativa* is the recovery of the sense that it is in art, creativity, and the birthing of new images, that we most resemble God. In the *Via Creativa* the process of trusting and expressing creativity takes place within the context of 'art as meditation.' When meditation is divorced from art, it becomes introverted and introspective. When art is divorced from spirituality, it becomes elitist and sterile. Art as meditation means paying

attention to inner imagery and allowing it to be expressed - whether in clay and paints, body movement, music, gardening, and so on. By teaching all to trust in their own self-expression, art as meditation leads to the democratization of art. In teaching that it is in creativity that one most resembles the divine, the Via Creativa also leads to a sense of responsibility; not hiding one's talents in the sand becomes a divine imperative.

The Via Creativa signifies 'the recovery of the tradition of God as Mother.'<sup>71</sup> Linear and static images of divinity are dropped for images of roundness, nurture, and gestation. 'From all eternity,' comments Eckhart, 'God lies on a maternity bed giving birth. The essence of God is birthing.' Humans, as royal persons, as the imago dei, are charged with the responsibility of 'co-creation' with God; indeed with the co-creation of God: 'We are all meant to be mothers of God'<sup>72</sup> says Eckhart. Or as Fox puts it: 'To birth wisdom or to birth compassion is to birth God. Here lies the deepest of all meanings behind ... the unfolding birth of the cosmos, and here we, as co-creators with God, have a significant role to play.'<sup>73</sup>

The Via Creativa 'Lays bare the sins of sadism and of masochism' writes Fox. Sadism is misuse of creativity, for demonic rather than divine purposes; to generate power-over others rather than power-with. Masochism is the refusal to accept the divine imperative to create, and to leave this imperative in the hands of the sadist. The task of all liberation movements, as Fox comments, is to break this sense of 'I can't,' - an inner attitude which leaves us open to 'the sins of the

sadist, who is always wanting to tell us, "You can't, but I can." Salvation in this path 'is art, creativity, the awakening of possibilities and imagination for possibilities'; the recovery of 'the theme of our co-creativity with God.'<sup>74</sup>

The Via Creativa has a number of things to say about Jesus. The first point is that Jesus was not a priest, theologian or academician, but 'a poet, a storyteller, an artist.' Christologies which bind Jesus to the cross have little to say concerning the significance of Jesus' mode of teaching, or of the fact that he commissioned his followers to 'do likewise.' Another point that the Via Creativa highlights about Jesus is that he 'urges us to throw off all temptations to masochism or sadism.'<sup>75</sup> - he rejects the power-over of the oppressor and transforms the 'I can't' of the oppressed. This is a point given much attention by feminist theologian Mary Grey, who describes the power of Jesus as an 'erotic' power. This is a power not 'conferred by virtue of institution or external authority but the free-flowing relational and passionate energy of God's spirit.' This power is one that brings to birth, and empowers people in their own power. This is clearly indicated by the way in which Jesus 'was constantly empowering and sending people to heal, exorcise and preach.'<sup>76</sup> On a final note, Jesus understands the ongoing and unquenchable nature of creativity when he teaches that divine creativity does not stop with him, and that we are commissioned to do 'greater works than these.' A key part of Jesus' ministry, as Ruether comments, was his challenge to institutional religion grounded in past revelation. He insists that 'God has not just spoken in the past but is speaking now.' Therefore, to encapsulate Jesus as the

static, once-for-all, 'last word,' of God is, as Ruether concludes, 'to repudiate the spirit of Jesus and to repudiate the position against which he himself protests.'<sup>77</sup>

### The Via Transformativa

A recovery of creativity, of art, as a religious activity rather than a consumer product, leads finally to a new vision of the world. The part to be played by art and creativity in the recovery of an ecological consciousness is considered by Joranson and Butigan. They argue that the present ecological crisis is due in part to an 'impoverishment of imagination' where 'creative solutions to admittedly complex ecological difficulties are rarely proposed and even more rarely taken seriously as "realistic."' In contrast with this prevailing view, they argue that 'artistic resources must be an integral part in the development of genuine creation consciousness.' Art works

can symbolize for us our deepest concerns: they can be documents of what is and is not meaningful in human existence. When we are engaged by a work of art, we begin to participate in a new vision of the world. Art works, then, symbolically deconstruct and reconstruct our understanding of the world. They help us to see our world - and our place in it - in a new way.

Art, they continue, can free us from 'familiar images of the environment' and thus prompt 'creative solutions to ecological problems.' They conclude by suggesting that 'creativity' must become a 'guiding methodology' for resolving environmental problems.<sup>78</sup> It is at this juncture between art and social renewal that the Via Creativa dialogues with the Via Transformativa. This is the path concerned with illuminating those fundamental principles which can steer creativity in

the direction of creating the new society (something, as highlighted previously, which appears to be absent in the human potential movement). The Via Creativa, comments Fox, makes us aware that not all creativity is for good; it needs 'criticism and direction.' The Via Transformativa 'provides the basis for that judgement and that direction.'<sup>79</sup>

In the creation tradition the principle that guides human creativity is compassion, and the goal is transformation of a fragmented world into the Kingdom/Queendom of God, the 'new creation,' the New Age. With its emphasis upon the new creation, creation spirituality stands firmly apart from fall/redemption spirituality 'with its dualistic attitude that projects heaven into life-after-death and ignores realized eschatology.'<sup>80</sup>

The movement towards the new creation begins with the recovery of the biblical vocation of 'prophet.' In the fall/redemption tradition, according to Fox, the word prophet is associated with a unique individual who invokes oaths and curses on the world, and 'prophecy' connotes the foretelling of the future. There is little attention paid to the fact that Jesus is a prophet who calls his followers to be prophets. Yet the coming of the holy spirit at pentecost, as Peter the disciple recognized, signifies the democratization of the prophetic vocation: '"I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea even on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy"' (Acts, 2:16-18; Joel, 3:1-5).

In creation spirituality the central activity of the prophet is understood as 'interference': 'the prophet criticizes and places himself or herself in opposition and therefore in a position of interfering with what is happening.' The New Creation begins with 'tearing up and knocking down.' The act of interference takes place when the prophet begins to place trust in his or her anger and indignation. This contrasts sharply with the fall/redemption tradition which 'has made far too much of anger as a sin.' Art and creativity are seen as channels through which anger can be transformed into building the new creation. In creation spirituality 'prophet' is not understood merely in terms of individuals but in terms of movements. In modern liberation movements - including the Gray Panthers, women's liberation, Alcoholics Anonymous, the base communities in third world countries, nuclear freeze and the deep ecology movement - Fox sees 'the work of the spirit.' Here is a clear example of ecological spirituality's appreciation of diversity. Another is Fox's belief that 'The spiritualities of native Americans and of Third World Peoples, of feminists and of blacks, of homosexuals and of the handicapped, are [all] creation-centered spiritualities.'<sup>81</sup>

The New Creation proceeds not only from the recovery of the prophetic vocation but from the recovery of compassion. 'The fullest work that God ever worked in any creature,' declares Eckhart, 'is compassion.'<sup>82</sup> Fox laments the fact that in the West 'compassion' no longer signifies something shared between equals, but something the 'superior' offer to the 'inferior.' This, argues Fox is 'pity,' not compassion. Pity presumes a dualistic, separatist, worldview; it 'works out of a subject-object relationship where what is primary is one's

separateness from another. It presumes ego differences as a basic way of relating to reality.' Pity is condescension; it is applied to those 'out of the running,' and is used to emphasize the difference between 'our' lot and 'their' lot. By sentimentalizing 'their' lot we are led to philanthropy and the 'good works of charity.' Pity in short is 'disguised gloating.' True compassion, argues Fox 'never considers an object as weak or inferior'; it 'works from a strength born of awareness of shared weakness, and not from someone else's weakness. And from the awareness of the mutuality of us all. Thus to put down another as in pity is to put down oneself.'<sup>83</sup>

Premodern thinkers - who see interdependence and not separateness at the heart of reality - have a part to play in the recovery of an awareness of mutuality, and thus in the recovery of compassion. Aquinas declares: 'the perfection of any one thing considered in isolation is an imperfection, for one thing is merely one part of the entire integrity of the universe ... One indissoluble connection consists in all things.'<sup>84</sup> 'God,' writes Hildegard, 'has arranged all things in the world in consideration of everything else,' and although the human is the 'most significant' of all the creatures, it is also 'the most dependent upon the others.'<sup>85</sup> To sum up in the simple words of Eckhart, 'All creatures are interdependent.'<sup>86</sup>

Post-Newtonian science too can act as a resource for the recovery of compassion. Physicists like Capra and Swimme and ecologists like Lovelock all, as Fox notes, 'see interdependence as a basic law of our cosmos.'<sup>87</sup> Post-Newtonian physics, according to Berry, is showing us

that 'everything is receiving something from every other particle of the universe ... Every atom is immediately influencing every other atom in the universe, no matter how distant, even if it is billions of billions of light years away. There is still the bonding.'<sup>88</sup> An example of what Berry is talking about can be found in the work of David Bohm, a physicist from Birkbeck College, London. Bohm argues that the most fundamental level of reality is that of 'unbroken wholeness'; a 'single, unbroken, flowing actuality of existence as a whole, containing both thought (consciousness) and external reality as we experience it.' The order of separate things constitutes the 'unfolding' of this wholeness; the order of separate objects is the unfolded (explicate) form of the enfolded (implicate) wholeness. 'The order in every immediately perceptible aspect of the world,' to use Bohm's words, 'is to be regarded as coming out of a more comprehensive implicate order, in which all aspects ultimately merge in the undefinable and immeasurable holomovement,' or 'law of the whole.'<sup>89</sup> To demonstrate this idea, Bohm gives the example of a cylinder filled with glycerine in which an ink-droplet is deposited.<sup>90</sup> The mixture is stirred clockwise until the droplet disappears - that is, it becomes implicated throughout the glycerine. If the mixture is then stirred anti-clockwise, the droplet will then reappear or 'unfold' itself - it has become explicated. If the experiment is repeated with more than one droplet, then the droplets will enfold into a contiguous whole when stirred (the implicate order), but will unfold again into separate droplets when stirred in the opposite direction (the explicate order). From this interesting example Bohm argues that our understanding of reality is usually informed only by an appreciation of the implicate order, the order of apparently



separate and discontiguous phenomena. It fails to consider the most basic level of reality, where everything is contiguous, interconnected.

The recovery of compassion involves discarding the limited notion of a static, autonomous self, and 'waking up to a consciousness of interdependence.' Yet, it also means living out this truth; it is 'the action born of the truth of cosmic interdependence.' Those actions are of two kinds - celebration and justice-making. Celebration is as integral to compassion as sorrow; for at the heart of compassion are feelings of togetherness, of 'passion-with,' not pity, and 'It is this awareness of togetherness that urges us to rejoice at another's joy (celebration) and to grieve at another's sorrow.' The celebration born of compassion is an 'erotic' response to finding ourselves in the 'common soup' of the cosmos. Fox writes: 'If it is true that all of us creatures are swimming in one divine soup or womb, then what ought we do with one another? I suggest that we are to relate erotically. That is, celebrate.'<sup>91</sup>

The second action born of compassion is justice-making, or healing. The 'judicial' dimension of compassion, as with the celebrative, is rooted in a sense of interdependence - 'What happens to another happens to me.' The justice born of compassion is therefore about 'passionate caring'; about 'erotic' rather than 'abstract' justice-making.<sup>92</sup> Aquinas endorses an erotic view of justice-making when he says that 'Justice without compassion is cruel.'<sup>93</sup>

God, from the perspective of the Via Transformativa, is a passion-with God, who shares 'erotically' in our celebrations. God is also the passion-with God who shares in our sorrows, and seeks justice before personal piety. As God commands through the prophet Amos (Amos 5: 21-24): '"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies ... But let justice roll down life waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."'

Sin, in the Via Transformativa, is the refusal to do the works of compassion - that is to celebrate and do justice. Religions concerned with 'personal' salvation and introspection rather than a consciousness of interconnectedness, social transformation and celebration, sin against the Via Transformativa.

How does the Via Transformativa relate to the life and teaching of Jesus? The first thing to note is that Jesus saw himself as a prophet (Lk. 4: 24) and linked this vocation with 'interference'; that is, criticizing those who forget justice, and replacing injustice with justice (Matt. 23:23). His first public act, according to Luke (4:18-19) was to read the following proclamation from Isaiah; a proclamation which set the context for his entire ministry: '"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."' Another point to be made is that Jesus' healing and justice-making is not abstract but rooted in 'passion-with.' His relationship with the poor 'is not one of

bureaucrat or distanced person but one of touch, of smelling, of dining together.'<sup>94</sup>

To say that Jesus is 'compassionate' is to suggest that he had a sense of interconnectedness. This indeed appears to be the case. He scorns those who call out his name but do not do offer help to the poor and oppressed. Not because it lessens their chances in the otherworldly salvation stakes, but because 'as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Matt. 25:40). Of course, in an ecological spirituality, the 'least of these my brethren' is expanded to include all creatures. 'Compassion and Justice-making' comments Fox 'can in no way be restricted to relations among the two-legged ones.'<sup>95</sup> The depth of Jesus' relational capacities are also explored by Grey. For Grey, as indicated earlier, Jesus' authority was grounded in 'the free-flowing and passionate energy of God's spirit.' This energy according to Grey is 'relational' or 'erotic' energy, and, as Jesus' ministry would indicate, it has many dimensions. It is the power that brings to birth, and empowers people in their own power. It is the power of affiliation, and this formed the basis of Jesus' new dynamic of community-relating ('A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another'). It is the power of anger which 'drives to justice-making.' 'Relationality' is certainly descriptive of Jesus' bonds with other people, which were all characterized 'by intimacy, immediacy and intensity.' Again, his vision of the new creation 'was of its essence one to be loved, shared, and made accessible to the poorest on the face of the earth.' Relationality, argues Grey, lies at 'the very heart of the message of freedom to which Jesus witnessed and of which he was the

embodiment.' His death signifies, not the wrath of a divine king against the guilty world, for which Jesus was a scapegoat, but the world's 'great refusal and blockage of the dynamic of mutuality in relation, which was the outstanding feature of the way Jesus related to the world.'<sup>96</sup>

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN : FEMINIST WICCA

Although theologians like Fox and Ruether believe that it is possible to 'liberate' the Christian faith from a patriarchal conceptual framework, others like Christ, Goldenberg and Daly argue that this is an impossibility. Christianity, they assert, was, is, and always will be a tool of patriarchal oppression. It is beyond redemption. The first radical step in the dissociation of religious feminism from Christianity was taken in 1971 when Daly, delivering a sermon at the Harvard Memorial Church, urged her fellow women to leave the Church together as an exodus community. Her sermon concluded with these words:

'We cannot really belong to institutional religion as it exists. It isn't good enough to be token preachers. It isn't good enough to have our energies drained and co-opted. Singing sexist hymns, praying to a male god breaks our spirit, makes us less than human. The crushing weight of this tradition, of this power structure, tells us that we do not even exist ... Let us affirm our faith in ourselves and our will to transcendence by rising and walking out together.'(1)

Such views have been instrumental in the search for alternatives to Christianity, and arguably the most influential new religion to emerge from this quest has been feminist Wicca or Witchcraft. Looked at from one angle, feminist Wicca represents one area of 'Goddess spirituality.' From another, it is a spiritual component of the ecofeminist movement. Still again from another, it constitutes but one 'path' of Witchcraft (other paths include the Traditionalist, Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Georgian, and the New Reformed Orthodox Order

of the Golden Dawn). And, of course, Witchcraft itself constitutes but one area of a much larger Neopagan revival.

In Western culture terms like 'Pagan' and 'Witchcraft' have a number of negative connotations which generate a degree of unease. The dictionary definition of 'pagan' is a godless person or unbeliever. The word is also associated with hedonism and sexual promiscuity. Adler points out that the term actually comes from the latin 'paganus' which indicates a country-dweller (in the same way 'heathen' originally described someone who lived on the heaths). The term gained negative associations according to Adler with the victory of state Christianity over older polytheistic religions. Often the last people to be converted to Christianity were those living at the outskirts of populated areas - the heathens and the pagans. These words became insults, meaning 'hick' or 'country-bumpkin.' Today, the term 'Pagan' is being reclaimed by many as an alternative religion to mainstream Christianity. Modern Pagans look back to the past for inspiration, particularly to the pre-Christian mythologies of Europe. But they also incorporate elements of contemporary culture into their religious beliefs, including feminist theory, Jungian psychology, and scientific theories like the Gaia hypothesis. Thus they are often described as Neopagans rather than simply Pagans.

Another word with negative connotations is Witch. Dictionaries define Witches as (primarily) women who are either seductive and charming or ugly and evil. The word 'Witch' - according to contemporary Neopagans - comes from the Old English 'wicca' or 'wicce.' Some hold

that 'wicca' itself derives from the root 'wit' meaning 'wise.' Witches in this interpretation are the 'wise women.' Others believe that it comes from the word 'weik,' meaning to bend or to shape. In this interpretation Witches are those who bend or shape the things around them. Today, Witchcraft is sometimes called Wicca, or the Craft, and its members are Wiccans - although the term Witch is often retained. This is particularly true of feminist Wiccans, who are reclaiming the term Witch as a source of power, defiance, and inspiration.<sup>2</sup> Although sometimes viewed as a distinctly American phenomenon, feminist Witchcraft and other forms of Goddess worship have made some headway in Britain, with groups like the Fellowship of Isis and the Matriarchy Research and Reclaim Network, and with periodicals like from the flames and Pandora's Jar.

We will now examine a number of distinctive traits of feminist Wicca/Neopaganism, including its view of divinity, the role of ritual and magic, its relationship with science, its ethics, and its political activism. As the inquiry proceeds, it will be seen clearly that feminist Wicca is an ecological spirituality - affirming the world and cosmos as oikos, stressing the interrelatedness and interdependence of all things, and expressing an appreciation of diversity.

#### Neopaganism and Diversity

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of Neopaganism is its lack of dogma, its appreciation and acceptance of diversity. Neopaganism, in the words of Adler, 'is grounded in the view that reality is multiple and diverse. It stands against all the totalistic religious and

political views that dominate our society. It says "Strive to be comfortable in chaos and complexity ... Try to feel strong and whole and at home in a world of diversity."<sup>3</sup> This pluralistic attitude certainly reflects the views of feminist Wiccans. Wiccans, argues Starhawk, 'are not attempting to promote or enforce a spiritual practice: in my own tradition, we do not proselytize, and we believe firmly that our way is not the one, right, true and only one for everyone.' Wiccans have 'no dogma, no authorized texts or beliefs and no authoritative body to authorize anything; nor do we want one, for earth-based spirituality prizes individual inspiration and autonomy.'<sup>4</sup> Yet despite this apparent lack of cohesiveness, there are a number of assumptions and values embraced by feminist Wiccans and most other Neopagans. According to Adler, most Neopagans are polytheists, animists, pantheists, or two or three of these at once. They view humanity's 'advancement' and separation from nature as a source of alienation, and see ritual as a means of ending that alienation. Their goal is to live in harmony with nature. Neopagans draw much inspiration from the pre-Christian nature religions of the past, although these are being blended with elements of contemporary science fiction and fantasy, as well as with some of the teachings and practices of the remaining aboriginal peoples.<sup>5</sup>

### The Goddess

The deity worshipped by feminist Wiccans is the Goddess. She is worshipped under a multitude of names - mostly of Greek and Celtic origin - including Artemis, Astarte, Dione, Melusine, Aphrodite, Ceridwen, Diana, Arionrhod and Brigid. In the Craft, comments Starhawk,



'These are not seen as separate beings, but, rather, as different aspects of the same Being that is all beings.'<sup>6</sup>

The Goddess, it should be noted, is not considered to be the female equivalent of the transcendent and immutable God of male monotheism. She is not, to use the words of Spretnak, 'Yahweh with a skirt.' Christ highlights at least three meanings of 'the Goddess.' First, She is considered by some to be a metaphysical reality, a divine female, evoked in ritual. Second, She is a symbol of the life, death, and rebirth energy in nature and in culture. Third, again She is a symbol, although this time a symbol of the affirmation and legitimacy of female power. Christ notes that if worshippers of the Goddess were asked which interpretation was the 'correct' one, then a variety of responses would be made. Some would criticise the first meaning, and argue that any notion of a deity 'out there' is a dualistic left-over from the legacy of patriarchal oppression. Yet others would be happy with the notion of a divine female protector and creator, as well as suggesting that She is also immanent in humans and all natural processes. Some would affirm all three meanings. The fact that Goddess worshippers can hold such a 'diversity of explanations' together, is, for Christ, not indicative of 'sloppy thinking,' but 'a wisdom that Western theological thought has lost' - the primacy and power of the symbol over explanation.<sup>7</sup>

At times, the Goddess is, as King points out, 'interiorised and psychologised, without being linked to any metaphysical claims about an absolute Godhead.'<sup>8</sup> Indeed Goldenberg declares that Witchcraft 'is the first modern theistic religion to conceive of its deity mainly as an

internal set of images and attitudes.'<sup>9</sup> This psychologized interpretation of the Goddess is also expressed in the writings of Jungians like Edward Whitmont. Following Jung, Whitmont connects the rise of patriarchal divinities with the formation of egoic consciousness, of an heroic, self disciplined will, and the fragmentation of a unitary reality into 'a multiplicity of mutually exclusive opposites.' At the same time this signifies the repression of Eros, of 'feminine' qualities like nurturing, feeling, instinct, intuition, and compassion. He writes:

The focussing of consciousness around a centering heroic ego fostered the emergence of an almost totally masculine system of values, with a corresponding emphasis on separateness and individual will. Perceiving the self-conscious I as a masculine hero-warrior and enforcer of order, it became the task of ego in obedience to the laws of its liege lord the Divine King to conquer and suppress its feminine qualities, as well as its wayward urges, and relegate them to the unconscious.

Whitmont, like Jung, argues that the repression of the feminine was a necessary development in the evolution of consciousness, born of 'the need to separate the nascent ego from the encompassing field-consciousness of the magico-mythological world of need and instinct with its transformative (hence ego-threatening) dynamic of existence.' Yet, humans have had to pay a great price for this development: 'the loss of connection with the life-death continuum of existence, and the experience of self as a stranger in a senseless world.' The return of the Goddess is for Whitmont primarily a psychic event, a return to 'feminine' values and capacities. The Goddess herself is not a deity in any metaphysical sense, but a psychological archetype, the divinity within, the Self, the 'guardian of human interiority.'<sup>10</sup> Although

Whitmont believes that the Goddess is an interior reality, he argues that she need not be confined merely to psychological reflection, and indeed, places much emphasis upon the vital role to be played by ritual in the recovery of the feminine/Goddess. The role of ritual in the recovery of the Goddess archetype is also explored by the Jungian Wiccan Vivianne Crowley, who suggests that the major Pagan rituals should be utilized as a means towards personal, psychological, individuation.<sup>11</sup>

The obvious danger with an overly psychological approach to the Goddess is that it may lead to 'psychological Gnosticism'; to dualisms in which the outer world is abandoned for the inner world of the psyche. King agrees when she says that some spiritual paths explored by feminists 'can be excessively inwardly orientated and too much focused on the individual, especially when the spiritual quest is inspired by psychological and psychoanalytic theories.' The journey to the 'true self,' she continues, cannot be 'a journey without return to the outside,' for 'The health of social and political life is only possible if connections are made between the inner and outer, personal and social worlds.'<sup>12</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that Wiccans like Starhawk emphasize a more pantheistic and animistic interpretation of the Goddess. She writes:

The Goddess is first of all earth, the dark, nurturing mother who brings forth all life. She is the power of fertility and generation; the womb, and also the receptive tomb, the power of death. All proceeds from Her; all returns to Her. As earth, She is also plant life; trees, the herbs and grains that sustain life. She is the body, and the body is sacred. Womb, breast, belly, mouth, vagina, penis, bone, and blood - no part of the body is unclean, no aspect of the life processes is stained by any concept of sin. Birth, death, and decay are equally sacred parts of the cycle. Whether we are

eating, sleeping, making love, or eliminating body wastes, we are manifesting the Goddess.'(13)

Yet even Starhawk argues that as far as social transformation is concerned, Wiccans must recognize the necessity of confronting internal psychological processes. 'It is an underlying principle of magic,' she argues, 'that consciousness itself has structure, and that structure manifests in the forms of the physical world.' Consciousness 'is embodied in the forms and structures we create.' Therefore, to change social structures, 'We may well have to change the inner territory as well as the outer, confront the forms of authority that we carry within. For we shape culture in our own image, just as it shapes us.' When there is no attention paid to inner structures, 'we risk reproducing the landscape of domination in the very structures we create to challenge authority.' Yet inner transformation 'is only a first step. Unless we change the structures of the culture, we will mirror them again and again.'<sup>14</sup> Here we see that Starhawk advances a holistic approach to social transformation; one which recognizes that internal and external processes are inseparable.

The need - particularly for women - to come to terms with inner psychological processes is also recognized by Demaris S. Wehr, a feminist Jungian and assistant professor of the psychology of religion at the Boston School of Theology. Wehr's work represents an attempt to revision the 'contextless' nature of Jungian psychology. Her initial assumption is that human personality is shaped by a 'dialectical relationship' between the psyche and the external world. Thus she can agree with the Jungian view that 'psychological forces (prerational

images, mythic themes, fears, needs) do indeed shape society.' However, whereas for traditional Jungians the source of personality is found largely in archetypal factors, for Wehr, 'social structures already in existence at the time of each individual's coming into the world exert great influence in shaping the individual personality.' With this revisioning from 'universal forms' to 'context and experience,' Wehr hopes to build a bridge between Jung's psychology and 'liberation thought' (particularly feminism). She holds that Jungian-type thought may be of value in the attempt to rid women of 'internalized oppression.' Internalized oppression, the 'self-hater,' represents women's internalization of patriarchal society's definition of them as inadequate and inferior. The self-hater manifests itself in women as depression, low self-esteem, and 'a great fear of overstepping the place patriarchy has prescribed for them.' Wehr views this internal oppression as being just as crippling and as damaging as any form of external oppression.

despite the strength of patriarchal society, with its fear of women and what Jungians call the 'feminine,' if women themselves had not internalized damaging messages about their 'inferior,' 'weak,' or otherwise inadequate natures, patriarchal standards could not persist. Therefore, it is on the inner level that this voice wreaks the most havoc, since it paralyzes women from within, causing them to collude in their own destruction ...

It is here that Wehr, like Fox (as in the confrontation with darkness addressed in the Via Negativa), sees the relevance of Jungian thought - of confronting the shadow, of eliminating projections, and thereby of developing a more 'conscious' relationship with self, others, and the environment. As she writes:

It is possible that if the woman changes her inner image, by dialoguing with it, befriending it, or in some cases exorcising it, the person's behavior will change ... Jung's method of working with dreams and images gives women a handle on the problem and demonstrates effectively that 'inner' and 'outer' reality are intertwined and mutually reinforce - even invent - one another.

Wehr calls for a holistic and liberationist revisioning of Jungian psychology; one which will free it from the culturally-based stereotypes of its original formulation.<sup>15</sup>

The necessity of bringing together both psychic and social worlds is recognized by Christ in her interpretation of the meaning and function of the Goddess symbol. She argues, following Geertz, that religion is a system of symbols which act to produce powerful and pervasive 'moods' and 'motivations.' A mood is a 'psychological attitude' and a motivation is 'the social and political trajectory created by a mood that transforms mythos into ethos, symbol system into social and political reality.' Religions are symbol systems which 'create the inner conditions ... that lead people to feel comfortable with or to accept social and political arrangements that correspond to the symbol system.' The symbol of the Goddess is, at the most general level, a challenge to those religions centred around the symbol of a male God which, she argues, create moods and motivations that 'keep women in a state of psychological dependence on men and male authority, while at the same time legitimating the political and social authority of fathers and sons in the institutions of society.'<sup>16</sup> This is a view shared by Daly, who writes that 'The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has

in turn rendered services to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting.'<sup>17</sup> The symbol of the Goddess, according to Christ, creates rather different 'moods' and 'motivations.' Firstly, the basic meaning of the Goddess symbol is the 'acknowledgement of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power.' Psychologically, this means the defeat of the view engendered by patriarchy that women's power is inferior and dangerous. This in turn leads to new 'motivations': 'it supports and undergirds women's trust in their own power and the power of other women in family and society.'<sup>18</sup> Wiccan priestess Vivianne Crowley agrees, and contrasts patriarchal teaching in which woman 'is passive, a womb to bear children ... that which is to be impregnated and controlled by men and male society,' with feminist Wicca, in which 'the image of the Goddess is of strength and power,' and where 'Women are urged not to be passive vessels at the disposal of men, but women in control of their own destiny.' Through the worship of this Goddess, 'women internalize those qualities associated with the Goddess and learn to reject social and political philosophies and systems which oppress women.'<sup>19</sup>

Another meaning of the Goddess symbol is the 'affirmation of the female body and the life cycle expressed by it.' In contrast with the degradation of women's bodies encapsulated in Gnostic spiritualities, the Goddess as symbol of divine immanence creates a mood of 'joyful affirmation of the female body and its cycles and acceptance of aging and death as well as life.'<sup>20</sup> This is certainly confirmed by Starhawk, who argues that the image of the Goddess 'inspires women to see

ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy.'<sup>21</sup> According to Christ, the motivations which follow from this new mood 'are to overcome menstrual taboos, to return the birth process to the hands of women, and to change cultural attitudes about age and death.' Furthermore, as denigration of the female body is bound up with the denigration of the environment (both are victims of a dualistic and value-hierarchical conceptual framework), 'The Goddess as symbol of the revaluation of the body and nature thus also undergirds the ... ecology movements. The "mood" is one of affirmation, awe, and respect for the body and nature, and the "motivation" is to respect the teachings of the body and the rights of all living things.'<sup>22</sup> The 'ecological motivation' of the Goddess symbol is given much consideration by Starhawk. First, as with other proponents of ecological spirituality, she argues that patriarchal religion has left us with some very anti-ecological motivations. The image of a God outside nature 'has given us a rationale for our own destruction of the natural order, and justified our plunder of the earth's resources.'<sup>23</sup> However, the Goddess, as the symbol of divine immanence, provokes a profound shift in values. It insists that 'True value is not found in some heaven, some abstract otherworld, but in female bodies and their offspring, female and male; in nature; and in the world.'<sup>24</sup> When divinity is located in the world, rather than outside of it, we begin to understand that the 'world is not a flawed creation, not something from which we must escape, not in need of salvation or redemption.' The Goddess 'calls us to live our spirituality here in the world, to take action to preserve the life of the earth.' Because the Goddess 'fosters



respect for the sacredness of all living things,' Wicca is, concludes Starhawk, 'a religion of ecology.'<sup>25</sup>

Another implication of the Goddess symbol according to Christ is its positive valuation of a woman's will. Goddess-centred ritual magic involves the raising of energy and power, and this is directed by willpower. Those who participate in Wiccan rituals 'believe they can achieve their wills in the world.' This emphasis upon the will, comments Christ, is important for women who have been taught by their society to devalue their wills. Patriarchal religion, she continues, 'has enforced the view that female initiative and will are evil ... Even for men, patriarchal religion values the passive will subordinate to divine initiative.' In Goddess spirituality by contrast, the mood is a positive affirmation of personal will. But, not a separatist form of will that pursues self-interest, but rather, personal will 'exercised in harmony with the energies and wills of other beings.' The motivation here is 'for women to know and assert their wills in cooperation with other wills and energies.'<sup>26</sup>

Although the focus of Christ's inquiry is on why women need the Goddess, other Goddess worshippers believe that the Goddess has much to say to men, particularly men who are no longer attracted to the separatist models of manhood offered to them by patriarchal culture and society. In a patriarchal context men are encouraged to repress their relational capacities. By contrast, the Goddess symbol, according to Starhawk, 'allows men to experience and integrate the feminine side of their nature.' To a man, the Goddess 'embodies all the qualities

society teaches him not to recognize in himself.' If the Goddess opens men to the feminine dimensions of their nature, she also offers them a new model of masculinity, for the Goddess does not exclude the male. She 'contains him, as a pregnant woman contains a male child.' This male aspect of the Goddess is sometimes known as the 'Wild Man,' the 'Green Man,' the 'Lord of the Hunt,' or the 'Horned God.' Starhawk describes the relationship between the Goddess and the God in the following manner: 'The Goddess is the ... Ground of Being; the God is That-Which-Is Brought-Forth ... His is the sacrifice of life to death that life may go on. She is Mother and Destroyer; he is all that is born and is destroyed.' The God of Wicca is associated with many qualities - he is 'gentle, tender, and comforting'; 'untamed sexuality'; 'the power of feeling'; but he is also 'the power of the mind.'<sup>27</sup> The contribution to be made by the Horned God towards a new model of masculinity is also considered by Crowley. She argues that the Horned God is 'an image of great power which has endured in the human psyche through centuries of repression,' particularly with the advent of Christianity in which he was 'seen as threatening, sexual and animalistic,' and eventually 'associated with ... the Christian devil.' In contrast with the Christian deity which offers an image of masculinity based on rationality, celibacy, and the denial of animal nature, the Horned God is 'the phallic hunter God of forest and hill ... He is strong and powerful; but he is also the Shepherd, the caring and protecting father. The God is old, but young; he is strong and steadfast, but he is also light, energy, movement, creativity.'<sup>28</sup> In some forms of Wicca, the Goddess and the God are viewed as equal and complementary aspects of reality. In feminist Wicca however, it is

argued that the power of the God is ultimately derived from his relation to the prime source, the Goddess. As Starhawk comments: 'He has no father ... His power is drawn directly from the Goddess; He participates in Her.'<sup>29</sup>

### Prepatriarchal Goddess Religion and Culture

According to King, 'most contemporary women's interest in the Goddess is less concerned with historical evidence than with the existential significance of her presence in their lives now.'<sup>30</sup> This may be so, but it is also true to say that many worshippers remain attracted to the hypothesis of an ancient prepatriarchal Goddess religion and culture. There are perhaps many reasons for this - it provides women with their own sense of history; it questions the universal and timeless legitimacy of patriarchal truth claims; and it provides visions of an alternative future.

The notion of a prepatriarchal Goddess religion and culture is advanced in the writings of a number of contemporary feminist historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists, including Marija Gimbutas, Merlin Stone, and Riane Eisler. Basically, it is asserted that the prehistoric phase of Western civilization was characterized by the worship of the 'Great Goddess,' and that women occupied a central role in such a culture. It is also argued that prepatriarchal spirituality made no division between the 'profane' and the 'spiritual.' Finally, it is argued that this phase was superseded by patriarchal religion and culture, leading to the subjugation of women and to a dualistic form of spirituality.

According to UCLA archaeologist Gimbutas, the 'Pre-Indo-European' culture of 'Old Europe' (6500-3500 B.C.E.) was 'matrifocal, sedentary, peaceful, art-loving, earth- and sea-bound,' and their myths centred 'around the moon, water, and the female.'<sup>31</sup> In a similar vein, Eisler, codirector of the Center for Partnership Studies in Carmel, California, argues that scientific archaeological methods reveal, first, that 'prehistoric societies worshipped the Goddess of nature and spirituality, our great Mother, the giver of life and creator of all.' Second, that these societies were characterized by 'what we today call an ecological consciousness'; an 'awareness that the Earth must be treated with reverence and respect.' This ecological consciousness, she continues, 'was rooted in a social structure where women and "feminine" values such as caring, compassion, and non-violence were not subordinate to men and the so-called masculine values of conquest and domination. Rather, the life-giving powers incarnated in women's bodies were given the highest social value.'<sup>32</sup>

In prehistoric society, the worship of the Goddess was connected with the turn of the seasons and the generative powers of women. In short, the entire cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Yet, according to Eisler, the Goddess was seen to be much more than simply 'the source of all life and nature; she was also the font of spirituality, mercy, wisdom, and justice.'

For example, as the Sumerian Goddess Nanshe, she sought justice for the poor and shelter for the weak. The Egyptian Goddess Maat was also the goddess of justice. The Greek Goddess Demeter was known as the lawgiver, the bringer of civilization, dispensing mercy and justice. As the Celtic Goddess Cerridwen, she was the goddess of intelligence and knowledge. And it is Gaia, the primeval prophetess of the

shrine of Delphi, who in Greek mythology is said to have given the golden apple tree (the tree of knowledge) to her daughter, the Goddess Hera. Moreover, the Greek Fates, the enforcers of laws, are female. And so also are the Greek Muses, who inspire all creative endeavor.(33)

The worship of the Goddess, according to proponents of the prepatrarchal hypothesis, was naturally linked to a positive image of woman. The attitude towards the female in Goddess culture, according to feminist poet Adrienne Rich, was 'charged with awareness of her intrinsic importance, her depth of meaning, her existence at the very center of what is necessary and sacred.' Images of the Goddess 'told women that power, awesomeness, and centrality were theirs by nature, not by privilege or miracle; the female was primary.'<sup>34</sup> Goddess religion not only refers to a time when women were venerated for their reproductive powers, but, asserts Judy Chicago, when they 'actually had social and political power.'<sup>35</sup> In the Goddess culture of early Crete, according to Sjojo and Mor, women were 'priestesses, judges, doctors, artisans, athletes, business entrepreneurs - cultural leaders on all levels.'<sup>36</sup>

Although followers of the prepatrarchal hypothesis are keen to emphasize the central role occupied by women in Goddess culture, they also stress that it was not merely a female-dominated replica of patriarchal culture. Men were not central, but neither were they subordinate. Goddess societies argues Eisler 'were generally peaceful societies in which both women and men lived in harmony with one another and nature.' Again, unlike patriarchal religion, it is argued that Goddess religion was not dualistic, but holistic. In the words of Eisler: 'Planting and harvesting fields were rites of spring and autumn

celebrated in a ritual way. Baking bread from grains, molding pots out of clay, weaving cloth out of fibers, carving tools out of metals - all these ways of technologically melding culture and nature were sacred ceremonies. There was then no splintering of culture and nature, spirituality, science, and technology.'<sup>37</sup>

The Goddess culture of old Europe, so the theory runs, was brought to an end with the arrival of semi-nomadic 'kurgan' pastoralists from the Pontic Steppe. In direct opposition to those they had conquered, the invaders, according to Gimbutas, were 'patrifocal, mobile, warlike, ideologically sky oriented, and indifferent to art.' Their religion 'was oriented toward the rotating sky, the sun, stars, planets, and other sky phenomena, such as thunder and lightning.'<sup>38</sup> Between 4500 and 2500 B.C.E. the new culture supplanted the old, accompanied with the removal of female divinities from religious pantheons. Such a transition can be seen in what the mythologist Joseph Campbell has called the 'mythological defamation' that precedes the 'Age of Heroes.' This consists simply in 'terming the gods of other people demons,' and contrasting their impotence and maliciousness with 'the majesty and righteousness' of one's own Gods.<sup>39</sup> Such mythological defamation is reflected in the Babylonian Enuma Elish, where Tiamat, originally the mother of all, is pictured as one who gives birth to monstrous serpents, and is finally defeated by the virtuous and heroic warrior-God Marduk. This is not the end of the story however. 'Though many centuries of transformation had undoubtedly changed the religion [of the Goddess] in various ways, the worship of the female deity,' argues Stone, 'survived into the classical periods of Greece and Rome.' It was not totally

suppressed, she asserts, until 'the time of the Christian emperors of Rome and Byzantium, who closed down the last Goddess temples in about 500 A.D.'<sup>40</sup> The final chapter in this story of the Goddess is supplied by Starhawk. Mirroring the thesis first put forward by Margaret Murray in the 1920s, she argues that the religion of the Great Goddess was not completely suppressed, but transmitted from generation to generation in the religion now known as Witchcraft. After the Witchhunts, which began with the publication of the Malleus Maleficarum in 1468, 'the Craft went underground, and became the most secret of religions ... Yet somehow, in secret, in silence ... encoded as fairytales and folksongs ... the seed was passed on,' and it has now resurfaced as feminist Wicca. It is for this reason that Starhawk can describe contemporary Wicca as 'the oldest religion extant in the world,' 'The Old Religion.'<sup>41</sup>

## Science

While feminist Wicca makes some appeal to the past it is not tied to it, and, like other forms of constructive postmodern spirituality, makes some use of contemporary scientific theories. It is a simple matter to integrate scientific insight into a pantheistic religion like Wicca. Why? - because when divinity is viewed as something within rather than above nature, then science can be seen as the means of investigating the sacred reality of which we are all part. This at least is a view expressed by environmental ethicist Harold Wood. Wood examines a traditional methodology for 'knowing God' - the 'Way of Knowledge' - and looks at how this methodology functions differently within a theistic and a pantheistic context. In contrast with traditional Western theistic religion in which the pursuit of knowledge

deals with history and sacred texts, in pantheism, the study of God 'is ecology in its broadest sense.' Ecology in its broadest sense could include everything from bird watching, to studying wildflowers, to plumbing the great mysteries of life, for in all of these activities, 'the pantheist gains a closer relationship with deity as he understands it.' Furthermore in contrast with religions based on past revelation, 'the quest for knowledge understood from a pantheist perspective is a never-ending quest.' The fact that the 'Way of Knowledge' in a pantheistic context has no end, that there is no final or ultimate explanation of the universe to be uncovered, should, according to Wood, 'enhance our sense of awe and mystery for it.'<sup>42</sup> The close links to be made between religion and science is recognized in feminist Wicca. Starhawk comments that she would 'like to see the Goddess religion of the future ... firmly grounded in science, in what we can observe in the physical world.' 'In future or contemporary Goddess religion,' she reflects, 'a photograph of the earth as seen from space might be our mandala. We might meditate on the structure of the atom as well as icons of ancient Goddesses.' An earth-centred spirituality can take the insights from physics, mathematics, ecology, and biochemistry, and combine them with ritual and myth, 'so that they infuse our attitudes and actions with wonder at the richness of life.'<sup>43</sup>

One recent scientific theory which Neopagans are incorporating into their spirituality is biologist James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. According to Lovelock the world functions, not as some kind of mechanism that can be reduced to discrete, separate parts, but a single, organism, which regulates itself to maintain the optimum conditions for the



survival and flourishing of life. The entire range of living matter on Earth, argues Lovelock, 'from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts.'<sup>44</sup> He named this organism 'Gaia' in honour of the Ancient Greek Earth Goddess. According to Neopagan writers, like Anodea Judith, Lovelock is merely stating 'what ancient Paleo-Pagans knew instinctively: that the Earth and all life upon it are an interpenetrating system of divine proportion.'<sup>45</sup>

The significance of the Gaia hypothesis is that it goes some way in supporting the development of what Fox has termed a 'consciousness of interdependence.' This is suggested in the research of philosopher David Abram, who asserts that the Gaia hypothesis calls into question traditional views on perception. Contrary to the earlier scientific assumption that life adapts to an essentially random environment, 'Gaia indicates that the atmosphere in which we live and think is itself a dynamic extension of the planetary surface, a functioning organ of the Earth.' Along with all other life-forms, 'we are an active part of the Earth's atmosphere ... If Gaia exists, then we are inside her.' This has important implications for our understanding of perception. As Abram explains:

Traditionally perception has been taken to be a strictly one-way process whereby value-free data from the surrounding environment is collected and organized by the human organism ... [This] traditional account of perception as a uni-directional mechanical process is the only account possible if we still assert the convenient [in that it allows us to continue the paradigm of 'progress'] separation of psyche,

subjectivity, or self-organization from the material world that surrounds us.

The Gaia hypothesis immediately suggests an alternative view of perception ... If the perceivable environment is not simply a collection of separable structures and accidental events; if, rather, the whole of this environment taken together with myself constitutes a coherent living Being 'endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts [Lovelock],' then everything I see, everything I hear is bringing me information regarding the internal state of another living entity - the planet itself ... [Perception is re-visioned] as exchange, no longer a one-way transfer of random data from an inert world into the human mind but a reciprocal interaction between two living presences ... Perception, then - the whole play of the senses - is a constant communion between ourselves and the living world that encompasses us ...

'Our senses,' he concludes, do not place us above the world, but are 'the very embodiment of those conditions.' And Gaia 'is our own body, our flesh and our blood, the wind blowing past our ears and the hawks wheeling overhead.'<sup>46</sup>

## Ritual

'Whenever you have need of anything, once in the month, and better it be when the Moon is full, then ye shall assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of me who am Queen of all Witcheries.'<sup>47</sup> So says the Great Mother Charge, read out to Wiccans at the time of their initiation.

Ritual, according to Adler, is the means by which Neopagans seek to put an end to alienation - alienation from the self, and alienation from the environment. Ritual can achieve this, argues Adler, because it awakens the most basic and instinctual level of our being. Theory and analysis may confront alienation at an intellectual level, at the level

of the conscious mind. Ritual, on the other hand, attempts 'to end it on the unconscious level of the deep mind.'<sup>48</sup> This is a view of ritual shared by Wiccan Priestess Zsuzsanna Budapest. The purpose of ritual she writes is to '"wake up the old mind"' and '"put it to work."' The 'old mind' she claims is made up of '"the senses and parts of the brain that have been ignored."' These parts '"do not speak English ... do not care about television. But they do understand candlelight and colors. They do understand nature."' <sup>49</sup> Budapest calls this instinctual level of the mind the 'Slothwoman,' a 'hairy, tall, ungainly, lumbering creature, who is preverbal.' She controls 'our slick, modern person's health, love life, sexual prowess, vitality, body, racial memories.' The purpose of ritual is to 'arouse her interest in our work,' to 'wake up this ancient being within us.' Through ritual we can 'reclaim our animal nature, because we are part of nature even though we ... think of ourselves as "higher beings."' <sup>50</sup>

This connection between ritual and the awakening of deeper and more instinctual levels of consciousness is again affirmed by Starhawk. Although 'normal' consciousness is highly valued in the Craft, Wiccans, she comments, are aware of its limitations. Such consciousness does not give a complete picture of the world; it is, finally, merely 'a grid through which we view the world, a culturally transmitted system of classification.' Through ritual, Wiccans can break through this normal mode of consciousness and enter 'starlight consciousness.' Whereas normal consciousness sees the world as fixed, and tends to focus on one aspect at a time, starlight consciousness is 'broad, holistic, and undifferentiated,' and sees 'patterns and relationships rather than

fixed objects.' Starlight vision, continues Starhawk, 'is the mode of perception of the unconscious, rather than the conscious mind.' It is also, she argues, a mode of perception linked to the functioning of the brain's right hemisphere, which is 'specialized for holistic mentation.' Starlight vision, finally, is a vision of the world at its most fundamental level - a single interconnected and interdependent process. 'Underlying the appearance of separateness, of fixed objects within a linear stream of time, reality is a field of energies that congeal, temporarily into forms. In time all "fixed" things dissolve, only to coalesce again into new forms, new vehicles.'<sup>51</sup>

Through ritual, it is argued, the Wiccan can open up communication between these two modes (holistic/intuitive and linear/analytic) of consciousness, which in turn will lead to a more expansive view of the self - a self no longer alienated from its own nature or from its surroundings. As Starhawk comments: 'we can become attuned to the cycles of nature, to the primal, ecstatic union that is the force of creation.'<sup>52</sup>

Some Wiccans are solitary practitioners, and perform rituals privately. Most however perform rituals in groups, usually called 'covens.' King notes that covens within the feminist movement are 'extremely diverse' in nature. Some covens consist of hereditary witches who claim to practice rites unchanged for centuries. Others prefer to create new rituals. Some covens contain equal numbers of men and women, while others consist of lesbian feminists or gay men. Other covens, while not necessarily lesbian, are still women-only covens.

These are 'Dianic' covens made up of women who prefer to explore spirituality in a space removed from men and patriarchal culture.<sup>53</sup>

According to Adler, a traditional Wiccan coven has twelve or thirteen members, although in practice the numbers can vary from three to twenty. As a form of religious gathering, covens, argues Adler, work well, because, 'small groups, working together, are effective.'<sup>54</sup> Starhawk makes similar comments. The Craft, she writes, 'is not based on large, amorphous masses who are only superficially acquainted.' And neither is it based on hierarchical authority; there is 'no Dalai Lama, no Pope.' The structure of the Craft is 'cellular, based on small circles.' These small circles allow for an intense 'sharing of spirits, emotions, imaginations.' Although feminist covens are non-hierarchical they are not leaderless groups. 'A ritual, like a theater production,' comments Starhawk, 'needs a director.'<sup>55</sup> However, as covens are concerned with empowering all their members, the responsibility of leadership is usually passed from one covenor to another.

A Wiccan ritual usually begins with the casting of a circle. The High Priestess or Priest takes a ritual sword or wand, and with it traces the outline of a circle, which is then purified with the four ancient elements - air, water, fire and earth. The circle can be cast in any location - a forest, a garden, a living room. The important point is that the circle is considered to be a sacred space, set apart from the surrounding environment. The creation and setting aside of a sacred space is regarded as being extremely important in feminist Wicca. High Priestess Diane Stein explains why. In the sacred circle, women

create a microcosm of how they would like the macrocosm, the world outside, to be. Within the safety of the sacred circle,

They enact the herstories of women and Goddesses of other times and make them now, becoming those Goddesses and women. They enact the cycles of the changing earth and thereby become in tune with the Goddess of the planet, become one with her. They celebrate the changing seasons as their own life passages, validating and honouring them. Women create change within the circle, releasing and healing the psychological damage of the patriarchal world and substituting it for a space where women are honored, nurtured, validated and powerful. When the circle is opened, the women take the values, stories, cycles, healing and knowledge of power-within/Goddess-within into the macrocosm of their everyday lives.(56)

Most Wiccan rituals take place at esbats and sabbats. Esbat rituals are linked to the cycle of the moon - the moon as it waxes, the full moon, and the waning moon. This cycle is identified with what Wiccans call the triple aspects of the Goddess - the Goddess as maiden, as mother, and as crone. Esbat rituals create a positive 'mood' towards the cycle of birth, growth, and death, as it manifests itself in the moon, in nature, and in the lives of men and women. The sabbats are the eight great festivals of European Paganism. The 'minor' sabbats are the two equinoxes and the two solstices - Eostar, Mabon, Yule, and Litha. The four 'major' Sabbats are Imbolc, Beltane, Lammas, and Samhain. These festival, like the esbats, celebrate the growth and decline of the Goddess and her consort. At the same time, this is a celebration of the birth, fullness and decline of the body, and the 'mood' generated is one of affirmation of the body, in youth as well as in old age and death. It is also a celebration of the fertility and decline of the earth over the cycle of seasons. The mood generated is, to use Adler's words, a sense 'of living communion with natural cycles, with the changes of

season and land.' Ritual, she argues, remaining on this ecological theme, 'seems to be one method of reintegrating individuals and groups into the cosmos.' Contemporary scientific theories like the Gaia hypothesis can explain at an intellectual level how we are interrelated with all other forms of life; but ritual 'allows us to re-create that unity in an explosive, nonabstract, gut-level way.' Rituals have the power to 'reset the terms of our universe until we find ourselves suddenly and truly "at home."'57

Some rituals - particularly those associated with the sabbats - appear fixed in terms of their thematic content. Yet many Wiccans, as Adler notes, 'are perfectly capable of changing the festivals and their meanings.' Some rituals emerge spontaneously from 'an immediate need to affirm women's being.' Women are 'reinterpreting events related to women in a new light and using these insights to create new ritual forms.'58 For example, some Goddess rituals have been specifically created to generate celebration of those aspects of a woman's life that patriarchal religion and culture have ignored or pronounced 'unclean,' including menstruation and menopause. One such ritual has been developed by feminist Wiccan Antiga. Antiga calls women to 'discard the patriarchal notion that our blood is dirty or evil,' a notion which 'has forced us to hate our female bodies and our female selves.' As women rediscover 'the beauty and power in our blood, we honor our bodies, we honor the Goddess and are more easily able to love our female selves.' She calls upon other women to 'create rituals and be a part in rituals honoring women's blood: rituals of passage for young women beginning to bleed, for old womyn ceasing to bleed, for all women who still bleed.'59

Rituals employ a wide assortment of techniques and activities, and generate a wide variety of emotional states. 'A craft ritual,' comments Starhawk,

might involve wild shouting and frenzied dancing, or silent meditation, or both. A carefully rehearsed drama might be enacted, or a spontaneous poetic chant carried on for an hour ... The best rituals combine moments of intense ecstasy ... with moments of raucous humor and occasional silliness. The craft is serious without being dry or solemn.(60)

Storytelling seems to be an important ingredient in the pot-pourri that goes to make up Wiccan ritual. In Goddess circles, observes Wiccan storyteller Jay Goldspinner, women 'reenact the ancient goddess myths,' but they also create their 'own stories from fact and fantasy,' for 'any story can become ritual.' Within the sacred circle, 'We share our past, present and even future experiences in story, song and dance.' In these acts of telling and listening, 'we create ourselves anew.'<sup>61</sup> The sabbats are the times when Wiccans tell, sing, dance and act out the drama of the Goddess and the God, who is her son and lover. At Yule the darkness of Winter triumphs, but eventually gives way to light when the Goddess gives birth to the divine child. In the Eostar ritual the young God stretches out his hand to Kore, the dark maiden, who returns from the land of the dead. The Beltane festival celebrates the sexual union of the God and the maiden, the fertility of the earth, the fertility of the body. At Lammas, the God dies with the waning of the year, sacrificed by the Goddess, who now reveals her dark side. But the bridge between life and death is opened at Samhain, or Halloween, and the cycle starts again. In ritual this story can be enacted, and participants take upon themselves the roles of the Goddess and her consort. Although Wiccans



enact traditional Pagan stories like the one just mentioned, they are also free, as both Goldspinner and Adler note, to create and enact their own.

Another essential ingredient in Wiccan ritual is 'magic.' Most Witches, according to Adler's research, 'do not believe that magic has anything to do with the supernatural.' The term magic is used to cover a whole collection of techniques, 'all of which involve the mind.' 'Magic' would embrace 'the mobilization of confidence, will and emotion ... the use of imaginative faculties.' The aim of magic is 'to understand how other beings function in nature so that we can use this knowledge to achieve necessary ends.'<sup>62</sup> Such a pragmatic and naturalistic view of 'magic' is shared by Starhawk, who defines it as 'the art of causing change in accordance with will.'<sup>63</sup>

This modern interpretation of magic presupposes a fundamental tenet of ecological spirituality - that reality is an interconnected whole. This is affirmed by Neopagan theorist Isaac Bonewits, who says that magic can only be understood within the context of a universe that is '"a huge Web of interlocking energy, in which every atom and every energy wave is connected with every other one."<sup>64</sup> Again, Starhawk says that the primary principle of both ecology and magic is 'connection.' Echoing Bonewits, she pictures the universe as 'a fluid, ever-changing energy pattern, not a collection of fixed and separate things. What affects one thing affects, in some way, all things: All is interwoven into the continuous fabric of being.'<sup>65</sup>

In Starhawk's system magic is bound up with the function of ritual - of moving beyond 'normal' consciousness to 'starlight' consciousness; to a more instinctual level of being and holistic type of perception. Once this level has been attained, magic can be used to sense and shape the 'subtle, unseen forces that flow throughout the world.' 'Unseen' can mean psychological forces, and thus magic is sometimes associated with a process of psychological integration, involving psychotherapeutic techniques like dream-work and visualization. Starhawk for example takes the view that magic can be used to confront the inner 'Shadow,' which, in an obviously Jungian-inspired way, she defines as 'All that we are and feel we should not be - sexual, angry, hostile, vulnerable, masochistic, self-hating, guilty, and even, perhaps, powerful or creative.'<sup>66</sup>

At other times, magic is more outward looking, concerned with changing the material and emotional situation of someone else, whether inside or outside the coven. Here, magic is linked to the casting of spells, defined by Starhawk as the technique of projecting energy through a symbol.<sup>67</sup> Christ, as discussed earlier, links the Goddess symbol with the affirmation of a woman's will. Spell casting can be viewed in similar terms. Budapest for example writes: 'I recognize the reluctance toward casting a spell. It is against every kind of social conditioning you have received. so I advocate doing this; go ahead and scare yourself. It's good for you ... Practise your powers and you will never again believe you're inferior.'<sup>68</sup>

Spell casting, as mentioned above, requires some symbol through which energy can be projected. 'Symbols' used in Wiccan spell casting include different types of herbs, candles, chants, and so on. Each specific chant, herb or candle colour is understood to be somehow linked with a particular goal. According to Budapest, a white candle can be used to regain health, a yellow candle is conducive to study or a successful school year. Herbs like Basil and verbenas should be used to cast protection over a house. During this intricate and lengthy house protection spell, the Wiccan is required to clean her home thoroughly, wash her floor with basil, write her name three times with a special pen, and pass it through incense smoke, reciting the following:

In the name of Habondia, lady of plenty, in the name of Fortuna, lady who weaves the threads of my life, in the name of the fair Diana, the huntress of the night, may my person be blessed with security. May evil men stay away from my house! May nothing but good pass across my threshold!(69)

As always, Starhawk opts for the pragmatic and sensible over the mysterious and exotic: 'It is simpler to lock your door than to protect your house with psychic seals.' Starhawk is also critical of magic when it is used merely to meet the psychological or material needs of individuals. 'When "expanded consciousness" does not deepen our bonds with people and with life, it is,' she declares, 'worse than useless: It is spiritual self-destruction.'<sup>70</sup> She believes that magic can be integrated with political action, for if magic has to do with change in accordance with will, then 'political acts, acts of protest and resistance, acts that ... push for change, are acts of magic.' Indeed, she argues that by transforming political demonstrations into rituals

and 'magicopolitical' events, political action will become 'more effective.'<sup>71</sup>

### Ethics and Politics

The basic ethic of Witchcraft, according to Starhawk, is 'Love for life in all its forms.'<sup>72</sup> It is usually summed up in this traditional Neopagan dictum: 'An it harm none, do as you will.' This ethic is grounded in the belief that Goddess, the locus of all meaning and value, is not above, but immanent in all forms of life. Life is sacred.

But does the belief that the world is divine necessarily lead to 'Love of life,' or to a life-sustaining environmental ethic? If divinity is within all things and actions how can it be said that one action is morally correct, while another is not? This sort of objection to pantheistic ethics is made by C. S. Lewis, who writes: '"confronted with a cancer or a slum the Pantheist can say, 'If you could only see it from the divine point of view, you would realize that this also is God.' The Christian replies, 'Don't talk damned nonsense.'"<sup>73</sup> According to Wood however, this type of argument reflects 'a major misunderstanding of the nature of pantheism.' Pantheism he argues, is simply a religious teaching which does not separate humans from nature, nor the divine from natural processes. A pantheist can confirm not only that humans are part of nature, but that they are a unique part of nature. A pantheistic ethic he continues could be derived from humanity's unique abilities, such as empathy and compassion. The goal of pantheistic ethics would be to use such capacities to 'better participate with, rather than dominate nature'; to establish 'a relationship with nature

equivalent to traditional religion's relationship with God.'<sup>74</sup> In any case, Wiccans like Starhawk are not pure pantheists, and affirm, along with Fox and process theologians, that divinity is both immanent and transcendent; that the sacred reality of the cosmos is in some way being directed and guided or at least has some 'goal.' Starhawk evokes a sense of transcendent directionality when she says that 'The Goddess is immanent, but she needs human help to realize her fullest beauty.'<sup>75</sup>

Starhawk maintains that pantheism does provide a basis for a life-affirming ethic; although, she continues, this ethic is 'based on principles very different from those of patriarchal culture.' The basic principle upon which traditional patriarchal ethics are based, according to feminist Wiccans and postmodern theologians like Don Cupitt, is the Platonic two-worlds dualism. Prescriptions for behaviour are understood to be a set of contextless, absolute and unchangeable laws which descend out of the timeless realm of forms, or heaven, and arrive in this world of relativities. These laws, because they are understood as coming from a realm that is more real, valuable, truthful and enduring than ours, are to be followed irrespective of context. They are, to use Starhawk's words, 'valued out of context, over and above the values of the world, of human feeling, needs, and desires. They are the laws of heaven, and must be followed whatever their consequences here on earth - because heaven, not earth, is what we value.'<sup>76</sup> Because feminist Wicca locates the locus of ultimate value and meaning in this world, and not the next, it has an 'immanent' rather than transcendent understanding of ethics and justice. The ethics of immanence, according to Starhawk, are

grounded, not in time-transcending laws, but in personal and communal 'integrity.'

Personal integrity, first of all, concerns confronting and integrating those aspects of personality which patriarchal culture and religion have denied and repressed, including instincts, emotions, sexuality, and even mortality. For example, Starhawk declares that in Wicca, sexuality, is sacred, and not just as a means of procreation, 'but as a power that infuses life with vitality and pleasure, as the numinous means of deep connection with others.'<sup>77</sup> In the Great Mother Charge, read to Wiccan initiates, the Goddess declares: 'Let my worship be within the heart that rejoiceth; for behold all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.'<sup>78</sup> In relation to mortality, personal integrity means to accept death as part of the cycle of existence, rather than as the wages of sin. In Wicca, death is seen as a natural process that precedes our recycling in the body of the earth. 'The ethics of immanence,' comments Starhawk, 'strongly value life - but not as an untempered absolute. For life too, is relationship, interwoven in a dance with death, and death is the limiting factor that sustains the possibility of new life.'<sup>79</sup> An anti-supernatural attitude towards death is also expressed by Christ, who understands the whole of divinity to be 'the earth and sky, the ground on which we stand, and all the animals plants, and other beings to which we are related.' Within this divine reality, we live because others die, and die that others may live. The divinity that shapes our lives is 'life, death, and change.' The religious response to this view of the divine, according to Christ, is 'to rejoice and to weep, to sing and to dance, to tell stories and

create rituals in praise of an existence far more complicated, more intricate, more enduring than we are.'<sup>80</sup> The essence of earth religions, comments Budapest, 'is common sense that glorifies practical things and the improvement of our lives right now, not later, after death, which is absurd.'<sup>81</sup>

Personal integrity, secondly, means to act with consistency, to act in accordance with our thoughts, images, and speeches. The view of the world as divine and holy demands a response, and the response is to celebrate, preserve, and sustain the ground upon which we stand. Third, personal integrity means to recognize that choices have consequences, and that one cannot escape responsibility for choices and actions. Not because there is some transcendent judge who will eventually pass sentence, but because the world is a single, interconnected web of relations, in which the consequences of any action affect the web in its entirety. For example, a Wiccan, according to Starhawk, would not steal - but not because of some admonition in a sacred book, but because the consequences of stealing are higher prices for groceries, insurance and taxes for everybody. Thus the popular Pagan dictum: 'What you send, returns three times over.'

Wiccans place much emphasis upon personal integrity and responsibility for it is believed that just as the world is sacred, every individual, as a manifestation of the Goddess, is also sacred, and therefore has a right to some degree of self-determination. Starhawk writes: 'Each of us has our own direct line to truth; each of us is her/his own Pope, so nobody can be invested with authority over us.' To

value the integrity of any individual fosters a respect for diversity. 'No longer do we tell each other stories about the one truth, or the set of rules that everyone must follow,'<sup>82</sup> says Starhawk. At one level, a respect for diversity would mean to strive to preserve the biodiversity of the earth. At another, it would mean to create and sustain 'a wide range of differences in lifestyle, theory, and tactics.' Feminist Wicca is not a religion of the Chosen People, but 'a religion of heretics, who refuse to toe any ideological lines or give their allegiance to any doctrines of exclusivity.'<sup>83</sup>

One criticism of this emphasis upon personal integrity and self-determination is that it seems to advocate that which feminists understand as being intrinsic to patriarchal consciousness - putting the interests of self before others, which is dualism. 'Perhaps,' replies Starhawk, but only 'if the individual self is seen out of context.' And in feminist Wicca it is argued that this is not possible, for reality is seen as a single web of relationships. There is no such thing as an isolated self; the self is a nexus of relationships. Thus 'integrity' means communal as well as personal integrity. The self is not some isolated manifestation of divinity, but 'an integral and inseparable part of the human and biological community.'<sup>84</sup>

This concern with communal integrity is again voiced by Crowley, for whom the core principle of Pagan ethics is the preservation of harmony and balance. Pagans she writes are attempting to 'live in a way which does not harm those around us - human beings or others whose environments we impact upon.' To do this requires 'a balance between



our needs and those of the animal and plant kingdoms.' One way of preserving harmony and balance is to offer a gift for anything that is taken. 'If we cut down a tree,' argues Crowley, 'we should plant one or two more.' This attempt to preserve harmony and balance is rooted in Paganism's vision of the world in which humans are seen as but one strand in the interconnected web of life. As Crowley puts it: 'Pagans believe not that human beings are superior, but that the Great Mother finds all her creation pleasing and that each of us - humans, animals, plants - has a place and role in the scheme of things. The other forms of creation are there for us to live with in harmony, not to exploit.'<sup>85</sup>

#### Wicca and Politics

The relationship between Neopaganism and politics is as Adler reports a confusing one, for many Neopagans describe themselves 'as "apolitical," while espousing very political views.' Much of the confusion comes down to how the term 'politics' is defined. Neopagans who define politics in terms of voting, political campaigns, and lobbying generally argue that Neopaganism is 'totally removed from politics and should remain so.' On the other hand, those who define politics in the more general sense of 'the decisions that affect our daily lives,' hold that Neopaganism is intensely political.<sup>86</sup>

The view that politics and spirituality are interconnected is a distinctive feature of feminist Wicca. In contrast with much of the New Age movement in which the split between spirituality and politics seems to be widening, 'portions of the feminist movement,' as Adler notes, 'seem to be combining political and spiritual concerns.' It has become

clear, she concludes, 'that many women regard political struggles and spiritual development as interdependent, and feel that both are needed to create a society and culture that would be meaningful to them.'<sup>87</sup>

Feminists have made links between Witchcraft and politics since the 1960s. In 1968, a manifesto was published by a feminist group called WITCH, an abbreviation for Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell. WITCH, according to this manifesto, is

'an awareness that witches and gypsies were the original guerrillas and resistance fighters against oppression - particularly the oppression of women - down through the ages. Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary. (This possibly explains why nine million of them have been burned.)'(88)

The link between Witchcraft and political activism has been affirmed more recently in former Yugoslavia. Journalist Lucy O'Brien reports that in this war-torn area of Europe, women critical of the government are being vilified or imprisoned in Zagreb, Croatia and Belgrade, accused of being 'Witches.' She notes that Croatia's national equivalent of the Daily Mail 'has published a list of recalcitrant women with the names of their fathers or husbands.' In solidarity with these victims of political oppression, 'young women wear badges inscribed with the word "hexe" or "witch".'<sup>89</sup>

The view of many in the feminist Craft is that the division between spirituality and politics is a false division created by patriarchal culture. Wiccan writer Ann Kent Rush for example views 'separation' as

the basis for both patriarchal socialism and patriarchal capitalism - the 'Separation of women and men, being and practice, learning and working, experience and belief, production and product, mind and body, race, age and class.' Feminist Wicca, grounded in the belief that reality is interconnected, is by contrast opposed to divisions between the spiritual and the political. The aim of feminist spirituality, declares Rush, is 'the creation of a way of life ecological to the whole person.'<sup>90</sup> This is echoed by Judy Davis and Juanita Weaver, who argue that feminist spirituality affirms the 'interrelatedness of all things,' and that an awareness of this 'must inform our sense of revolutionary urgency, as expressed in political ideologies, strategies, and lifestyles.' 'To deny the spiritual while doing political work, or to cultivate the spiritual at the expense of another's political and economic well-being, is,' they suggest, 'continuing the patriarchal game.'<sup>91</sup> In a similar vein, Hallie Iglehart proclaims that 'spiritual and political powers' are inseparable, and that the abuses of both kinds of power 'are the result of the patriarchal mentality which views them as antithetical.' Feminist spirituality, by contrast, 'expresses a consciousness that inner must always be combined with outer, that the psychic is inseparable from the material, that political power cannot exist without spiritual power.'<sup>92</sup> To sum up in the words of Charlene Spretnak, the aim of feminist spirituality is to bring about 'the end of patriarchy, the eclipse of the politics of separation, and the beginning of a new era modeled on the dynamic holistic paradigm.'<sup>93</sup>

One of the ways in which feminists are bringing spirituality and politics together is through rituals, which are being transformed into

what Starhawk calls 'magicopolitical events.' Adler reports that Goddess rituals have taken place in the midst of demonstrations at military bases and nuclear plants, including Greenham Common. 'Reclaiming' - the feminist collective founded by Starhawk - has taught these ritual and leadership techniques all over the United States and Europe. In addition, some of the most militant environmental organizations, like Earth First!, are beginning to explore and incorporate Pagan ideas into their philosophy and activism.<sup>94</sup>

The area to which most Neopagan activism has been directed, is, as to be expected, environmental issues. A common view is that Neopaganism, as a spiritual path seeking kinship with nature, cannot consider environmental issues to be merely side issues. As one Neopagan interviewed by Adler argues:

'If our land is being poisoned and we don't relate to the poisoning, there is a very large error factor there. Ecology should not be an arguable point within the Craft. If our goal is seeking kinship with nature and the nature we are seeking kinship with is being poisoned, then we must become religious militants. We should be the chaplains of the ecology movement, at the least, if not in the front ranks of the fight.'(95)

Ecofeminist wiccans would share this concern, although they would be more inclusive in their beliefs and activism, arguing that the oppression of nature cannot be separated from other forms of oppression, including sexism, classism, and racism. As Starhawk says, environmental issues are social justice issues, 'for it is the poor who are forced to work directly with unsafe chemicals, in whose neighborhoods toxic waste incinerators are planned.' But they are also women's issues, 'for women

sicken, starve, and die from toxics, droughts, and famines, their capacity to bear new life is threatened by pollution, and they bear the brunt of care for the sick and the dying.<sup>96</sup>

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN :  
CRITICISMS OF CREATION  
AND GODDESS SPIRITUALITY .

There are a number of criticisms and problems associated with the forms of ecological spirituality discussed in the previous two chapters. Some for example consider them to be too inner-oriented. In relation to the creation spirituality of Fox, Robert Goizueta of the Aquinas Center of theology at Emory University, Atlanta, argues that in the more recent writings of the former-Dominican there is a distinct shift away from social analysis and identification with the poor, and a growing interest in ahistorical interpretations of mysticism and social justice. Goizueta argues that in Fox's earliest works (for example, Religion USA and Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear) a 'practical commitment to justice' is seen as the one and only criterion 'for determining the authenticity of any form of mysticism.' In these early works, according to Goizueta, Fox warns against the 'solipsistic, narcissistic tendencies present in mysticism,' and argues that authentic mysticism 'emerges out of a solidarity with the crucified victims of history.' However, continues Goizueta, in his more recent works like The Coming of the Cosmic Christ, Fox now sees the goal of mysticism as an 'affirmation of the world as a whole' rather than 'commitment to justice.' And, social transformation is increasingly identified with 'inner' transformation rather than identification with the poor. The 'engine of social transformation' is no longer social analysis, but 'the cosmic Christ, cosmologies, psychic justice, spiritual rebirth, resurrected imaginations, cosmic masses, and paradigm shifts.' As a matter of fact,

Fox understands social transformation as a dialectic between inner and outer transformation, and he still remains critical of spirituality that does not lead to social transformation, and of political activism that is not grounded in spirituality. Nevertheless Goizueta is right to insist that Christianity needs enough solidarity with the poor to engender 'the ideological suspicion necessary to check the narcissistic tendencies in any call to personal transformation, particularly when the call comes from a privileged social sector.'<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel at a talk on Women in Theology given in 1984, criticised Goddess spirituality for being a '"religion of self-discovery"' which '"no longer has a social, economical or ecumenical perspective."' In Goddess spirituality, '"contemplation of one's navel or narcissism has replaced the stimulus of communication ... and women snuggle up in the arms of the goddess in erotic love."'2

It should also be noted that some elements within the Goddess movement have become enmeshed in the individualistic, socially-conformist, 'create your own reality' dimension of the New Age. In relation to this, Woodhead suggests that the distance Goddess worshippers set between themselves and the so-called patriarchal New Age is an illusory one. Throughout the New Age, she argues, we find 'an individualistic relativism' where 'something is only true for someone, and though it may be true for you that says nothing about whether it is true for me.'<sup>3</sup> There is some truth in Woodhead's claim. I have before me an information pack concerning the activities of a Wiccan 'seminary' called 'Our Lady of Enchantment,' run by High Priestess 'Lady Sabrina.' This organization teaches a 'reverence for nature,' 'acceptance of a God

and a Goddess,' 'harmony' and 'knowledge of the whole' through 'religious ritual and ceremony,' and 'our equality and common bond with each other and the universe.' At the same time, it stresses 'the importance of the individual,' that 'each person is both creator and recipient of his or her own reality,' and that everyone can use 'personal power to change or bend reality.' This Wiccan organization reassures us that 'Even in today's world with its economic insecurity, political instability and social pressures, there is the opportunity to change your life for the better. Through the power of Witchcraft and magic you can make your wishes and dreams come true ... We have the secret to success and are willing to share it with you.'<sup>4</sup> It is however a gross over-generalization, as the last chapter will have shown, to suggest that all Wiccans embrace such a selfish, autistic, philosophy. For Wiccans like Starhawk, diversity should be encouraged, not because the individual rules supreme, but because in human society, as in environmental systems, diversity is the means by which the optimum conditions for survival and balance are generated. Moreover, despite its acceptance of diversity, Neopaganism in general contains a number of shared 'ground rules' - pantheism, kinship with nature, and so on. This, like the previous point, place a huge question mark over the blanket charge of 'individualistic relativism.'

Rather than discussing in detail every criticism that has been made of creation and Goddess spirituality, I would like in this chapter to focus upon two in particular - first, their respective appeals to the past; and second, the links they make between women, the 'feminine,' the 'ecological,' and 'nature.'



### Appeals to the Past.

According to Fox, creation spirituality is not a recent invention but a neglected tradition within the history of the West. This sense of historical continuity is important to Fox, for he believes that it is precisely 'tradition' which distinguishes a spiritual path from a 'cult.' Creation spirituality 'has a past; it has historical and biblical roots; it boasts a communion of saints.'<sup>5</sup> This sense of historical continuity is also maintained in Goddess spirituality, which roots itself in the religion and culture of the so-called 'prepatriarchal' phase of the civilizational process. Even Christians like Berry and Fox make some use of this prepatriarchal hypothesis. Fox for instance argues that native American spirituality, Celtic religions, matrifocal and 'Wikke' traditions and other 'prepatriarchal' religions' are all creation-centred traditions.<sup>6</sup> There are a number of problems and criticisms associated with these respective appeals to the past which will now be discussed. We begin with creation spirituality.

Margaret Brearley of the Centre for Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations does - in an otherwise scathing polemic against Fox and 'Paganism' - make two important points about Fox's work. First, it presents an oversimplified picture of the Western religious heritage, in which a suppressed creation tradition is made to stand against a dominant, monolithic, 'fall/redemption' tradition. According to Brearley however, it would be more accurate to say that the West 'has seen the dialectical interplay of both traditions.' She notes that in medieval Christianity - the zenith of fall/redemption spirituality according to Brearley - God was understood as a gardener, artist and

architect; that medieval poetry to the virgin Mary was imbued with images of creation and occasional eroticism; that the glories of Western landscape painting can be traced back to 'the hortus conclusus tradition and exquisite landscapes in late medieval religious paintings.'<sup>7</sup>

Brearley's second criticism of Fox is that he also presents an oversimplified picture of the two traditions themselves - they are not as monolithic as he claims. To begin with, the fall/redemption tradition, according to Brearley, has a much greater appreciation for nature than Fox admits. It was precisely in the Middle Ages that an 'intense preoccupation of theologians with the creation was strongest.' The physical world was understood as a book, and theologians wrote encyclopedias which 'explored in great detail the physical characteristics of all created things and gave them spiritual meanings.'<sup>8</sup> Echoing the criticisms of Brearley, Tiina Allik argues that the goodness of creation 'is a central tenet of the Christian tradition,' and that 'deliberate and straightforward denials of the goodness of creation are rare in the mainstream of Christian theology.' Given this, Allik criticizes Fox's work for giving the impression that 'in much of Christian theology, the goodness of creation is simply denied.' To illustrate her point Allik looks at Augustine's doctrine of original sin, and argues that this doctrine does not deny the original created goodness of human beings. Therefore Fox should argue that 'despite its intended function ... [this doctrine] is always misapplied in practice'; instead, he claims that it 'directly contradicts the goodness of created human nature.' Such oversimplifications concludes Allik are a 'serious flaw in his work.'<sup>9</sup>

Such oversimplifications are also evident in Fox's treatment of the creation tradition. Investigation reveals that historical members of the 'family tree' of creation spirituality are perhaps not as creation-centred as Fox presents them. James Wiseman, assistant professor of the History of Christian Spirituality at the Catholic University of America, notes in reference to Eckhart that he quotes no one as often and as favourably as Augustine. Again, like Fox, Wiseman notes that ascetic practices are not advocated in the works of Eckhart, but he criticizes Fox for not placing this observation in historical context. Eckhart's sermons 'were preached to communities of nuns in the Rhineland,' who may, as the convent literature of that time reveals, have been involved in 'extreme practices of mortification.' In this context, 'it is all the easier to understand why Eckhart would downplay ascetical practices in his sermons.'<sup>10</sup> Overall, it is difficult to find 'creation-centred' personages of the past who do not in some way express views which would find a home in the 'fall/redemption' tradition. Hildegard for example appears particularly dualistic at times: 'so long as body and soul have to live with one another,' she declares, 'they will be locked in a powerful struggle.' She laments that 'the body often gives into its fleshly desires and keeps the soul from following the path onto the heights, where it can see God.' She does not appear particularly ecological when she says that the human species 'rules over all creation' and that 'Each creature is under our control and in our service.' She does not appear particularly in touch with a 'consciousness of interdependence' when she says that 'order in the world and order in the Church should be separate, and each order should take care of its own interests.' She does not appear particularly

appreciative of diversity when she praises Bernard of Clairvaux for capturing men with his zeal for Christ, 'so that they will wage war in the Christian army against the wrath of the pagans.'<sup>11</sup> Similar problems attend other creation-centred thinkers like Aquinas, who, by Fox's own admission, is at times anti-Semitic, sexist, anthropocentric, and values the intellect over the body.<sup>12</sup>

Fox gets around the 'clay feet' of Aquinas, Hildegard and others by arguing that the four paths of creation spirituality should be used as a hermeneutical 'grid' for extracting and interpreting the most 'useful' (that is, creation-centred) elements from the writings of these premodern figures. The four paths of creation spirituality offer a fresh interpretation 'which is missing wherever creation spirituality is untaught.'<sup>13</sup> And here is the confusion in Fox's work. Sometimes it is argued that the creation tradition is an historical one; but here, by Fox's own admission, it is a modern hermeneutic or interpretative grid. One is tempted to argue that such an interpretative grid could be used to uncover a creation-centred Augustine.

Similar problems of historical verity attend feminist reconstructions of a prepatriarchal Goddess culture and religion. First, historical research tends to be predominantly 'Eurocentric.' Starhawk for example, as King notes, limits her considerations of ancient Goddesses to traditions from northern Europe. And, although she states that southern and eastern Europe, Asia, India, Africa and the Americas all possess Goddess traditions, she does so 'without giving attention to their individual differences.'<sup>14</sup>

King observes that contemporary reflection is further limited by too much emphasis upon 'the benign, protective, nurturing figures associated with life-giving power, creative renewal and transformation.' History, by contrast, tells us that 'the different goddess figures are profoundly ambivalent.' Goddess worshippers tend to play down those goddesses of the past linked with the demonic and destructive aspects of life; goddesses which appear irrational, merciless and devouring.<sup>15</sup> However, although Wiccans like Starhawk have not given primary concern to such goddesses of the past, it is wrong to suggest that their contemporary understanding of the Goddess is merely one of life and light. At the heart of Wicca, according to Starhawk, is the concept of the Goddess as change, rather than the Goddess as nurturer. The Goddess may be nurturing and comforting in some respects, but in others, 'She's the Sow Who Devours Her Own Young.' She is 'the ever-diversifying creating/ destroying/ renewing force whose only constant is, as we say, that She Changes Everything She Touches, and Everything She Touches, Changes.'<sup>16</sup> A similar interpretation of the Goddess is offered by Crowley, who declares that the Goddess is 'both beneficent and cruel: she gives but she takes away.'<sup>17</sup> This interpretation of the Goddess is one which embraces all aspects of existence, and is certainly a better model of pantheistic immanence than that of a Goddess who merely nurtures. For, as Catherine Madsen notes in her criticisms of those who offer a too 'life-and-light' model of the Goddess, our experience of life in the world and in the cosmos is a 'strange combination of tender bounty and indifference.'<sup>18</sup>

Another fact played down by proponents of the prepatriarchal hypothesis, and tied up with the previous point, is that not all of the rituals associated with the goddesses of the past were of the 'spiral dance' variety. The mythologist Joseph Campbell for example does on the one hand argue that the matrifocal Minoan culture represented 'a civilized refinement that has not been often equaled since.' Yet, on the other hand, he notes, following mythologist Jane Harrison, that in the mystery cults and field festivals of ancient Greece there can be detected the vestiges of a pre-Homeric mythology in which the place of honour was held 'by a goddess, darkly ominous,' whose rites 'were in dark spirit and full of dread.' A deity whose offerings were pigs and human beings, sacrificed 'in twilight groves and fields, over trenches through which the fresh blood poured into the bottomless abyss.'<sup>19</sup>

Another criticism of the contemporary reconstruction of a prepatriarchal Goddess culture is made by transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber. Wilber, as highlighted previously, espouses a hierarchical and anthropocentric view of the evolution of consciousness. His 'Chain of Being' consists of successively 'higher' states of consciousness development; an 'upward' orientation which inevitably leads to the making of dualistic and value-hierarchical claims. 'History' he says 'is basically the unfolding of those successively higher-order structures, starting with the lowest (matter and body) and ending with the highest (spirit and ultimate wholeness).' Despite this, Wilber has a few important points to make concerning the nature of the ancient Goddess. The worship of the Goddess belongs to what Wilber terms the 'mythic-membership' level of consciousness development. This phase

represents the awakening of humankind from its 'slumbering in the subconscious,' the 'slumber of Eden' (the 'typhonic' level), and the start of 'the slow climb back to the superconscious All.' In the mythic-membership level humankind was still close to instinct, body, and nature, but it 'abandoned the life of the sleeping serpent uroboros, abandoned the pre-personal stage shared with the rest of nature, and became, of all the animals, the Prodigal Son lost in the wilderness.' The dominant figure of the mythic-membership level according to Wilber was the Mother Goddess. However, unlike some contemporary Wiccans, Wilber differentiates between two different meanings of the Mother Goddess - the 'Great Mother' and the 'Great Goddess.' The Great Mother image, he argues, is a correlate of bodily existence, of the biological experiences of womb birth, breast feeding, and general dependence on the biological mother. This dependence, amplified by the notion of the earth as the mother of farmed crops, 'accounted for the prevalence of the Mother Image in the basic mythologies of the mythic-membership level-self.' Worship of the Great Mother according to Wilber centred around sacrificial rites, 'largely to appease and assuage the Earth Mother, to magically ensure fertility and crop renewal.' Yet alongside this 'Chthonic Mother' the mythic-membership level showed indications of a more refined understanding of female divinity. In Goddesses like the Egyptian Isis we find, argues Wilber, indications of 'insights into a truly transcendent Oneness, a Oneness that is not simply the naturic backdrop of the Great Mother or Earth Mother, but rather the One Form and Divine Ground of all space and time, the Great Goddess herself.' He suggests that the two Goddesses should not be understood as separate entities, but as different levels of awareness from different levels of

consciousness development. As with Jung and his followers, Wilber believes that the death of the 'chthonic matriarchate' and the ensuing development of egoic consciousness was an evolutionary necessity. And like Jung, he laments the fact that this development has generated a number of negative experiences, including separateness, alienation, dualism, too much assertive logic and active mentality, and the exclusion of the 'feminine.' He suggests that women have a leading part to play in the development of a new level of consciousness. The 'new hero' he writes will be 'centauric (which means mind and body united and not dissociated), whole-bodied, mentally androgynous, psychic, intuitive and rational, male and female.' However, he ends by criticizing the attempts of 'angry feminists' and 'decadence theorists' to reactivate what he calls 'chthonic "female only" matriarchal obsessions.'<sup>20</sup> That is, reactivating models of divinity that do not move beyond the confines of biology and female reproduction. According to King, Wilber's distinction between the Great Mother and the Great Goddess is a valuable one for feminists, although she insists that one need not be abandoned for the other. The important point, she reflects, is that the women's experiences of motherhood cannot be the 'exclusive starting point for reflection about ultimate reality. However rich and revelatory of dimensions beyond ourselves, human birth and motherhood are only one of the many possible expressions and manifestations of the Divine within and around us.'<sup>21</sup>

Another criticism of the prepatrarchal Goddess hypothesis is that worship of an ancient Goddess is in no way indisputable proof that women occupied a central and powerful role in such cultures. King for example



points to the fact that the Hindu tradition has developed the ritual, devotion, and theology of the Goddess perhaps more so than any other religious tradition, and yet, the widespread veneration of goddesses in India 'has not enhanced the status of women.'<sup>22</sup> Another feminist who has questioned the supposed connection between Goddess worship and the elevated status of women is de Beauvoir. In the 'pre-agricultural' period, she argues, female fertility, rather than being regarded with honour and reverence, actually reduced the capacity of women for work and 'made them at times wholly dependent on the men for protection.' The painful ordeal of childbirth, combined with a harsh environment, suggest that 'the early days of the human species were difficult,' rather than utopic. In the painful ordeal of childbirth, continues de Beauvoir, woman found 'no reason for a lofty affirmation of her existence.' Through it, women were confined to the domestic labours which were 'reconcilable with the cares of maternity.' The 'bondage of reproduction' confined them to 'repetition and immanence'; to an existence 'which was perpetuated almost without change from century to century; they produced nothing new.' This is not to say that pre-agricultural societies did not worship the Goddess - they did, but her worship was instigated by men. The ancient Goddess is a male projection of fertility and sexuality onto the female, and onto nature. The husbandman, writes de Beauvoir, ' marvelled at the mystery of the fecundity that burgeoned in his furrows and in the maternal body'; 'all nature seemed to him like a mother: the land is woman and in woman abide the same dark powers as in the earth.' Women, as a manifestation of the Goddess, may have been worshipped, but only because men wished it so: 'The prestige she enjoys in men's eyes is bestowed by them [men]; they

kneel before the Other, they worship the Mother Goddess.' Moreover, such worship was not whole-hearted, but motivated by 'respect mingled with fear.' When men worshipped the Goddess, 'it was because they feared Nature.' Woman was venerated 'only to the degree that man made himself the slave of his own fears.'<sup>23</sup> De Beauvoir is extremely negative towards women's capacities to give new life, which, she argues confines them to a position of static immanence. Furthermore, she believes that women will only become fully human once they affirm their 'brotherhood' with men, and join them in 'transcendent' activities. It is for this reason that she is rightly accused of being, to use Keller's phrase, 'an essentially patriarchal self disguised as the normatively human.' Her emphasis upon the mutual hostility of all human beings, her belief that humans have a right to 'dominate matter,' reflect 'an ethic grounded in the culture of male dominance.'<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, de Beauvoir's position still raises questions which proponents of the Goddess hypothesis need to answer - is veneration of the ancient Goddess proof of a position of female authority?; secondly, to what extent is the Goddess a male projection of fertility and sexuality onto women and nature? Even if women did occupy a position of power and authority in a now-lost prepatrilachal Goddess religion and culture, feminists are still left as Sally Binford suggests with a well-worn patriarchal theme - women do not know how to handle and hold onto power when they have it.<sup>25</sup>

It is unlikely that contemporary feminists will be able to substantiate many of the claims they make concerning the nature of prepatrilachal Goddess religion and culture - there is simply not enough evidence. A 'lack of clear historical evidence,' notes Mary Jo Weaver,

a professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University, has been one of the main arguments against Goddess religion. Scholars have pointed to 'the flimsy if not altogether nonexistent state of the historical evidence ... for a religion devoted to "the Great Goddess."'26

Such criticisms have also been made against the claim - first made by Margaret Murray in the 1920s and still voiced by Wiccans like Starhawk - that the ancient Goddess religion was passed down through the ages in the form of Witchcraft. Medieval 'Witches' may have been linked to traditional healing practices, but this, according to King, 'is quite different from seeing them as members of a pre-Christian matriarchal religion or as a dissident feminine movement organised against the medieval church.' Contemporary Witchcraft covens may claim to have stemmed from women's lore and ritual of medieval times or before, but in reality they are 'a specifically new blend of the feminist movement.' While looking to the past, they are at the same time 'a religious innovation of the twentieth century.'27

Despite the above-mentioned criticisms of the prepatriarchal hypothesis, many feminist Wiccans remain unruffled. Why? - because, historical verity is not of supreme importance in Goddess spirituality. Although Wiccans do speak of ancient matriarchies, most, as Goldenberg reports, 'are more concerned with that concept as a psychological and poetic formula than as an historical verity.'28 A creative and pragmatic approach to the reality of Goddess religion is certainly endorsed by Starhawk, who declares: 'Whether or not there was a religion of the Great Goddess in prehistoric times, there is one today.'29 Adler agrees,

and points out that Witches 'do not feel their future is contingent on a hypothesized past.' The appeal to and creative use of the prepatriarchal hypothesis would 'in no way be compromised if suddenly there were "definite proof" that few matriarchies ever existed.'<sup>30</sup> It is clear from these words that in Goddess spirituality the prepatriarchal hypothesis functions primarily - not as a source of legitimation - but as inspiration for a better future. Weaver describes the prepatriarchal hypothesis as 'utopian poetics' - a creative, and imaginative reconstruction of the past that leads to change and transformation in the present, and a vision and hope of a New Age.<sup>31</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz agrees, and argues that in feminist Wicca, it does not matter if there really was an historical prepatriarchal culture that worshipped the Goddess, or if medieval Witches were proto-feminists, or if the Goddess had the attributes contemporary Neopagans ascribe to her. What matters, 'is only that these ancient religious forms offer alternative ways of living and new vocabularies that might help address current problems.'<sup>32</sup> On an interesting note, Wiccans like Adler do not merely accept the utopian and poetic nature of Wicca - they celebrate it as a mark of human creativity. She writes: 'let's face it, we are creating a new religion. Let's rejoice at our creativity.'<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the contemporary reconstruction of a prepatriarchal Goddess culture is more 'utopian poetics' than historical verity. Nevertheless, it is both unhelpful and unnecessary to say that feminist views are only poetic and bear no relation to history. Unhelpful, because it will take more than utopian poetics to challenge the absolutist nature of patriarchal religions which are supposedly grounded in historical

events. Unnecessary, for in Western history some shift in religious consciousness certainly did happen. And this shift, as Ruether argues, can be observed in the succession of creation stories from the ancient Near Eastern and Greek worlds. In the earliest creation stories - the Sumerian for example - the birth of the cosmos and of the gods is imbued with images of gestation. Here the created order is birthed into being from the primal mother Nammu. In Sumerian cosmogenesis 'the primacy of female power ... is evident.' In the Babylonian Enuma Elish, a number of changes have taken place. The cosmos is still regarded as the body of the Goddess - in this case Tiamat - but here it is the dead body of the Goddess, ripped apart and organized by the young, male warrior God Marduk. In the Hebrew creation story, Tiamat has become the passive, inert, 'tehom' or 'deep,' waiting to be shaped into being by the transcendent Yahweh. Here, the act of creation has lost all its earlier feminine images of female gestation. Creation proceeds, not from the divine womb, but from the fiat of the divine craftsman. The story of the divine craftsman is again repeated in Plato's Timaeus, where the created cosmos by this time is regarded as an imitation of the transcendent order of forms. In this succession of stories, 'we can see,' comments Ruether, 'a progressive trend towards the subordination and finally the elimination of female deities in cosmogenesis. ... The imagery of creation shifts from procreation to that of artisan tool-making and verbal fiat.' The creation of the world becomes seen as 'a distinct process of making (not begetting) a contingent nondivine reality.'<sup>34</sup> In the scientific revolution - to expand this developmental continuum - the cosmos becomes a barren mechanism, wound up occasionally by the abstract, impersonal God of the deists. Finally, the

theistic/deistic tradition ends up with atheism, the death of God. In sum, this succession of creation narratives may not offer proof beyond doubt of the presence of a peaceful, democratic, holistic, ecological, and matrifocal religion and culture, but it does indicate a particular process in religious thought. The process of divinity-extraction. This is a process, which, as Starhawk has put it, has left behind an 'empty world.'

#### Female, Feminine, Ecological, and Nature.

In many of the works associated with the ecological spiritual dynamic of the New Age, a link is made between 'ecological' values and female, or often 'feminine' values and capacities. The assumption made, as Easton puts it, is that feminist reflection represents 'an ecological point of view ... the understanding of persons as psycho-somatic unities which ... have been torn asunder by patriarchal culture.'<sup>35</sup> 'Ecological' means 'female,' or 'feminine,' and these terms indicate the values of compassion, nurturing, making connections, and harmony with nature. Given this link, it is of little surprise that 'woman' for some has become the symbol of an emerging ecological age. According to Berry for example, the

emergence of the new age of human culture will necessarily be an age dominated by the symbol woman. This, too, depends on the identification of woman with the earth and its creativity. Woman and Earth are inseparable. The fate of one is the fate of the other ... Our alienation from the earth, from ourselves, and from a truly creative man-woman relationship in an overly masculine mode of being, demands a reciprocal historical period in which not a balance will be achieved but even, perhaps, a period of feminine emphasis.(36)

This series of connections - linking woman together with feminine

values, ecological values and nature - is a problematic one, as many feminists are aware.

The first area of debate concerns this close identification with woman and the earth, the belief that woman and the earth 'are inseparable.' Some ecofeminists argue that the notion that women are somehow closer to the earth than men is an invention of male culture. Yet, a view expressed by other ecofeminists is that women, if not closer to nature than men, are at least more 'attuned' to it by way of their reproductive biology. 'It is women,' declare Sjoon and Mor, 'who live the lunar cycles in our bodies.'<sup>37</sup> An obvious criticism of this view is that women are actually reinforcing the patriarchal view that women are closer to nature than men. Moreover, as nature is found at the bottom of patriarchal ontologies, women are actually identifying themselves with a devalued nature. This woman/nature connection may not only be detrimental for women, but for the environment itself. This is a concern expressed by feminists like Spretnak and Gray. Spretnak warns that calling the earth 'Mother' might be a mistake because 'in this culture the people in power, making most of the governmental and military-industrial decisions, are nearly all men, in whom the idea has been deeply embedded that Mom always comes along and cleans up after them.' Patriarchal culture does not deny the 'femaleness' of the environment, indeed, claims Spretnak, 'the image of Mother Earth or Mother Nature ... has widespread currency in our culture - even to the debased extent of selling margarine successfully in television commercials. ("It's not nice to fool Mother Nature!")'<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Gray warns that 'our fitting into nature' will be delayed and distorted to

the extent that men consciously or unconsciously symbolize natural processes as 'female,' where 'female' indicates that which is subordinate and needs to be controlled.<sup>39</sup>

Some ecofeminists however believe that there is an alternative to the view that women are closer to nature than men, or the view that women should transcend their ties with nature and affirm their 'brotherhood' with men (de Beauvoir). The question is not whether women are closer to nature than men, but why patriarchal culture seeks to deny and forget its connections with nature. For some, the woman/nature connection serves as a vantage-point from which feminists can criticise patriarchy's denial of immersion in nature, its denial of the feminine, and one which offers a new nondualistic vision of society in which all humans will be reconciled with themselves and with the earth. To sum up in the words of Ruether:

women have ... been identified with nature, the earth, and the body in its despised and rejected form. To simply reject this identification would be to neglect that part of ourselves we have been left to cultivate and to buy into that very polarization of which we have been the primary victims. The significance of our movement will be lost if we merely seek valued masculine traits at the expense of devalued feminine ones ... women must be the spokesmen for a new humanity arising out of the reconciliation of spirit and body ... We need to build a new cooperative social order out beyond the principles of hierarchy, rule, and competitiveness.(40)

Similar problems attend the connection between women and 'feminine' values and capacities. Are women by nature more 'feminine' - that is, compassionate, relational, and 'ecological' - than men, or again, is the 'feminine' an invention of patriarchal culture, where men repress and project such values and capacities onto women? This is the view taken



by Ruether, who describes the feminine as 'really a male projection and not female humanity.' The so-called feminine values indicate men's failure to 'integrate into their own personality those repressed capacities which they project onto women.' Women in turn are denied access to the so-called 'masculine' values, such as 'autonomous selfhood, decision-making, and critical intelligence.'<sup>41</sup> The notion of the feminine - as values and capacities intrinsic to women's nature - is therefore an instrument of oppression and repression. It is a device which ties women down to a specific set of roles and expectations. Given this, to what extent is the ecological dynamic of the New Age, with its emphasis upon the recovery and elevation of the 'feminine,' an instrument of oppression rather than liberation? Grey reminds us, in words appropriate to our times, that 'the more important to a society to keep women at home, out of public life, the more idealized become the notions of womanhood.'<sup>42</sup> In an early work published in 1975, Ruether warns that women should be suspicious of a society which attempts to elevate the symbolic role of women during a period of environmental degradation. Such romanticism is an attempt to reconcile the guilty male-conscience with nature, but one which makes little or no effort to transform the psychology and social patterns which have alienated humans and nature in the first place. Elevating the feminine, instead of leading to the emergence of a new ecological age, may in fact perpetuate and reinforce the existing system of alienation. Women, instead of becoming the vanguard of a new society, will, like their Victorian counterparts, be asked to play 'the "natural" wood-nymph and earth mother and to create places of escape from the destructive patterns of the dominant culture.' Ruether warns that the feminine is 'the oldest

and ultimate ideology of patriarchal culture,' and that aspects of New Age thought are deeply infected by this ideology, which 'evades the real structure of the problem while recreating women's role as the symbol and servant of male self-alienation.' Contemporary veneration of the Goddess may be no more than the latest phase in the 'changing ideology of symbolization of the "feminine" in (male-defined) culture.'<sup>43</sup>

The psychology of Jung is a clear example of how the elevation of the feminine can at the same time be an instrument of oppression. Jung, as outlined previously, believes that men need to recover their repressed 'feminine' nature - anima/Eros. However, women according to Jung, should not attempt to integrate their masculine side - animus/Logos - with their everyday life. Why? - because 'Eros is an expression of their true nature, while their Logos is often a regrettable accident.'<sup>44</sup> Women who attempt to bring their masculine side to the fore, risk, according to Jung, injuring their 'true' nature. By taking up a 'masculine profession,' 'woman is doing something not wholly in accord with, if not directly injurious to her feminine nature ... Could he [man], for instance, be a nursemaid or run a kindergarden?'<sup>45</sup> This quote also reveals that Jung had a rather limited view of what men in touch with their 'feminine' nature could do.

Jung's views on the feminine and the masculine are doubly oppressive, in that they are raised to the position of transcendent archetypes, and as Goldenberg points out, 'if something is an archetype, it is unchanging and unchangeable.' Thus the 'feminine,' as expressive of the intrinsic nature of woman, guards against social change. The

impression left by traditional Jungian thought, is, as Goldenberg puts it, that

men can keep control of all 'logos' activities and appropriate just whatever 'eros' they need from their women as a kind of psychological hobby. Women, on the other hand, are by no means as encouraged to develop 'logos,' since they are thought of as handicapped by nature in all 'logos' arenas such as those found at the top of any important profession.(46)

In Jung's psychology we find, to use Keller's words, 'the social stereotype masquerading as the eternal archetype.' Despite this 'infamous liability,'<sup>47</sup> feminists recognize that Jung made some important observations, and that his psychology points in the direction of a more expanded sense of self. Furthermore, a number of contemporary Jungians are abandoning Jung's initial theories concerning the fixed nature of the anima and animus.<sup>48</sup> Although this constitutes an important development in Jungian thought, there is much to be said for the criticism, discussed in Part Two, that traditional Jungian psychology is to some extent 'a form of patriarchal religion.'<sup>49</sup>

The notion of an archetypal feminine immediately suggests another issue - what sort of images and values should feminists associate with female divinity, with the Goddess? This is an important point for as Monica Sjoo notes, some New Age images of the Goddess seem to be cultural stereotypes that have been elevated to the level of divinity. 'I find,' she writes, 'that the images of women and of the Goddess that are popular and acceptable in the New Age movement are the very sentimentalised and sickly sweet ones that I had rejected years ago as sexist, racist and heterosexist ... docile and non-threatening Virgin

Marys, sweetly smiling while the earth burns.'<sup>50</sup> Similar problems attend the notion of androgynous divinity, where, as Ruether points out we flirt with the possibility of ratifying on the divine level 'the patriarchal split of the masculine and feminine.' In this type of androgyny the 'feminine' side of God is regarded as a secondary or mediating principle, a mirror of the kind of subordinate position and role offered to women in the patriarchal social order. The divine 'feminine' may be the bride or the daughter of God, but never divinity in its fullness. If feminists appropriate this notion of divine androgyny, they will simply 'reinforce the problem of gender stereotyping on the level of God-language.'<sup>51</sup> Such 'gender stereotyping on the level of God-language' is certainly evident in some forms of Wicca. According to Keith Morgan for example - a British Wiccan priest who has written many introductory works of Wicca - the Goddess is the 'Great Mother Earth' while the God 'is the force that moves upon it.'<sup>52</sup> Crowley reports that in some Wiccan circles 'the Mother Goddess often appears as a mediator between humanity and a sterner father God.'<sup>53</sup>

An alternative to both a 'feminine' Goddess or a 'feminine' side of God is the employment of genderless language when talking about divinity. Yet by using genderless language, according to Ruether, we court with the danger of concealing androcentric assumptions: 'God is not male. He is Spirit.'<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps the most promising path to follow would be one similar to that proposed by theologian Sallie McFague. McFague believes that 'She' is necessary to shatter the image of an exclusively male God, and agrees

with Ruether that genderless abstractions may conceal androcentric assumptions. But, she continues, a female God 'should be imaged in female not feminine.' A feminine divinity merely 'extends to the godhead the stereotypes we create in human society,' and therefore 'crystallizes and sanctifies them.' God must be female rather than feminine, and female images themselves 'should be inclusive of but not limited to maternal ones.' She points out that in some ancient religions various activities were shared by both male and female deities: 'both Ishtar and Horus, for instance, engage in creating, governing, nurturing, and redeeming.' The female God or Goddess, she concludes, following Elizabeth Johnson, must represent, not the 'feminine' aspects of the divine, but the fullness of divine power and care shown in a female form.<sup>55</sup>

The view of influential ecofeminist theologians like Ruether, Grey, and Keller is that 'feminine' values are simply human values and capacities which have been repressed by men and projected onto women. Yet, feminists are aware that they are in a double bind when it comes to such values and capacities. On the one hand, they recognize that female is not feminine; but on the other, that such values need to be embraced if the human race, and indeed the earth, is to survive, and that women will have an integral part to play in society's rediscovery of such values. In a sense, women - not because of some 'feminine' nature, but because of their deliberate exclusion by men from the dominance ethic of the public sphere - have throughout history been left to cultivate the 'feminine.' Hidden at home, they have quietly carried 'the torch for all humanity's need and longing for deeper and more satisfying

relationships, more effective patterns of affiliation.' It is by way of their projection onto women that the 'relational strengths - vital for all humanity - have been preserved, developed, but omitted from the transmission of official history.' Because women have kept alive the 'relational process' which lies at the heart of reality, it is they who hold the key to the 'redemptive spirituality needed for the transformation of the world.'<sup>56</sup>

Ultimately, what ecofeminist spirituality seeks is not an elevation of the feminine, but the abandonment of the patriarchal masculine/feminine polarity, which, far from representing the ideal relationship between men and women, is a distortion of authentic relationality. We need, in the words of Ruether, 'a new vision of humanity for women and men, one that invites us to recast and re-create all our relationships.'<sup>57</sup> For men, this would indeed include to some extent a recovery of a number of human values and capacities which have been labelled 'feminine' - gentleness, caring, nurturing, relationality. Men need to develop what Grey calls the 'connective self'; to move beyond the separative self into wider fields of identification, 'including nature and the cosmos itself.'<sup>58</sup> But women need to develop those capacities and values which have been denied to them - rationality, autonomy, and self-determination. Only by pursuing these complementary directions 'can their relationship cease to be parasitical and become genuinely reciprocal.'<sup>59</sup> The new humanity according to Grey will embrace a 'creative balance' between the two poles of being - the integrative and the self-assertive - for both 'have to be respected for the health of the organism.'<sup>60</sup>

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN : NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

'This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself ... If men spit on the ground, they spit on themselves.'

Chief Seattle<sup>1</sup>

### The Dialogue

Part Three has concentrated upon the ecological dimensions of two New Age spiritual paths in particular - creation-centred Christianity and feminist Wicca. One belief held by both these paths is that they share much in common with the spiritualities of Native peoples, particularly the spirituality of the Native American Indians. As mentioned previously, Fox believes that 'The spiritualities of Native Americans and of Third World peoples, of feminists and of blacks ... are creation-centered spiritualities.'<sup>2</sup> Along with creation-centred Christianity, the spiritual path of the Native American Indian is, according to Fox, nonanthropocentric. Indians 'worship as citizens in a universe - a living, teeming, diverse, moving, sacred universe.' The Native American path, continues Fox, also makes room for a Via Negativa. Their ceremonies appropriate 'the power of darkness and night,' while the sweat lodges 'allow us to be immersed in the holy darkness of our origins in the womb.' The Western Church could also 'learn much from the native religions about the art of wailing and lamentation.'<sup>3</sup> For Starhawk, similarly, ecofeminist Wicca and the 'spiritual traditions of Native Americans, Africans, Asians and other tribal peoples' are all

'earth-based' spiritualities, and all have in common 'a worldview in which the sacred is seen as immanent in the world.' The focus of all these earth-based paths is upon the cycle of life - 'birth, growth, decay, death, and regeneration as it appears in the seasonal round of the year, in the moon's phases, in human, plant and animal life.' And their shared goal is 'balance among all the different communities that comprise the living body of earth.'<sup>4</sup> In actual fact there is more than a shared worldview, focus and goal between Native American and Neopagan paths like Wicca. Wicca as Hutton observes has adopted various Native American practices as its own, including 'totemic animals, vision quests, medicine wheels and sweat lodges.'<sup>5</sup> In this chapter we will take a brief look at Native American spirituality, for in the resurgence of its traditional and what some have called its more recent 'New Age' expressions this path can be seen as another example of ecological spirituality. (Although some commentators make a distinction between traditional and New Age forms of Native American spirituality, I am not sure that such a clear demarcation exists. In a sense both are 'New Age' to the extent that they both signal growing dissatisfaction with and movement beyond Western patriarchal society and consciousness.)

### Native American Spirituality

The Native American peoples constitute perhaps the most tenacious indigenous culture extant in the world today, having survived five centuries of colonization, acculturation, assimilation, relocation, the destruction of wilderness and reservation land, and the severe curtailment of hunting, fishing, timber harvesting and water-use rights. 'For all the varied weapons of extinction pointed at our heads,'



observes Laguna Indian and ecofeminist scholar Paula Gunn Allen, 'we endure.'<sup>6</sup>

Yet Indian spirituality appears to be doing more than simply 'enduring.' The raising of political issues such as self-determination for tribal communities, of economic issues such as adequate health care and fair employment practices, the widespread return of Indian peoples to traditional religious practices and ceremonies, and the growing number of films, dance performances and scholarship devoted to Indian life and religion all constitute, according to Allen, 'a mighty cultural flowering, a truly Native American Renaissance.'<sup>7</sup>

In part the rise in Indian tribal self-consciousness reflects a concern to re-establish roots and identity. All Indian peoples comments Allen place great emphasis upon tradition, because tradition is that which confers identity. Failure to know one's roots, practices, traditions and history constitutes 'failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society.' The loss of tradition means a loss of identity, a condition where the individual is 'isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated.'<sup>8</sup> Yet, another dimension to this Indian renaissance is the belief among some Indians that their spirituality has much to offer in providing a solution to the problems created by Western society and culture. To support this view of the missionary role of Indian spirituality, Indian teachers like Sun Bear appeal to an old Hopi prophecy, which states, according to Sun Bear, that 'The time will come ... when the sons and daughters of our oppressors will return to us and

say, "Teach us so that we might survive; for we have almost ruined the Earth now."<sup>9</sup> Such enthusiasm is again expressed by non-Natives like Berry, who argues that Indian spirituality expresses the precise 'mystique' of nature that is necessary 'to reorient the consciousness of the present occupants of the North American continent toward a reverence for the earth, so urgent if the biosystems of the continent are to survive.'<sup>10</sup>

Such beliefs have been instrumental in the setting-up of groups designed to bring Indian spirituality to the non-Native. A good example is Sun Bear's Bear Tribe at Spokane, Washington, comprised mainly of non-Native Americans.<sup>11</sup> The Bear Tribe has promoted hostile reactions from some Indians who believe that such ventures are little more than the commercial exploitation and selective appropriation of their sacred ways. Sun Bear himself describes such attitudes as separatist and racist, and appealing to his missionary vision, argues that 'If the Native people are not willing to teach the non-Native our ways, how can they learn them?'<sup>12</sup>

Does the contemporary Indian renaissance reflect a recovery of 'authentic' Indian spirituality? This is an ambiguous question in that it implies that somewhere in the past lies a single, static, form of 'true' Indian spirituality. On the contrary, as Brown notes, research indicates that 'there is neither an American Indian tradition nor a spiritual legacy, but rather a rich diversity of both.' To ignore this diversity - in origin, language, and cultural forms - is 'to do great disservice to the American Indian peoples and their history.' Second,

as Brown notes again, there is no such thing as a 'static' spiritual legacy, for Indians have shown through history a remarkable ability for coping with change by judiciously borrowing and adapting elements from the non-Indian world, making it possible to survive and yet retain core elements of their traditions. 'New' religious forms should therefore be seen, not as alien innovations, but as being continuous with a history of change and adaptation.<sup>13</sup> Weinstock agrees with this 'organic' characterization when he states that Native American Religion 'was not a religion carved in stone ... rather, a religion of constant renewal and growth.'<sup>14</sup> Another problem related to this notion of recovering an 'authentic' spirituality is raised by Allen, who puts forward the thesis that what has come to be regarded as authentic Indian spirituality - by both Native and non-Native alike - is actually a spirituality shaped by five centuries of patriarchal colonialism and interpretation. The result of this has been that the 'gynocentric' core of Indian spirituality has been lost, and that Natives now live a 'patriarchal revisionist' expression of their own tradition.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these complex issues of diversity and cultural adaptation, there is a belief expressed - even by Allen herself - that there exists a number of core principles and elements that are 'universal and fundamental to virtually all North American Indian religious traditions of past or present.' First, there is the fact that 'religion' is not seen as being something separable from any other aspect of life. In no Indian language is there any word or term that could translate as 'religion.' Second, that Indians have a circular rather than linear understanding of time, reflected in art, architecture and ritual.

Third, that Indian spirituality expresses a devotional and reverential attitude towards nature. Fourth, that all things in the universe are viewed as being interrelated and interdependent.<sup>16</sup>

It is the opinion of Beck and Walters that the Indian renaissance - at least as experienced and expressed within the Native American community - is continuous with such core elements of Indian spirituality. They write: 'the concepts and practices at the root of classic tribal systems of knowledge continue to describe a basic way of thinking about the sacred in today's Indian communities.'<sup>17</sup> There are however a number of criticisms made against the cooptation of Indian spirituality by non-Natives. Indians themselves have expressed concern at the cooptation of certain 'exotic' practices - for example, shamanism, the sweat-lodge ceremony, the vision quest - by white commercial raiders. Such practices are not being used as originally intended - that is, to deepen bonds with others and with the earth - but to further advancement in a highly competitive and individualistic environment. The new shamans, comments Brooks Alexander, 'are psychospiritual soldiers of fortune, seeking wisdom and power. They are both autonomous and rootless.'<sup>18</sup> A more positive assessment of non-Native involvement in the Indian renaissance is given by Albanese who argues that 'Amerindian immersion in nature' lives on in both the traditional version and its 'New Age incarnation.' Although the New Age incarnation is 'decidedly eclectic,' between this and more traditional forms, there is a 'striking congruity,' and this is the 'centrality of nature':

What unites traditionalists ... and New Agers .... is an abiding conviction of the centrality of nature and a continuing enactment of their concern. Nature provides a language to express cosmology and belief; it forms the basis for understanding and practising a way of life; it supplies materials for ritual symbolization; it draws together a community.(19)

A positive note is also struck by Brown, who, while agreeing that New Age incarnations and 'pan-Indian movements' are open to commercial exploitation, and that they provide no long-terms solutions to the fundamental problems of rootlessness and alienation, argues that they do at least indicate 'the non-Native Americans' questioning of many of the basic premises of their own civilization.' In relation to Western concern with the environment, and the questioning of basic premises which have led to environmental degradation, he notes that it is the Indian message of the sacred nature of land and place 'that today has been most responsible for forcing the Native American vision upon the mind and conscience of the non-Native American.' Furthermore, such questioning, combined with the time and trouble taken to understand the basic principles of Indian spirituality, may lead non-Natives to a new understanding of their own religious heritage; to the rediscovery of 'the roots of what normally, or historically, should be one's own spiritual heritage.' The promise of the contemporary non-Native encounter with the Indian renaissance lies in the establishment of a genuine dialogue in which 'neither will attempt to imitate the other, but where each may ultimately regain and reaffirm the sacred dimensions of their own respective traditions.'<sup>20</sup>

As with other forms of ecological spirituality, a basic perception of Indian spirituality is that the earth and cosmos are home to the human. 'We have a biological father and mother,' comments Lakota shaman Wallace Black Elk, 'but our real Father is Tunkashila [Creator], and our real Mother is the Earth. They give birth and life to all the living, so we know we're all interrelated.' Humanity has lost this awareness and thus its 'navigation in this world.' The solution is to 'come back to our roots ... to Grandfather, the Creator, and Grandmother, the Earth, where there is life everlasting.'<sup>21</sup> This sense of belonging can be seen in the micro-macro cosmology that forms the basis of Indian symbolism. A symbol of the plains Indians which expresses this sense of belonging is that of the cross inscribed within a circle, which is painted on ritual objects, on the bodies and heads of people, and is reflected in the shape of the central fire of the tipi, and in the ritual movements of the Sun Dance. The circle represents the totality of existence, while the cross in the middle is the human, for the human is understood as being an integral and central part of the cosmic structure, and indeed is a microcosmic expression of this structure in its totality. As Brown explains, each animal may reflect a particular aspect of the Great Spirit, but humans, by way of their special capacities for reflection and empathy, may include within themselves all aspects. 'A human being is thus a totality, bearing the Universe within himself or herself and through the intellect having the potential to live in continual awareness of this reality.'<sup>22</sup>

The earth is not merely home to the Indian - it is sacred, a manifestation of the Divine. As Black Elk says: '"We regard all created

things as sacred and important ... We should understand well that all things are the works of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things; the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains and all the four-legged animals, and the winged peoples.'" But the divine according to Black Elk is also above all these things, a transcendent unity above all created forms.<sup>23</sup> Thus the Indians express a panentheistic understanding of the divine.

Because the world is viewed as our sacred home, 'salvation' in Indian spirituality means reconciliation with the earth rather than transcendence of it - to attain harmony and balance with the sacred forces and cycles of nature. The 'pressing ideal' of Indian spirituality, comments Brown, is 'the maintenance of balance and harmony in interrelationships with the total environment.'<sup>24</sup> This 'pressing ideal' is instilled from an early age through the oral tradition which, as Beck and Walters note, teach youngsters about 'relationships and how they are arranged and interact with each other.' The oral tradition also tells how 'this harmony can be upset and what tragedies can result.' This pressing ideal also forms the basis of shamanism, for as Beck and Walters note again, the shaman 'studies ecological and natural relationships and learns about the origin and nature of things.' This pressing ideal also forms the basis of vision quests and rituals, for 'The People do these things in order to be in touch with natural forces, in order to understand the forces of order, disorder, growth and change.'<sup>25</sup>

Living in harmony with nature is not the only goal of Indian spirituality, for there is also emphasis placed upon the idea of 'co-creation' with the divine. As in the theology of Fox, Indians believe that the divine has given humans responsibility for the ongoing work of creation and creativity. This comes across in the Cheyenne tale of Maheo, the 'All Spirit,' who, although being creator, has much respect for the creative abilities of the creatures: "'I must have your help, all of you. By myself, I have made four things ... Now I must have help if I am to create more.'"<sup>26</sup> A corollary to these concerns with harmony, balance and co-creativity is a mature and nondualistic attitude towards finitude and death. In the words of Sun Bear: 'Last year's grass dies and goes into the Earth, and, from its nutrients, new life comes forth. In the same way, when we pass on, our bodies go into the Earth, and from the disintegration of our flesh comes even more new life.' The 'Earth Mother' needs our bodies 'to live and grow.'<sup>27</sup>

Also linked with the concerns of harmony and balance is the belief that all beings are interrelated. The Indian view of the world comments Albanese is 'fundamentally relational.' Humans are seen as being bound to all other creatures through 'ties of kinship,' and therefore address them as brothers and sisters, grandfathers and grandmothers.<sup>28</sup> In Indian spirituality all things are viewed as being interdependent as well as interrelated. As Beck and Walters note: 'Everything, though having its own individuality and special place, is dependent on and shares in the growth and work of everything else.' Thus, Indians strive to be 'constantly aware of how ... actions will affect others, whether they are plants, animals, people, or streams.'<sup>29</sup> This sense of



interrelatedness and interdependence underlies one of the most basic Indian ceremonies - the sacred pipe ceremony. During this time, the sacred pipe is filled with individually prepared grains of tobacco, each representing some aspect of creation. When the pipe is full it contains 'the totality of time, space, and all of creation including humankind.' When the pipe is smoked, according to Brown, the individual leaves behind his or her ego identity or sense of separateness, and affirms his or her identity with the rest of creation, and comes to the realization that 'oneself and the world are mysteriously plunged in God.' At the end of the ceremony the participants all recite: 'We are all related.'<sup>30</sup> This aim of developing an expanded sense of self appears to be a feature of Indian ceremonies in general. Mirroring the views of Starhawk and others on the function of Wiccan ritual, Allen argues that the purpose of Indian ceremony 'is to integrate: to fuse the individual with his or her fellows, the community of people with that of the other kingdoms.' This is accompanied with an 'expansion of individual consciousness' where 'the person sheds the isolated, individual personality and is restored to conscious harmony with the universe.'<sup>31</sup>

The ideas outlined above constitute the 'core' elements of Native American Indian spirituality, and, if Albanese's assessment is accurate, this 'centrality of nature' is a feature of both the more traditional and 'New Age' expressions of the Indian renaissance. Even so, it must be remembered that such core elements are contained within a 'rich diversity of formal expressions.'<sup>32</sup>

## C O N C L U S I O N

The aims of this thesis, as indicated in the General Introduction, were to provide an overview of New Age spirituality and theology, and at the same time, to provide a broad, heuristic typology which would make sense out of some of the fundamental contradictions that characterize the New Age. The patriarchal/ecological typology does, I believe, provide a framework for doing just this. Indeed, this typology reveals two almost antithetical New Age spiritual dynamics. One is dualistic, hierarchical, espouses a separatist view of the self, and sees the world as a prison, or a training ground, or a springboard. The second is holistic, nonhierarchical, espouses a more expansive vision of selfhood, and views the earth and the cosmos as our home.

If the New Age does indeed embrace such antithetical types of spirituality/theology, why, it must be asked, do many researchers continue to present and preserve the image of the New Age as something distinguished by, as Chandler puts it, 'a common vision, a shared worldview about the nature of existence and the purpose of life in the cosmos?'<sup>1</sup> There are I think at least eight factors contributing towards such a lack of discrimination.

The first concerns the marketing of New Age ideas. The New Age as Palmer notes is very much a publishing phenomenon, created, sustained and even invented by a publishing world that has sensed the 'spiritual hunger' of contemporary society, and 'has set out to make money feeding it.' Through the symbol of the 'New Age,' publishers and bookshops have

found an excellent opportunity to bring together all manner of difficult-to-classify subjects under a convenient banner.<sup>2</sup> One result of this is that anyone attempting to find out about the New Age movement via their local bookshop will find works like Sjoon and Mor's The Great Cosmic Mother sharing shelf-space with publications concerned with making money through positive thinking. In New Age bookshops and bookshelves, we find not any consistent worldview, but as Wilkinson observes, 'a religious smorgasbord.' The typical New Age bookshop is 'not pushing any single religion but is rather bewilderingly eclectic.'<sup>3</sup>

The second factor contributing to a lack of discrimination is the fact that it is within what Spangler calls the 'glamour' New Age (that is, the dualistic and apocalyptic New Age) that the term 'New Age' is most often used. One result of this is that the general public's (and of course, researchers') perception of the New Age is distorted, and the movement is defined in terms of its more sensational and bizarre aspects. Another result is that those who previously identified with the New Age symbol - particularly feminists and environmentalists - may no longer wish to do so. If this is true, then perhaps many interpretations of the New Age are founded on partial and distorted images of what the movement actually is; and indeed, this seems to be the case. For theorists like Capra, feminism and feminist theory have a crucial role to play in the emerging new worldview. The feminist spirituality movement, he says, as quoted previously, is 'creating a new self-image for women, along with new modes of thinking and a new system of values.' Yet, researchers like Chandler and Miller can devote chapter upon chapter to a variety of New Age exotica (crystals,

channeling, UFOs, etc.), and say little or nothing about feminism. Miller devotes all of one sentence to the feminist critique of patriarchal religion; this stands alongside over forty pages devoted to channeling.

Third, and in particular reference to some Christian researchers, a lack of discrimination is due in part to attempts to keep up a 'conspiratorial' image of the New Age. Conspiracies are appealing for they constitute something 'tangible' and organized that can be attacked and defended against. The Cumbey-type approach to the New Age is, as Palmer comments, no more than the 'time-honoured' way of dealing with new and strange religious movements: 'You lump them all together and proclaim that they are an organized conspiracy.'<sup>4</sup> Conspiracies may be threatening, but they are also easy to conceptualize; and in the process, contradictions are masked or forgotten. Ironically, those who assume that there is a unified New Age worldview often go on to attack it precisely on the grounds that it is incoherent as such! For example, Olson begins his analysis of the New Age with the following remark: 'Christian philosopher Elton Trueblood stated that "it is the task of the Christian in every age to outthink all opposition." Outthinking the New Age Movement must include the task of demonstrating its incoherence.'<sup>5</sup> This he does by constructing a straw man - a single, unified, New Age worldview - which he then proceeds to take apart.

Fourth, although the 'glamour' New Age in itself has distorted perceptions of what the New Age actually is, I believe that there is another reason why researchers - again, with reference to Christian

researchers in particular - have given this part of the New Age so much attention. The reason is that this aspect of the New Age shares much in common with the dualistic assumptions of mainstream Western Christianity. What seems to annoy many Christians is not the Gnosticism of the New Age, but the New Age brand of Gnosticism. The underlying structure (that is, dualistic supernaturalism) is taken for granted, and even applauded for reintroducing the public to the 'spiritual.' It is the 'content' (that is, ascended disembodied masters and the like) that is criticised. The antagonism between the fundamentalist/evangelical pole of Christianity and the dualistic New Age denotes, as Palmer observes, not fundamental opposition, but 'sibling rivalry':

If you believe in a real devil; in occult forces, in witches and in the idea that the Book of Revelation is a coded manual for the last days and that the Antichrist is with us now, then it is quite likely that you will also be fascinated by crystals, pyramids, fortune-telling, devil-worship and so forth. In other words, this obsession ... is as much a feature of the fundamentalist and ... evangelical branches of Christianity as it is a feature of many who play with tarot cards or read their horoscopes. This is why the New Age so enrages its opponents, for they believe that people who are playing with these aspects of the New Age should be playing with their version of Christianity instead. The games are so similar that it is sibling rivalry, not fundamental opposition, that denotes the style and content of much that comes from the right of the Church in response to the perceived 'threat' of the New Age.(6)

When the underlying structure of the patriarchal New Age is recognized by fundamentalists, it is affirmed as true. For example, a recent fundamentalist critique slams the New Age for being a satanic 'curse and bondage'; an 'unholy alliance of Eastern religions, secular humanism, and the occult.' Yet the authors go on to suggest that despite 'fundamental conflicts between New Age and Christianity it would

be well to see that there is a convergence between the two' - and the convergence is dualism. Along with the (patriarchal) New Age, (patriarchal) Christians can affirm that 'man really is a creature of two worlds. He is at home in the visible, tangible world of space and time, but there are deep and insatiable longings within him for the unseen world which will forever be breaking into his consciousness.'<sup>7</sup> Similarly, according to Perry, Christians can affirm with New Age reincarnationalists that 'there is more to learn than one earthly lifetime can teach us.' In fact, he continues, Christians can go one better than those who preach perpetual return to the material 'treadmill': despite this world being a 'marvellous world,' 'we need also to teach that if our sight is limited to it and our souls inextricably bound to it, we are failing to enthuse our hearers about the possibilities of learning, growing, and experiencing in an even more breathtaking environment.' God, apparently, 'has better things in store for us; things that will boggle our imagination.'<sup>8</sup> Different words, same song. This of course raises the interesting idea that the fundamentalist pole of Christianity can be seen as part of the New Age movement. This at least is implied by Spangler when he argues, as noted earlier, that the glamour New Age is 'identical in spirit if not always in language to many of the current millennial expectations of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian groups.' This is also a line pursued by York. Following Philip Lucas, a researcher at the University of California at Santa Barbara, he notes that in both the New Age and 'the Pentecostal/charismatic revival' there is 'the search for direct experience of the sacred as well as the quest for spiritual guidance from spirits or spiritual beings.' At the very least, both can

be seen as similar responses 'to the same disenchantment and its associated consequences within contemporary society.'<sup>9</sup>

Fifth, spiritual disciplines associated with the ecological New Age dynamic can easily be tailored to fit the separatist assumptions of the patriarchal dynamic. For example, Macy believes that Buddhist theory and practice can lead to an expanded sense of identity, to an 'ecological self.' But this need not necessarily be the case all of the time. The crux of the problem is highlighted by Cox. As with Macy, Cox believes that Buddhist meditation is concerned with 'escaping illusion and ego,' and with 'seeing the world of impermanence and suffering for what it is.' Yet, continues Cox, there is a problem in how the West 'repackages' such disciplines. Transplanted disciplines are refracted through two prisms - Western consumerism and a psychology of individualism. The first 'transforms rubies and emeralds into plastic, the sacred into the silly, the holy into the hokey ... the gods into consumer software.' The second again turns them into something they are not - either 'mental health gimmicks' or 'yet another device for delving into the bottomless recesses of the self.' A Western psychology of individualism distorts spiritual disciplines by dissecting them from their 'ethical vision'; from their concern with the 'enmeshment of the self in its society.' Such mutations 'prevent them from introducing the sharply alternative vision of life they are capable of bringing to us.'<sup>10</sup> Cox's concerns are also shared by Buddhist scholar Geoffrey Samuel. Samuel points to the dangers involved in removing Eastern disciplines - Tantrism in this case - from their original cultural context. These cultural elements form an 'essential part of how the

practices operate'; excluded from this heritage, tantrism may function rather differently 'within our very different social environment':

If you are selfish, egoistic and exploitative before you undergo Tantric training, you will be the same after you finish, though of course you may now be better at being selfish, exploitative and whatever, because you are less bound by ordinary social conventions.(11)

It is not surprising that Cox can point out the irony of the 'turn East': 'the now-refracted Oriental light serves as one more support for the structure its original teachers had most hoped it would undermine: the isolated, western competitive ego.' In 'seeking to oppose the system, it seems to reinforce it; and fleeing it, it extends its perimeters.'<sup>12</sup>

The sixth factor which impinges upon attempts to make some sense out of the contradictions of the New Age is that some New Agers are just contradictory. Not only between, but within the two poles of New Age spirituality and theology, we find, as York puts it, an 'unresolved dialectic' between immanentist Pagan pantheism and transcendental Gnosticism; between a numinous materialism that sees the world as real, and a world-denying idealism that sees the world as illusion. A good example of such 'unresolved dialectic' was observed by an environmental action group during a recent talk given by David Icke at the University of Stirling. As the group commented:

The ninety minute talk consisted of an exploration and critique of the dominant belief systems - namely economic, religious and scientific - which have served to form our definitions and colour our thoughts of what is beneficial to life on earth ... As his lecture went on some flaws within his argument became apparent. Believing in reincarnation, he sees each person involved in a path of evolution to higher levels



of consciousness. But if this is the reality, where is the point in intervening to improve the environment and human relations? Also, his argument was paradoxical in that he favoured people making positive value changes in their lives whilst he also believed that we should always respect the views of others apparently irrespective of their merit.(13)

In a similar fashion, Trevelyan can speak of our need to live in harmony with Gaia; but at the same time expresses the belief that our destiny lies in transcendence - transcendence of the body, and transcendence of the earth. Again, in Jungian thought, concern is expressed with the recovery of the more instinctual and 'feminine' dimensions of human nature; yet, archetypes are at the same time viewed as being more primary and more real than the physical context in which they operate. Some argue that such contradictions can be found in feminist Wicca. 'Pushed one way,' comments Albanese, the Goddess 'celebrates the reality, the concreteness, of matter.' But pushed another way 'she tells us that matter is only a form of energy.' The religion of Wicca believes in a 'world that is real' but also 'a world that is unreal.'<sup>14</sup> Such a conclusion is, I believe, unjustified. Starhawk's assertion that the world is really an interconnected web of energy is not an attack upon the concreteness of the world, but upon the illusory belief that the world is made up of dead, isolated, and valueless parts. An illusory belief that results in a very real consciousness of alienation, and the very real politics of 'power-over.' Where some feminist Wiccans really do contradict themselves is in their beliefs concerning postmortem existence. For example, Budapest, as already noted, believes that the 'essence' of all earth religions is 'common sense that glorifies practical things and the improvement of our lives right now, not later after death, which is absurd.' In the Craft 'there is no

division between body and soul' and 'All is Nature.' Contradicting this, Budapest states that death should be 'considered a door leading into a new life.' It signifies the 'exit of the soul from the physical body.' Free from the body the soul may either attain 'liberation' or be reincarnated into another physical body. When choosing new parents 'we indeed have an opportunity to be born to those who can help us develop our spirits higher.' But, concludes Budapest, 'Be careful whom you choose. You are the one who must live with it.'<sup>15</sup> On the positive side, some feminist are becoming increasingly sensitive to and critical of such inconsistencies. In from the flames, described as a journal of 'radical feminist spirituality, magic and the goddess,' the following observations and criticisms are made by 'Denise':

As is their custom each seasonal celebration the Matriarchy Research and Reclaim Network newsletter offers definitions for the current festival: for Samhain this year one of the definitions was 'the time of the thinning of the veil between the physical and spiritual worlds' ... In her article last Issue Vron recorded the definition given by the Concise Oxford Dictionary of the word 'spirituality' 'of spirit as opposed to matter'. American Goddess teacher Shekinah Mountainwater is particularly sensitive to such splits; and dualistic thinking in general, writing - '... they are ... perpetuating the dichotomy, and thus the role stereotypes that oppress us all. This, I'm afraid, is the fatal flaw of even more advanced movements such as Neo-paganism, modern Witchcraft ...'. In the WEN [Women's Environmental Network] talk given by Charlene Spretnak on 15th October [1992] - 'The Spiritual Dimension of Ecofeminism' - Charlene discussed the beginnings and elaborations of dualism in European history and pointed out that dualism is historically hierarchical, especially patriarchal. Surely the idea of a veil between the physical and spiritual, a divide however diaphanous, is integrally dualist, for otherwise the physical and spiritual would be conceived as indistinguishable, one and the same. Reincarnation is similarly problematic. Its premise is a distinction between the spirit and the body: the spirit will survive stripped from those neural networks which have fostered it for a lifetime ... It is even more disturbing when the spirit degenerates into that problematic entity the individual personality. Take for example Zsuzsanna Budapest's account of contacting her dead mother through a psychic - her

mother, Masia, had apparently continued her career as a sculptress in some light-filled afterworld.

Denise's criticisms are extended to other dualisms within the Goddess movement, including the split between 'feminine' and the 'masculine,' described as 'an exercise in mirroring and validating the mode in which such divisions are enacted in human society, that is gender.'<sup>16</sup> If Denise's observations are indicative of a growing self-criticism within feminist spirituality, then it seems likely that the movement is developing slowly in the direction of a more consistent nondualistic materialism, characteristic of ecofeminists like Ruether and Christ.

The seventh factor impinging upon a clear demarcation between the two spiritual orientations is the fact that the patriarchal dynamic advances such a thoroughgoing relativism that it can, in a sense, embrace everything. Both spiritual dynamics of the New Age movement are relativistic to a degree. Starhawk for example says that every individual must become their own 'pope.' However, this is a 'guarded' form of relativism, for while emphasizing the authority of the individual, Starhawk simultaneously says that we must reject hierarchical dualisms. She also relates diversity in belief to ecological sanity. Again, Ruether, while stressing the importance of personal experience, describes the value-hierarchical vision of the world as the 'Big Lie.' Moreover, while valuing autonomy and personal insight, Wicca, and indeed the Neopagan movement in general, contains a number of 'ground rules.' Most Neopagans are animists, pantheists, and/or polytheists; most sense an 'aliveness' in nature; and most express concern with environmental degradation, and see the goal of the

spiritual life as reconciliation with the environment. The patriarchal dynamic does not have such definite ground rules, for the 'real' self is seen as being fundamentally detached from the physical and social reality that surrounds it. This is the assumption Trevelyan makes when he says: '"This is what things look like to me. If it doesn't seem like that to you, you don't have to accept what I say. Only accept what rings true to your own Inner Self."'17 'Everything is true,' declares Ramtha, because whatever one thinks ... is reality in his kingdom ... Everyone is right, because everyone is a god who has the freedom to create his own truth.' Truth 'is optional ... all are gods who create truth according to their freedom of will.'18 Such a thoroughgoing relativism is also advanced by Ike Isaksen, director of the theatre at the Findhorn Community, who describes the community as having '"no fixed idea. We include just about any belief ... It is a sort of spiritual supermarket, where you can pick and mix and try to find something which suits you."'19 Such a relativistic philosophy is certainly reflected in Findhorn's 'Phoenix' bookshop, where works on deep ecology, radical feminist Wicca, and voluntary simplicity sit quietly alongside revelations from ascended masters and advice for those who want to create prosperity through positive thinking.

Eighth, and again of some importance, New Age researchers are guilty of focussing upon 'universal' New Age ideas (like monism, gnosis, and self-realization) and not upon the frameworks (patriarchal and ecological) within which these ideas are structured. Although the New Age movement as a whole shares what Heelas calls 'a fundamental lingua franca,'20 in order to avoid much confusion, consideration must be given

as to how various universal beliefs are interpreted differently between both dynamics. Consider these five 'universal' New Age beliefs - all is one, cosmic evolution, the creative potential of the human, the divinity of the self, and self-realization. According to Chandler, the New Age bottom line is 'All is One.'<sup>21</sup> This may be true, but he makes no attempt to make sense out of the different interpretations given to this New Age assertion. For some, like Trevelyan, it indicates that the world is but the lowest level of emanation in an interconnected hierarchy that moves from spirit down to matter (this is 'dualism on a monistic background'). The ecological New Age by contrast embraces a 'horizontal' or naturalistic understanding of monism. One which indicates both the unity and the sacredness of all life without digressing into dualistic hierarchism. As regards the concept of evolution, some picture the 'evolutionary process' in terms of an upwards march towards the ultimate, or Omega. Such an interpretation of evolution, as discussed previously, tends to be anthropocentric and value-hierarchical. On the other hand, some New Agers describe evolution as the creative 'adventure' of an open-ended cosmos; an 'advance into novelty.' As regards ideas about human nature, in the New Age as a whole, we find 'original blessing' and 'human potential' replacing 'original sin.' We are not 'sinful blotches' on creation declares Fox. 'Sin' is the doctrine of archontic entities, according to Ramtha and other channeled beings. However, in the patriarchal dynamic, the negation of 'original sin' tends towards antinomianism, towards a freedom that knows no bounds, and no directionality. In the ecological dynamic by contrast, the negation of original sin is connected with moving beyond the Western obsession with the separate self, and sin is

redefined in structural and relational terms. In both dynamics we find emphasis upon the divinity of the self. We are immortal entities says Ramtha. We are co-creators with the divine says Fox. The important difference is that in the patriarchal dynamic the divinity of the self is viewed in atomistic terms, and is set against the supposed illusory nature of the external world. By contrast, in the ecological dynamic, the divinity of the self is connected with the recovery of dignity and responsibility, and the entire cosmos is divine, the 'primary sacrament.' The charge made against Fox that he is a Gnostic (because he asserts the divinity of the self), or at least, contradicts himself,<sup>22</sup> indicates a lack of consideration of Fox's view of the relationship between the divine, the self and the cosmos. Extreme care must also be taken over the 'universal' New Age belief in self-realization. The self to be realized in patriarchal spirituality is, as Cox puts it, the 'concentric self,' the 'psychologized diminutive of the ... soul of Neoplatonic philosophy.' By contrast, the self to be realized in ecological spirituality is the self that is coexistent with all life. Here, self-realization, in the words of transpersonal ecologist Warwick Fox, is the 'this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible.'

The factors outlined above highlight the problems involved in attempting to make a clear demarcation between different dynamics of New Age spirituality and theology. Perhaps the most significant problem is that New Agers can be contradictory at times. The patriarchal/ecological typology should therefore be seen primarily as a heuristic indication of the two 'poles' of the New Age movement. At one

end we would find the unmitigated dualism of groups like the Lectorium Rosicrucianum; and at the other the consistent numinous materialism of ecofeminist Goddess worshippers like Christ, for whom divinity 'is life, death, and change.' Between the Lectorium and Christ exist many others who show 'tendencies' towards either one of the two poles.

Can anything positive be derived from the dialectical tension that exists between these two extremes? At first glance such a belief appears ludicrous, in that ecofeminists are directly opposed to patriarchal religious assumptions - a separative view of the self, a desire to transcend the finite limits of human existence, the view that the world is not our true 'home,' the positing of hierarchical ontologies and other 'disembodied constructs.' For ecofeminists, the 'New Age' will signify the abandonment of such beliefs. Yet, in their reaction against such thinking, ecofeminists should be aware of not throwing out everything. For example, there is a tendency, particularly among radical feminist Wiccans, to confine divinity to the experiences of women. This may be a healthy corrective to confining God to the experiences and aspirations of men, but, as King points out, the human vision of the divine cannot be limited to the experiences of motherhood and birth. Such experiences are only some 'of the many possible expressions and manifestations of the Divine within and around us.'<sup>23</sup> The panentheism of Fox - which emphasizes not only the cataphatic but the apophatic nature of the divine - may serve as a corrective to limiting divinity to human experience alone. This may also be true of Wilber's model of the transcendent 'Great Goddess.' Similarly, is the view that we are not truly at 'home' always indicative of contempt for

the cosmos and a desire to transcend the earth and everything organic? While noting that the theme of 'cosmic homelessness' pervades many religious traditions and that it can easily be interpreted in such a way as 'a demand to move beyond the ensnarements of the physical cosmos,' Haught believes that this 'exilic motif' can still be used in a more world-affirming way. 'Homelessness' need not have to coincide with 'an environmentally unhealthy cosmic homelessness.' The exilic motif can instead urge us not to get too comfortable with the realities of the present, and thus provide motivation for action. The exilic motif can also be incorporated within the 'new story,' the understanding of the cosmos as an ongoing adventure, where our 'wanderings' are seen as 'continuous with the cosmos itself.'<sup>24</sup>

It could be argued that the present contradictions and tensions of the New Age indicate an attempt to return to or rediscover neglected themes in the Christian tradition. This idea of 'recovering that which was lost' is prominent in many New Age works. In Trevelyan's Operation Redemption and in Needleman's Lost Christianity,<sup>25</sup> we see attempts to recover the 'esoteric' and Gnostic dimensions of the Western religious heritage. (Although, Ruether is probably right in her contention that orthodox Christianity has never 'lost' this dimension. Despite the efforts of the Church fathers to unite the God of creation with the God of eschatological redemption, 'cosmic alienation and spiritual dualism triumphed in classical Christian spirituality.'<sup>26</sup>) In the spirituality of Fox and in the liberationist position of Ruether and others, an attempt is made to recover the more creation-centred aspects of the Christian tradition, with emphasis upon the goodness and blessing of



creation and life, and this-worldly eschatology. In many respects, as York notes, the New Age can be seen as a 'partial reconstitution from the flotsam of rejected Christian and quasi-Christian ideas of a competing theological position.' The ancient 'heresies' - from Pelagianism to Gnosticism - are 'resurfacing yet again within the variations and permutations embraced within the New Age umbrella.' The New Age may be paving the way for a post-Christian Neopaganism, but it is also 'bringing many back to their Christian origins,' and may even foster a new type of Christianity; one offering 'possibilities both of revitalization, and hopefully, increased tolerance.'<sup>27</sup>

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- 22) Russell Chandler, Understanding the New Age, British edition (Milton Keynes, 1989/1988), op. cit., pp. 18, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 30, 32, 32-33.
- 23) Miller, A Crash Course, p. 15. A good introduction to networks and networking has been written by Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps. Lipnack and Stamps argue that networks are 'spontaneously created by people to address problems and offer possibilities primarily outside of established institutions.' While the network represents a type of organization, it is one that is 'significantly different from other types of organizations such as bureaucracies or hierarchies.' Networks - the 'unorganizations of tomorrow' - cohere 'through the shared values of their members,' rather than through the 'mechanisms of reward and punishment (promotions and demotions).' Lipnack and Stamps differentiate between seven network categories: 1) healing; 2) sharing (setting up intentional communities and cooperatives); 3) using (ecology, appropriate technology); 4) valuing (concerned with radical political and economic transformation); 5) learning (alternative education and communication); 6) growth (personal and spiritual growth); 7) evolving (concerned with 'planetization' and alternative futures). They suggest that despite such a diverse range of interests, most networks share a number of values with transcend individual interests; they are 'verbalizing similar messages based on the same

underlying values.' For example, both a women's health network and a 'save the whales' campaign 'are operating out of the same, mutualistic concerns for a world in which honor and protection are accorded to all living beings.' It is this shared value system 'that defines the pattern of a "metanetwork," a network of networks, and immense subculture.' (Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps, Networking: The First Report and Directory [New York, 1982], pp. 6, 7, 237, 9, 5, 3.) Lists of Network organizations are found in 'directories.' A typical example is the British Green Pages directory, published by Macdonald Optima. Overall, while networking represents one aspect of the movement, not all New Agers would claim membership to any network or metanetwork, and not all New Agers I will contend are 'verbalizing similar messages based on the same underlying values.'

- 24) Miller, A Crash Course, pp. 16, 17, 18.
- 25) Ted Peters, 'The Gospel and the New Age' in Dialog, Winter 1989, Vol. 28, pp. 18-29 (p. 19).
- 26) Peters, The Cosmic Self, pp. 56.
- 27) Peters, The Cosmic Self, pp. 57, 58, 59, 64, 67, 68, 69, 70, 74, 75, 78-79, 79, 81, 84.
- 28) Melton et al., New Age Almanac, pp. iv-x, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 304, 363, 364, 303.
- 29) Peter Donebauer, 'Preface' in Bloom, The New Age: An Anthology, pp. xiii-xiv (pp. xiii, xiv); Bloom, 'Introduction,' p. xvi.
- 30) Bloom, 'Introduction,' pp. xvi, xvii, xvii-xviii, xv-xvi.
- 31) Heelas, 'The New Age in Cultural Context,' p. 105.
- 32) Ted Schultz, 'A Personal Odyssey Through the New Age' in Robert Basil, ed., Not Necessarily the New Age: Critical Essays (New York, 1988), pp. 337-358 (p. 354).
- 33) Michael Perry, Gods Within: A Critical Guide to the New Age (London, 1992), p. 150.
- 34) Michael York, 'New Age in Britain: An Overview' in Religion Today: A Journal of Contemporary Religions, Summer 1994, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 14-21 (p. 16).
- 35) See for example Terry Cole-Whittaker, Prosperity: Your Divine Right (San Diego, CA., n. d.).
- 36) According to Duane Elgin, 'voluntary simplicity' is 'the unpretentious merging of common sense and compassion in the immediate circumstances of daily life.' 'Common sense' and 'compassion' would urge that we 'deliberately conserve ... precious [nonrenewable] resources rather than carelessly squander them

through wasteful consumption'; 'voluntarily simplify our material demands and thereby help to minimize environmental pollution'; 'simplify ... material wants in order to release more ... desperately needed resources for those peoples who are still struggling to establish economic self-reliance'; 'moderate our energy demands and move toward greater self-reliance'; 'reduce ... undue [material] clutter and complexity ... to find a more satisfying balance between the material and the spiritual aspects of existence'; and 'consciously adopt ... a conservation [rather than a consumer] psychology.' Voluntary simplicity does not advocate material depravation; it is 'an aesthetic simplicity because it is consciously chosen.' Neither does it endorse a retreat from progress; to simplify 'is to bring order, clarity, and purpose into our lives.' Such qualities are 'crucial foundations for progress.' (Duane Elgin, Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich [New York, 1981], pp. 25, 26, 27, 32, 37.)

- 37) Robert Basil, 'The History' in Basil, ed., Not Necessarily the New Age, pp. 33-34 (p. 33).
- 38) Ellen Hinlicky and Paul Hinlicky, 'Gnosticism Old and New' in Dialog, Winter 1989, Vol. 28, pp. 12-17 (p. 16).
- 39) J. L. Simmons, The Emerging New Age (Santa Fe, NM, 1990), p. 64.
- 40) George Trevelyan, A Vision of the Aquarian Age: The Emerging Spiritual World View (Walpole, NH, 1984), pp. 109, 52.
- 41) George Trevelyan, Operation Redemption: A Vision of Hope in an Age of Turmoil (Walpole, NH, 1985/1981), pp. 19, 181.
- 42) Mark L. Prophet and Elizabeth Clare Prophet, The Science of the Spoken Word (Malibu, CA, 1984/1965), p. 102.
- 43) Jane Roberts, A Seth Book: The Nature of Personal Reality (New York, 1988/1974), pp. 25, xxii.
- 44) Starhawk, The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess, 10th anniversary edition (San Francisco, 1989/1979), pp. 10, 209.
- 45) Matthew Fox, Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality (Santa Fe, NM, 1983), pp. 11, 23.
- 46) Melton et al., New Age Almanac, p. 429.
- 47) Chandler, Understanding the New Age, pp. 30, 32-33, 27.
- 48) Chandler, Understanding the New Age, p. 17.
- 49) Melton et al., New Age Almanac, pp. 303.
- 50) Peters, The Cosmic Self, pp. 56, 80.

- 51) Joanna Macy, 'Awakening to the Ecological Self' in Judith Plant, ed., Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism (London, 1989), pp. 201-211 (p. 201).
- 52) Trevelyan, A Vision of the Aquarian Age, p. 111.
- 53) Trevelyan, Operation Redemption, p. 153.
- 54) Melton et al., New Age Almanac, p. 340.
- 55) Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, 'Witches of the West: Neopaganism and Goddess Worship as Enlightenment Religions' in Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Spring 1989, Vol. 5. No. 1, pp. 77-95 (p. 91).
- 56) Margot Adler, Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today, revised and expanded edition (Boston, 1986/1979), pp. 207-08.
- 57) David Spangler, The Rebirth of the Sacred (London, 1984), pp. 78, 80. A paradigm is simply a theoretical model or pattern through which something may be conceptualized, defined and interpreted. The nature of paradigms was first explored in Thomas Kuhn's classic study The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. As the title suggests, Kuhn's work is concerned with the nature of scientific paradigms and scientific paradigm 'shifts.' However, New Age theorists often use Kuhn's general observations to assert the viability of a cultural paradigm shift. Kuhn's observations can be summarized as follows. Firstly, Kuhn notes that scientific textbooks give the impression that modern paradigms have occurred through a linear process of incremental increases in knowledge. Kuhn however argues that scientific 'progress' occurs as a sudden shift between conceptual paradigms. Each shift involves a reconceptualization of reality and a reassessment of earlier ideas. Each shift (for example, from a Ptolemaic to a Copernican cosmology) constitutes a perceptual revolution. Secondly, paradigm shifts begin with the 'awareness of anomaly'; with problems which refuse to be resolved within the existing framework. The existing paradigm ceases to 'function adequately in the exploration of an aspect of nature to which that paradigm itself had previously led the way.' This in turn leads to a state of crisis in which the anomaly is either finally resolved within the existing paradigm or a new one begins to emerge. Thirdly, although the new paradigm may be sketched out quickly, its inauguration is initially met with hostility and rejection. Yet the new model eventually gains ascendancy until 'only a few elderly hold-outs' remain committed to the older one. Fourthly, although new paradigms are born from the old, and inherit much of their vocabulary and apparatus, 'they seldom employ these borrowed elements in quite the traditional way ... old terms, concepts, and borrowed elements fall into new relationships one with the other'; the old is not abandoned but transformed. Kuhn compares this restructuring to a gestalt-like change in perception. (Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, second edition, Foundations of Unity Science Series, Vol. II, No. 2 [Chicago, 1970/1962], pp. 92, 159, 149.)

- 58) Spangler, Rebirth, pp. 79, 15, 19, 19-20, 54.
- 59) Spangler, Rebirth, p. 79.
- 60) David Spangler and William Irwin Thompson, Reimagination of the World: A Critique of the New Age, Science, and Popular Culture (Santa Fe, NM, 1991), p. 31.
- 61) William Kautz and Melanie Branon, Channeling: The Intuitive Connection (San Francisco, 1987), pp. 15, 16. See also Shirley MacLaine, Out on a Limb (London, 1991/1983).
- 62) Spangler and Thompson, Reimagination of the World, pp. 30, 31.
- 63) Spangler, Rebirth, pp. 80, 81, 82.
- 64) Spangler, Rebirth, pp. 84, 82-83, 84.
- 65) Fritjof Capra, The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture (London, 1990/1982), p. 458.
- 66) Spangler, Rebirth, pp. 28, 66-68. Moreover, given that Spangler seems keen to present the image of the 'real' New Age as a celebration of the 'divine within the ordinary,' why did he allow Trevelyan to write his Foreword? Upon opening Spangler's study, the reader is confronted with the following: 'This new book by David Spangler ... [is] the best introduction to what we mean by the New Age. It is a sane and balanced book, which to my mind puts this remarkable movement into its true perspective.' Trevelyan goes on to declare: 'We, the tenth hierarchy, are given this supreme task of lifting individual consciousness, that we may receive the universal intelligence of which we are in fact part ... human freedom is an inviolable factor. The angelic world will not undermine it. Yet the planet is to be cleansed ... The truth is that the moment we attune to God and our angelic guide in free decision, the power [to transform the world] can flood ... God's Power, Love and Intelligence is everywhere, but on a higher frequency vibration, invisible to our senses, which are only tuned to the heavy vibration of the dense physical plane of matter ... God is on the march and the planet is to be cleansed, and Apocalypse means opening the way for the descent of the New Jerusalem ... The force field of higher divine energy is pouring into the weight of dying matter and re-animating it. Human consciousness is the vehicle for receiving the inflooding of the cosmic intelligence associated with the name of Michael, standard bearer of the Christ. So let us not fear to recognize the scale of events.' (Spangler, Rebirth, pp. ix, x-xii.) A celebration of the divine within the ordinary?
- 67) See Linda Woodhead, 'Post-Christian Spiritualities' in Religion, April 1993, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 167-181.
- 68) See David Ray Griffin, ed., Sacred Interconnections: Postmodern Spirituality, Political Economy, and Art (New York, 1990).

- 69) See Catherine L. Albanese, Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age (Chicago, 1990).
- 70) Capra, The Turning Point, pp. 462, 463.
- 71) Cited in Theodore Roszak, Person/Planet: The Creative Disintegration of Industrial Society (London, 1981/1977), pp. 68, 73.
- 72) Ursula King, Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest & Promise, second edition (Hampshire, 1993/1989), p. 3.
- 73) See Monica Sjoo, New Age & Armageddon: The goddess or the gurus? Towards a feminist vision of the future (London, 1992).
- 74) Walter Principle, 'Toward defining Spirituality' in Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses, 1983, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 127-41 (p. 136).
- 75) Principle, 'Toward defining Spirituality,' p. 138.
- 76) Adrienne Rich, 'Stepping Backward' in Poems: Selected and New (New York, 1975), p. 9; cited in Fox, Original Blessing, p. 110.
- 77) John Charles Cooper, The Roots of the Radical Theology, first British edition (London, 1968/1967), pp. 17-18.
- 78) Bloom, The New Age: An Anthology, p. xviii.
- 79) York, 'New Age in Britain,' p. 14.
- 80) Icke's talk was given at Stirling University, 11 April, 1994.
- 81) Thomas Berry, The Dream of the Earth (San Francisco, 1990/1988), pp. 142, 143, 141, 143, 141.
- 82) Karen J. Warren, 'Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections' in Environmental Ethics, Spring 1987, Vol. 9, pp. 3-20 (pp. 6, 7).
- 83) Claude Y. Stewart, 'Factors Conditioning the Christian Creation Consciousness' in Philip N. Joranson and Ken Butigan, eds., Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Creation Tradition (Santa Fe, NM, 1984), pp. 107-131 (pp. 121, 122, 121).
- 84) Catherine Keller, From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self (Boston, 1986), pp. 1, 9.
- 85) Keller, Broken Web, pp. 205, 7, 206.
- 86) Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk (Boston, 1983), pp. 54, 78-79, 79-80, 78-79.
- 87) Keller, From a Broken Web, pp. 38, 37-38, 38.



- 88) Don Cupitt, The Long-Legged Fly: A Theology of Language and Desire (London, 1987), pp. 19-20.
- 89) Don Cupitt, 'From Dogma to Therapy' in Resurgence, March/April 1993, No. 157, pp. 4-7 (p. 5).
- 90) Don Cupitt, Radicals and the Future of the Church (London, 1989), pp. 3, 44, 4.
- 91) Cupitt, Long-Legged Fly, see pp. 2-34; 'From Dogma to Therapy,' p. 6.
- 92) Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Green Paradise Lost, formerly Why the Green Nigger? (Wellesley, Massachusetts, 1981/1979), p. 116.
- 93) Cupitt, Long-Legged Fly, pp. 3, 7, 101.
- 94) Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, pp. 79, 79-80.
- 95) Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Motherearth and the Megamachine: A Theology of Liberation in a Feminine, Somatic and Ecological Perspective' in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion (San Francisco, 1979), pp. 43-52 (p. 47).
- 96) Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity, second edition (Boston, 1963/1958), pp. 110, 147.
- 97) See for example Carl A. Raschke, The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness (Chicago, 1980); and Richard Bergeron, 'Towards a Theological Interpretation of the New Religions' in John Coleman and Gregory Baum, eds., New Religious Movements, Concilium series No. 161 (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 74-80.
- 98) My understanding of ancient Gnosticism is derived from a variety of sources, including Jonas, The Gnostic Religion; Benjamin Walker, Gnosticism: Its History and Influence (Wellingborough, 1983); Giovanni Filoramo, A History of Gnosticism, Anthony Alcock, trans. (Oxford, 1990); Kurt Rudolph, Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion, Robert McLachlan Wilson, trans. (Edinburgh, 1983/1977); The Nag Hammadi Library in English (Leiden, 1977). In this thesis Gnosticism is viewed as a clear example of patriarchal spirituality. For a counterview see Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (London, 1979). Pagels argues that Christian Gnostics understood God as 'a dyad who embraces both masculine and feminine elements.' Moreover, that there was a 'correlation between religious theory and social practice.' She highlights criticisms made by Tertullian and Irenaeus concerning the central role occupied by women in Gnostic worship. The Valentinians for example 'followed a practice which insured the equality of all participants.' The Christian Gnostics, in opposition to the developing orthodoxy, did not rank 'their members into superior and

inferior "orders" within a hierarchy.' Yet such a 'feminist' reading of Gnosticism, is, as Pagels herself recognizes, 'not ... universally applicable.' In the Gospel of Thomas for example, Jesus explains that women are not worthy of life, and that to enter the kingdom of God they must become like men. The Book of Thomas the Contender addresses men and warns against intimacy with women. In the Dialogue of the Saviour, Jesus asks his disciples to pray in a place where there is no women, and to destroy the works of femaleness. In the Paraphrase of Shem, nature is depicted as the evil creation of a dark vagina (Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels, pp. 49, 60, 59-60, 43, 41, 60, 49, 66). This last point - Gnosticism's link between 'femaleness' and a corrupt nature - is explored in some detail by Fischer-Mueller. He notes that in ancient medical writings, 'femaleness' was considered a deformity, and that male semen was seen as the most important element in creation. Without the male element, a women can only bring forth a monstrous miscarriage. In picturing the cosmos as the creation of a single female principle (Sophia is said to have created the cosmos without the consent of her consort), the Gnostics 'reiterate the idea postulated by the medical profession that femaleness is a deformity, a first step towards monstrosity.' To the early Gnostics even the demiurge, argues Fischer-Mueller, may have been understood as the embodiment of femaleness: 'Yaldabaoth's traits of weakness, lack of form and perfection, androgyny, monstrosity, and inability to create perfect offspring, are clearly connected with femaleness.' (E. Aydeet Fischer-Mueller, 'Yaldabaoth: The Gnostic Female Principle in its Fallenness' in Novum Testamentum, January 1990, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, pp. 79-95 [pp. 87-88, 91]). A further point against a 'feminist' reading of Gnosticism is that although women may have occupied a central position in some Gnostic groups, this gives no grounds for assuming that they advocated sexual equality in the social sphere. This is the position adopted by Ruether, who argues that when Gnosticism did elevate the position of women, it was done merely in anticipation of the coming eschatological order of redemption: 'Where women's messianic equality was affirmed in heretical Christianity, it was generally done by asserting an eschatological order of redemption as a counterpoint to the patriarchal order of creation ... Gnostic Christianity affirmed women's equality, but against the goodness of nature and bodily existence.' In this 'eschatological feminism,' women gain access to the transcendent realm of spirit - but only as they are stripped of their sexual, bodily and carnal nature; such feminism 'has no message of equality of women in the world.' (Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, pp. 36, 79-80).

- 99) Rudolph, Gnosis, p. 58.
- 100) Cited in Walker, Gnosticism, p. 100.
- 101) Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, p. 45.
- 102) William R. Schoedel, trans., The First Apocalypse of James in The Nag Hammadi Library in English (Leiden, 1977), pp. 246, 246-47.

- 103) Catherine Keller, 'Women Against Wasting the World: Notes on Eschatology and Ecology' in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism (San Francisco, 1990), pp. 249-263 (p. 263).
- 104) Naomi R. Goldenberg, 'Archetypal Theory and the Separation of Mind and Body: Reason Enough to Turn to Freud?' in Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, eds., Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality (San Francisco, 1989), pp. 244-255 (p. 254).
- 105) Monica Sjoo, 'New Age and Patriarchy' in Religion Today: A Journal of Contemporary Religions, Summer 1994, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 22-28 (p. 23).
- 106) Thomas Berry, 'The Spirituality of the Earth' in Charles Birch and William Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel, eds., Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology (Maryknoll, New York, 1990), pp. 151-158 (p. 151).
- 107) Augustine, De Genesi ad Litterum, book xii, 7:16; cited in Matthew Fox, Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality (San Francisco, 1992), p. 34.
- 108) Berry, 'Spirituality of the Earth,' p. 158.
- 109) Matthew Fox, 'Creation-Centred Spirituality From Hildegard of Bingen to Julian of Norwich: 300 Years of an Ecological Spirituality in the West' in Joranson and Butigan, eds., Cry of the Environment, pp. 85-106 (p. 100).
- 110) Frances Vaughan, 'Discovering Transpersonal Identity' in Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Summer 1985, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 13-38 (pp. 20, 21).
- 111) Fox, 'Creation-Centred Spirituality,' pp. 100, 101.
- 112) Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex & Politics (Boston, 1982), p. 38.
- 113) Fox, Sheer Joy, p. 9.
- 114) Charlene Spretnak, States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age (San Francisco, 1991), pp. 12, 12-14.
- 115) Eilberg-Schwartz, 'Witches of the West,' pp. 92, 93, 94.
- 116) Cited in Perry, Gods Within, p. 147.
- 117) Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 140.
- 118) Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, pp. 264-65.
- 119) Mary Grey, Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition (London, 1989), p. 9.

- 120) Carol P. Christ, 'Embodied Thinking: Reflections on Feminist Theological Method' in Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Spring 1989, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 7-15 (pp. 13, 11, 12, 15).
- 121) Spretnak, States of Grace, pp. 5, 121, 233.
- 122) Grey, Redeeming the Dream, pp. 31, 32. Spretnak agrees: 'We do not need to invent a ground of connectedness, but only to realize it.' (Spretnak, States of Grace, p. 188.)
- 123) Ralph Metzner, 'Age of Ecology' in Resurgence, November/December 1991, pp. 4-7, p. 7.
- 124) David Ray Griffin, 'Introduction to SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought' in Griffin, ed., Sacred Interconnections, pp. ix-xii (pp. x, xi, xii, xi).
- 125) Griffin, 'Introduction: Sacred Interconnections' in Griffin, ed., Sacred Interconnections, pp. 1-13 (pp. 1, 2, 3, 2, 5, 4).
- 126) Lynn White, Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis' in Science, 10 March 1967, Vol. 155, pp. 1203-07 (pp. 1205, 1206-07).
- 127) White, 'The Historical Roots,' pp. 1206, 1206-07.

## **P A R T   O N E :   T H E   H I S T O R I C A L   R O O T S O F   T H E   N E W   A G E   M O V E M E N T**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- 1) Melton et al., New Age Almanac, pp. 3-4. In addition, see Chandler, Understanding the New Age, Chapter Five.
- 2) Marilyn Ferguson, The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s (London, 1989/1980), p. 67.

### **CHAPTER ONE: THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION**

- 1) Edward Goldsmith, The Way: An Ecological World-View (London, 1992), p. xiv.
- 2) John F. Haught, 'Religious and Cosmic Homelessness: Some Environmental Implications' in Birch and Eakin and McDaniel, eds., Liberating Life, pp. 159-181 (pp. 161-163).
- 3) Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution (New York, 1980), p. 99.
- 4) George Trevelyan, Operation Redemption, pp. 10, 14.
- 5) Trevelyan, Operation Redemption, pp. 104, 103-04, 83.

- 6) Capra, The Turning Point, pp. xvii-xviii, xviii.
- 7) Ian G. Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion, study edition (London, 1972/1966), p. 25.
- 8) Galileo declares: "'I cannot believe that there exists in external bodies anything, other than their size, shape or motion ... which could excite in us our tastes, sounds and odours. And indeed I should judge that, if ears, tongues, and noses be taken away, the number, shape and motion of bodies would remain, but not their tastes, sounds, and odours ... And I again judge that heat is altogether subjective.'" Galileo, The Assayer (n. d.); cited in Barbour, Issues in Science, p. 27.
- 9) Capra, The Turning Point, pp. 39, 39-40; R. D. Laing, The Voice of Experience (New York, 1982), no page reference given.
- 10) Brian Swimme, 'How to Heal a Lobotomy' in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism (San Francisco, 1990), pp. 15-22 (p. 16).
- 11) Capra, The Turning Point, p. 40. Deep ecologist Edward Goldsmith makes a similar criticism. On the one hand, Bacon 'was the first to insist that science be ruthlessly separated from values ("the idols of the understanding").' On the other, 'His scientific knowledge, far from being "value free" set out explicitly and purposefully to give man power over nature.' (Goldsmith, The Way, p. 63).
- 12) Rene Descartes, Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii (1628); cited in Daniel Garber, 'Science and Certainty in Descartes' in Michael Hooker, ed., Descartes: Critical and Interpretive Essays (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 114-151 (p. 116).
- 13) Rene Descartes, Meditations (1641); cited in Margaret D. Wilson, 'Cartesian Dualism' in Hooker, ed., Descartes, pp. 197-211 (p. 198).
- 14) Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method (1637); cited in Fred Sommers, 'Dualism in Descartes: The Logical Ground' in Hooker, ed., Descartes, pp. 223-233 (p. 225).
- 15) Susan R. Bordo, The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism & Culture (Albany, New York, 1987), pp. 75-76, 91.
- 16) Capra, The Turning Point, pp. 45-46, 46.
- 17) Bordo, The Flight to Objectivity, p. 45.
- 18) Capra, The Turning Point, p. 56.
- 19) Alexander Koyre, Newtonian Studies (Chicago, 1965), no page ref.; cited in Goldsmith, The Way, p. 18.

- 20) Capra, The Turning Point, pp. 52, 53.
- 21) Capra, The Turning Point, p. 285.
- 22) Brian Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression: Patriarchy's Confrontation with Woman and Nature (London, 1981), pp. 65, 124, 85.
- 23) Merchant, Death of Nature, p. 1. Merchant's views on this issue appear to have changed slightly. In a recent essay she argues that the scientific revolution was only one point in patriarchy's ongoing degradation of nature. (See Carolyn Merchant, 'Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory' in Diamond and Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World, pp. 100-105.)
- 24) Bordo, The Flight to Objectivity, p. 108.
- 25) Paul Hoch, White Hero, Black Beast: Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity (1979, no other reference details given); cited in Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 196.
- 26) Joseph Glanvill, The Vanity of Dogmatising: The Three Versions (1661); cited in Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 70.
- 27) Henry Oldenburg, 'Publisher to the Reader' in Robert Boyle, Experiments and Considerations Touching on Colours (1664); cited in Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 70.
- 28) Francis Bacon, De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum (n.d. given); cited in Merchant, Death of Nature, p.168.
- 29) Francis Bacon, Novum Organum (1620); cited in Merchant, Death of Nature, p. 171.
- 30) Francis Bacon, in Farrington, Philosophy of Francis Bacon (no other reference details given); cited in Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 85.
- 31) Thomas Vaughan, Anima Magica Abscondita (1650), pp. 6, 8, 13; Magia Adamica (1650), p. 86; cited in Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 84.
- 32) Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 74.
- 33) Rene Descartes, Le Monde (1633); cited in Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 72.
- 34) Thomas O. Lambdin, trans., The Gospel of Thomas in The Nag Hammadi Library in English, pp. 117-130 (p. 130).
- 35) Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 73.
- 36) Bordo, The Flight to Objectivity, p. 58.

- 37) Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, pp. 84-85.
- 38) Robert Hooke, A Discourse on the Nature of Comets (1692); cited in Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 85.
- 39) Descartes, Discourse on Method; cited in Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, p. 86.
- 40) Easlea, Science and Sexual Oppression, pp. 85-86, 119-20.
- 41) Bertrand Russell, Why I am not a Christian (London, 1992/1957), pp. 26, 48, 68, 69.
- 42) Cited in Perry, Gods Within, p. 71 (no ref. given).
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## CHAPTER TWO: THE ROMANTIC REACTION

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- 42) Jung, Collected Works, Vol. 5, para. 351.
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from facts that are relevant only to neurotic states of mind ... Freud's is not a psychology of the healthy mind.' (Jung, Modern Man, p. 135.)

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- 16) See Nancy Corson Carter, 'Body-Vessel-Matrix: Co-creative Images of Synergetic Universe' in Zygon, June 1990, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 151-165 (p. 152).
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- 18) Capra, The Turning Point, p. 463.
- 19) Jeffrey C. Eaton, 'Simone Weil and Feminist Spirituality' in Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Winter 1986, Vol. LIV, No. 4, pp. 691-704 (pp. 701-02).
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- 26) Warren, 'Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections,' p. 8.
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- 44) Ynestra King, 'Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature/Culture Dualism' in Diamond and Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World, pp. 106-122 (p. 110).
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- 48) Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation (New York, 1975), p. 204.
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- 50) Warren, 'Feminism and Ecology,' pp. 4-5.
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- 72) Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, p. 26.
- 73) C. S. Lewis, The Case for Christianity (New York, 1943); cited in Wood, 'Modern Pantheism,' p. 161.
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- 84) Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 37.
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- 89) Lucy O'Brien, 'The wild woman within' in Everywoman, February 1994, pp. 13-15 (p. 13).
- 90) Anne Kent Rush, 'The Politics of Feminist Spirituality' in Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality, pp. 382-385 (pp. 382, 383).
- 91) Judy Davis and Juanita Weaver, 'Dimensions of Spirituality' in Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality, pp. 368-372 (pp. 370, 372).
- 92) Hallie Iglehart, 'The Unnatural Divorce of Spirituality and Politics' in Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality, pp. 404-414 (pp. 408-09).
- 93) Spretnak, 'Introduction' in Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality, p. xxiii.
- 94) Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, pp. 413, 414.
- 95) Cited in Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, pp. 399-400. While most Neopagans express concern about the process of environmental degradation, not all can be described as embracing a 'religious militancy' when it comes to this issue. Dr. Graham Harvey, a researcher of Neopaganism in Britain at the University of

Newcastle, differentiates between various Neopagan 'shades of Green,' although he adds that this does not mean that any shade exists in a pure form, and indeed that 'many Pagan organizations encourage their members to find their own level of ecological activity.' One shade is that of 'symbolic action,' where concern for the environment may be expressed in the form of sitting at home, meditating, and radiating thoughts or feelings of peace towards the world. Neopagans expressing this type of environmental concern 'would have considerable reservations about participating in anything more public or political.' Another shade of green is 'active involvement,' where Neopagans are members of environmental action groups like Greenpeace, or conservation groups like the British Trust for Nature Conservation. Neopagans are also involved in 'more specifically Pagan' action groups like Tree Spirit, Odinshof, and Druid Orders that are 'trying to buy land to plant trees.' At the other end of the pole to symbolic action are the more militant Neopagan groups like Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front, who set out to 'damage tree-felling and earth-moving machinery.' (Graham Harvey, 'The Roots of Pagan Ecology' in Religion Today, Summer 1994, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 38-41 [pp. 38, 39].)

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#### CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: CRITICISMS OF CREATION AND GODDESS SPIRITUALITY

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- 2) From a talk given by Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel at the 'Women in Theology' conference in London, 1984; cited in Grey, Redeeming the Dream, p. 44.
- 3) Woodhead, 'Post-Christian Spiritualities,' p. 175.
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- 6) Fox, Original Blessing, p. 16; see also Berry, The Dream of the Earth, Chapter Eleven.
- 7) Margaret Brearley, 'Matthew Fox: Creation Spirituality for the Aquarian Age' in Christian Jewish Relations, 1989, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 37-49 (pp. 39, 40).
- 8) Brearley, 'Matthew Fox,' p. 41.

- 9) Tiina Allik, 'Matthew Fox: On the Goodness of Creation and Finitude' in Listening, Spring 1989, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 54-72 (pp. 55, 58, 59). Similar criticisms of Fox have been made by others, including Lawrence Osborn and even Ruether. Ruether argues that Fox's division of the Western cultural heritage into the 'good guys (and girls)' and the 'bad guys' betrays, not only a lack of historical scholarship, but 'critical distance from his own agenda.' Jesus, Eckhart, Hildegard, Buddhists and Native Americans 'all come out sounding exactly like Matthew Fox.' While obviously sympathetic to Fox's antidualistic and antipatriarchal stance, she concludes that 'Creation spirituality is too important to be identified only with the work of Matthew Fox.' (See Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Matthew Fox and Creation Spirituality' in The Catholic World, July/August 1990, pp. 168-72 [p. 172].) In addition to similar criticisms of Fox's interpretation of Western culture, Osborn makes the interesting observation that Fox espouses a form of emanationism analogous to the type of Neoplatonic/Gnostic emanationism which he claims to reject. Creation in Fox's work is 'described in dynamic terms as a process of flow and return ... creation flows out into multiplicity and returns to unity.' (See Lawrence Osborn, 'A Fox Hunter's Guide to Creation Spirituality' in Andrew Walker, ed., Different Gospels [London, 1993], pp. 155-172 [p. 160].) Although such emanationism occupies little room in Fox's work (he is more interested in 'co-creativity' and 'birthing God' rather than 'returning to God'), this sort of imagery - moving from oneness to multiplicity and back to oneness again - is certainly open to the kinds of criticisms discussed in Chapter Twelve and Chapter Thirteen.
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- 13) Matthew Fox, Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen (Santa Fe, NM, 1985), p. 12.
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- 15) King, Women and Spirituality, p. 124.
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- 17) Crowley, Phoenix from the Flame, pp. 149, 150.
- 18) Catherine Madsen et al., 'Roundtable Discussion,' p. 104.

- 19) Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology (Middlesex, 1985/1962), pp. 62, 17.
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- 21) King, Women and Spirituality, p. 143.
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- 23) Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, H. M. Parshley, trans. (London, 1988/1949), pp. 94, 95, 100, 105, 100, 160, 108.
- 24) Catherine Keller, 'Feminism and the Ethic of Inseparability' in Plaskow and Christ, eds., Weaving the Visions, pp. 256-265 (p. 260).
- 25) See Sally Binford, 'Are Goddesses and Matriarchies Merely Figments of Feminist Imagination?' in Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality, pp. 541-49.
- 26) Mary Jo Weaver, 'Who is the Goddess and Where Does She Get Us?' in Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Spring 1989, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 49-64 (p. 56).
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- 28) Goldenberg, Changing of the Gods, p. 89.
- 29) Starhawk, 'Ethics and Justice in Goddess Religion' in Spretnak, ed., The Politics of Women's Spirituality, pp. 415-422 (p. 415).
- 30) Adler, Drawing Down the Moon, p. 191.
- 31) Weaver, 'Who is the Goddess,' pp. 63-64.
- 32) Eilberg-Schwartz, 'Witches of the West,' p. 91.
- 33) Margot Adler, 'A Response' in Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Spring 1989, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 97-100 (p. 99).
- 34) Ruether, Womanguides, pp. 39, 38.
- 35) Jeffrey C. Eaton, 'Simone Weil and Feminist Spirituality' in Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Winter 1986, Vol. LIV, No. 4, pp. 691-704 (pp. 701-02).
- 36) Thomas Berry, 'The Spirituality of the Earth,' p. 157.
- 37) Sjoon and Mor, The Great Cosmic Mother, p. 142.
- 38) Charlene Spretnak, 'Knowing Gaia' in Anima, Fall 1987, Vol 14, No. 1, pp. 12-18 (pp. 16, 16-17).
- 39) Gray, Green Paradise Lost, p. 125.

- 40) Ruether, 'Motherearth and the Megamachine,' p. 51.
- 41) Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 22.
- 42) Grey, Redeeming the Dream, p. 22.
- 43) Ruether, New Woman/New Earth, pp. 203, 204, 205.
- 44) Jung, Collected Works, Vol. 9ii, para. 29.
- 45) Jung, Collected Works, Vol. 10, paras. 117-118.
- 46) Naomi R. Goldenberg, 'Jung after Feminism' in Rita M. Gross, ed., Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays on Women and Religion (Missoula, Montana, 1977), pp. 53-66 (pp. 61, 66).
- 47) Keller, From a Broken Web, p. 109.
- 48) A movement towards a postpatriarchal form of Jungianism is reflected in the writings of Whitmont: '"Instinct, soul and spirit, anima and animus, are archetypal principles that pertain to both sexes equally ... Women can be and always could be deeply involved with and psychologically determined in their conscious outlook by Logos and out of touch with their affects; men can be immensely sensitive to instinct, feeling, and affect and quite at loss in respect to Logos or for that matter to any other of the masculine archetypes ... Either sex may partake in any of the masculine or feminine determinants in various constellations or degrees, comparable to a zodiac wheel in which any of its sections can be accentuated to different degrees in different people."' (Edward C. Whitmont, 'Reassessing Femininity and Masculinity: A Critique of Some Traditional Assumptions' in Quadrant, Fall 1980, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 121; cited in Lauter and Rupprecht, eds., Feminist Archetypal Theory, p. 226.)
- 49) Goldenberg, 'Jung after Feminism,' p. 55.
- 50) Monica Sjoo, New Age & Armageddon, p. 86.
- 51) Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 61.
- 52) Keith Morgan, Wicca Awakens, extended edition (London, 1992/1987), p. 10.
- 53) Crowley, Phoenix from the Flame, p. 117.
- 54) Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 67.
- 55) Sallie McFague, 'God as Mother,' in Plaskow and Christ, eds., Weaving the Visions, pp. 139-50 (pp. 140, 141, 149n.); see also Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female' in Theological Studies, 1984, No. 45, p. 461.

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- 58) Grey, Redeeming the Dream, pp. 84, 39.
- 59) Ruether, New Woman/New Earth, p. 29.
- 60) Grey, Redeeming the Dream, p. 32.

#### CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

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- 3) Fox, The Coming of the Cosmic Christ, pp. 213, 221, 222.
- 4) Starhawk, 'Feminist Earth-Based Spirituality and Ecofeminism,' pp. 174, 175.
- 5) Hutton, 'Neo-Paganism, Paganism and Christianity,' p. 30.
- 6) Paula Gunn Allen, The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions, 1992 edition (Boston, 1992/1986), p. 190.
- 7) Allen, The Sacred Hoop, p. x.
- 8) Allen, The Sacred Hoop, pp. 209, 210.
- 9) Sun Bear and Wabun and Barry Weinstock, Sun Bear: The Path of Power (Spokane, Washington, 1983), p. 92.
- 10) Berry, The Dream of the Earth, p. 184.
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- 12) Sun Bear et al., Sun Bear, p. 263.
- 13) Joseph Epes Brown, The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian (New York, 1982), pp. xi, 2.
- 14) Sun Bear et al., Sun Bear, p. 29.
- 15) Allen, The Sacred Hoop, p. 42.
- 16) See Brown, The Spiritual Legacy, pp. 2-4.
- 17) Peggy V. Beck and Anna L. Walters, The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life (Tsaile, AZ, 1977), p. xii.



- 18) Brooks Alexander, 'A Generation of Wizards: Shamanism & Contemporary Culture' in Spiritual Counterfeits Project, Winter 1984, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 28; cited in Chandler, Understanding the New Age, p. 116.
- 19) Albanese, Nature Religion in America, pp. 154, 155, 155-56.
- 20) Brown, The Spiritual Legacy, pp. 47, 51, 113, 113-14, 49.
- 21) Wallace H. Black Elk and William S. Lyon, Black Elk: The Sacred Ways of a Lakota (San Francisco, 1990), pp. 4, 39, 185.
- 22) Brown, The Spiritual Legacy, pp. 36, 39.
- 23) Joseph Epes Brown, The Sacred Pipe (Norman, Oklahoma, 1953), p. 59.
- 24) Brown, The Spiritual Legacy, p. 24.
- 25) Beck and Walters, The Sacred, p. 21, 103, 49.
- 26) Alice Marriott and Carol K. Rachlin, American Indian Mythology (New York, 1972); cited in Allen, The Sacred Hoop, p. 57.
- 27) Sun Bear et al., Sun Bear, p. 245.
- 28) Albanese, Nature Religion in America, pp. 20, 21.
- 29) Beck and Walters, The Sacred, pp. 11, 12.
- 30) Brown, The Spiritual Legacy, pp. 17, 45, 17.
- 31) Allen, The Sacred Hoop, p. 62.
- 32) Brown, The Spiritual Legacy, p. x.

## CONCLUSION

- 1) One exception to this is York, who differentiates between the New Age and Neopaganism. Yet there are problems with this distinction as York himself acknowledges: 'we have pagan New Agers or pagans who identify as New Age and we also have New Agers who entertain pagan metaphors and even what could be identified as pagan or Gaian beliefs.' (York, 'New Age in Britain,' p. 16.)
- 2) Palmer, Coming of Age, pp. 13, 25.
- 3) Wilkinson, 'New Age, New Consciousness,' p. 8.
- 4) Palmer, Coming of Age, p. 24.
- 5) Olson, 'Christianity, Coherence, and the New Age Movement,' p. 350.
- 6) Palmer, Coming of Age, p. 80.

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- 7) Michael Cole and Jim Graham and Tony Higon and David Lewis, What is the New Age? (London, 1991/1990), pp. 191, 148.
- 8) Perry, Gods Within, p. 107.
- 9) York, 'New Age in Britain,' p. 19.
- 10) Cox, Turning East, pp. 77, 134, 75, 77, 75.
- 11) Geoffrey Samuel, 'The Body in Buddhist and Hindu Tantra: Some Notes' in Religion, July 1989, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 197-210 (pp. 208, 203-04).
- 12) Cox, Turning East, pp. 136, 142.
- 13) University of Stirling Environmental Action Group, Terra-Nova, Summer 1994, No. 7.
- 14) Albanese, Nature Religion in America, pp. 179-80, 183.
- 15) Budapest, The Holy Book, pp. xii, xxv, 90, 92, 97, 98.
- 16) Denise, 'Of WEN and Vron' in from the flames, Winter 1992, No. 8, pp. 28-29 (p. 28, 29).
- 17) Trevelyan, cited in Perry, Gods Within, p. 147.
- 18) Weinberg, ed., Ramtha, pp. 153, 63.
- 19) Cited in John Hancox, 'Clan of the outsiders,' Guardian (Society section), July 8, 1992, p. 23.
- 20) Heelas, 'The New Age in Cultural Context,' p. 104.
- 21) Chandler, Understanding the New Age, p. 28.
- 22) For such a misunderstanding see the 'soteriology' section in Colin Noble, 'Matthew Fox's Cosmic Christ - A Critical Response' in Crux, March 1991, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, pp. 21-29 (p. 25).
- 23) King, Women and Spirituality, p. 143.
- 24) Haught, 'Religious and Cosmic Homelessness,' pp. 160-61, 172, 175.
- 25) See Jacob Needleman, Lost Christianity (Garden City, New York, 1980).
- 26) Ruether, New Woman/New Earth, p. 190.
- 27) York, 'New Age in Britain,' pp 17, 21.

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