

5.

REMEMBERING CREATOR SPIRIT

GOD WHO ARRIVES

Within a Trinitarian framework the “person” of the Spirit refers primarily to God present and active in the world. Early Christian theology illustrated this by a series of natural metaphors that remain helpful in their illuminating power. If the great, unknowable mystery of God is pictured as the glowing sun, and God incarnate as a ray of that same light streaming to the earth (Christ the sunbeam), then Spirit is the point of light that actually arrives and affects the earth with warmth and energy. And it is all the one light. Again, the transcendent God is like an upwelling spring of water, and a river that flows outward from this

source, and the irrigation channel where the water meets and moistens the earth (Spirit). And it is all the one water. Yet again, the triune God is like a plant with its root, shoot, and fruit: deep, invisible root, green stem reaching into the world, and flower that opens to spread beauty and fragrance and to fructify the earth with fruit and seed (Spirit). And it is all the one living plant.⁵⁰

The point for our pondering is that speaking about the Spirit signifies the presence of the living God active in this historical world. The Spirit is God who actually arrives in every moment, God drawing near and passing by in vivifying power in the midst of historical struggle. So profoundly is this the case that whenever people speak in a generic way of “God,” of their experience of God or of God’s doing something in the world, more often than not they are referring to the Spirit, if a triune prism be introduced.

Of all the activities that theology attributes to the Spirit, the most significant is this: the Spirit is the creative origin of all life. In the words of the Nicene Creed, the Spirit is *vivificantem*, vivifier or life-giver. This designation refers to creation not just at the beginning of time but continuously: the

Spirit is the unceasing, dynamic flow of divine power that sustains the universe, bringing forth life. From this primordial religious intuition, three other insights reverberate.

First, as the continuous creative origin of life the Creator Spirit is immanent in the historical world. "Where can I go from your presence," sings the psalmist, "and from your Spirit where can I flee?" The Spirit is in the highest sky, the deepest hole, the darkest night, farther east than the sunrise, over every next horizon (Ps 139:7-12). The Spirit fills the world and is in all things. Since the Spirit is also transcendent over the world, divine indwelling circles round to embrace the whole world, which thereby dwells within the sphere of the divine. Technically this is known as panentheism, or the existence of all things in God. Distinct from classical theism which separates God and the world, and also different from pantheism which merges God and the world, panentheism holds that the universe, both matter and spirit, is encompassed by the Matrix of the living God in an encircling that generates freedom, self-transcendence, and the future, all in the context of the interconnected whole. The relationship created by this mutual indwelling, while

non-hierarchical and reciprocal, is not strictly symmetrical, for the world is dependent on God in a way that God is not on the world. Yet the Spirit's encircling indwelling weaves a genuine solidarity among all creatures and between God and the world.

Second, when things get broken, which can happen so easily, this divine creative power assumes the shape of a rejuvenating energy that renews the face of the earth (Ps 104:30). The damaged earth, violent and unjust social structures, the lonely and broken heart—all cry out for a fresh start. In the midst of this suffering the Creator Spirit, through the mediation of created powers, comes, as the Pentecost sequence sings, to wash what is unclean; to pour water upon what is drought-stricken; to heal what is hurt; to loosen up what is rigid; to warm what is freezing; to straighten out what is crooked and bent.⁹¹ When Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue, he highlights this point with explicit examples. The Spirit who was upon him had sent him to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, sight to the blind, and liberty to the oppressed (Lk 4:16-20). The resurrection of Jesus from the dead into the new life of glory is but the

most surprising revelation of this characteristic of the Creator Spirit. Precisely as the giver of life the creative Spirit cherishes what has been made and renews it in myriad ways.

Third, the continuous changing of historical life reveals that the Spirit *moves*. From the beginning of the cosmos, when the Spirit moves over the waters (Gen 1:2), to the end, when God will make all things new (Rev 21:5), standing still is an unknown stance. The long and unfinished development known as evolution testifies to just how much novelty, just how much surprise, the universe is capable of spawning out of pre-given order or chaos. In every instance the living Spirit empowers, lures, prods, dances on ahead. Throughout the process, the Spirit characteristically sets up bonds of kinship among all creatures, human and non-human alike, all of whom are energized by this one Source. A Christian liturgical greeting expresses this very beautifully: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Fellowship, community, *koinonia* is the primordial design of existence, as all creatures are connected through the indwelling, renewing, moving Creator Spirit.

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The fundamental insight that the Spirit is the giver of life with its three corollaries of the Spirit's renewing, indwelling, and moving power cry out for concrete, imaginative expression. How shall we speak of Creator Spirit? If we search the scriptures with our major thesis in mind, we find a small collection of cosmic and female symbols of the Spirit, most of which are marginalized by a patriarchal imagination. Remembering these texts can give us the beginnings of a vocabulary for an ecological ethic and spirituality.

COSMIC SYMBOLS

Among the elements of the natural world that biblical writers deem to have an affinity with the Spirit, the most important are wind, fire, and water.³² In Hebrew the word for spirit, *ruah*, means moving air or wind. The term encompasses all the movements of wind, from the small, gentle breeze caressing our cheek to the mighty storm gale that reshapes the landscape. The Spirit is like this invisible, natural force, a power that declares itself in the movement of the wind. Jesus spoke of this symbol in a beautifully allusive way: the wind blows

where it chooses; you hear the sound of it, but you do not see where it comes from nor where it is going. But you know it is passing by when you see its effects. So it is with the Spirit of God (Jn 3:8).

The Spirit can be likened to the wind and can be discerned as actively present in dramatic, wind-blown events. Think of the strong wind that blows back the Reed Sea so the escaping slaves can run free (Ex 14:21); and of the wind that blows through the valley of the dry bones, breathing life into the vast multitude (Ez 37:1-14); and of the mighty Pentecost wind that shakes the house where Jesus' disciples, women and men alike, are praying, impelling them to public witness of the good news (Acts 1:13-14; 2:1-4). But the blowing Spirit can also be discerned in mundane events, none the less wondrous for being so regular. The warm breezes of spring melt the winter ice, producing flowing waters that green the earth (Ps 147:18).

Wind is connected with wings. The symbol of the bird and her wings signified female deity in ancient Near East religions. In Greek mythology, as Ann Belford Ulanov points out, the dove is the emblem of Aphrodite, goddess of love. Doves were even cultically protected, with towers erected for

them and a steady supply of food provided. The figure of the dove in the gospels and in Christian art thus links the Holy Spirit with the broad pre-Christian tradition of divine female power: “Iconographically the dove is a messenger of the goddess and of the Holy Spirit.”³³ Whether hovering like a nesting mother bird over the egg of primordial chaos in the beginning (Gen 1:2); or sheltering those in difficulty under the protective shadow of her wings (Pss 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 91:1,4; Is 31:5); or bearing the enslaved up on her great wings toward freedom (Ex 19:4; Deut 32:11-12); or resting on Jesus to grace and mission him during his baptism (Lk 3:22), the Spirit’s activity is evoked with allusion to femaleness.

Ruah, finally, is linked with the breath in the throats of both animals and people. Its presence gives life (Gen 2:7; 7:15); its withdrawal means death (Ps 104:29-30). It makes words, especially prophetic ones (Zech 7:12). Here the primary analogue for Creator Spirit is the distinctive vitality, creativity, and mystery of the human spirit itself.

Drawn by the evocative power of the wind, Meinrad Craighead, artist and religious thinker, muses that “Perhaps it is the wind’s infinity which

excites that vertiginous desire for edgelessness. It is a longing to be inside the rhythm and duration of the Spirit's inhalation and exhalation, prolonged into the void, east of the sun and west of the moon."³⁴ Likening this symbol of Creator Spirit to the Native American indwelling spirit named Old Wind Woman, she continues:

The dark wind of my Mother expands and contracts, winding to and from the hub of the spinning wheel, which is everywhere. She spirals, uncoiling and recoiling, leaving and returning to her source; her spirit evolving, involving the entire universe. ³⁵

Signifying the Spirit of God with the symbol of wind already begins to transcend the hard dualism of spirit and matter played out in divine unrelatedness to the world. The whole community of creation is sustained by the breath, the Spirit of God, who "rides on the wings of the wind" (Ps 104:3) in profound, if free, connection.

Fire is another cosmic symbol of the Spirit. There is no definite shape to fire, and its ever-changing form signifies something that is unto itself, mysterious. It is a dangerous element that

sears if you touch it and that can easily escape human control. At the same time, the light and heat that emanate from fire are indispensable to human well-being. It points to the greater fires in the universe, the glowing sun and stars, and the fierce lightning storms. All are powerful biblical symbols of the presence of God. A bush burns but is not consumed as Moses hears the compassionate message of deliverance from slavery (Ex 3:1-12). Tongues of fire, streams of ardent heat, are seen above the heads of the women and men who will bring the good news of the risen Christ to the whole world (Acts 2:1-3). To borrow the analogy of a fourth century theologian, if fire passing through a mass of iron makes the whole of it glow, so that what was cold becomes burning and what was black is made bright, so too does the power of the Spirit transform hearts and minds, and indeed the clay of creation itself.³⁶ Perhaps no one has captured the evocative power of this symbol better than Hildegard of Bingen when she writes of the Spirit:

I, the highest and fiery power, have kindled every living spark and I have breathed out nothing that can die.... I flame above the beauty of the fields; I shine in the waters; in

the sun, the moon and the stars, I burn. And by means of the airy wind, I stir everything into quickness with a certain invisible life which sustains all.... I, the fiery power, lie hidden in these things and they blaze from me.³⁷

Contemporary scientific theory about the origin of the universe in a primeval explosion, inelegantly named the Big Bang, releases yet another layer of meaning from this symbol. The act of creation is already a Pentecost, a first and permanent outpouring of the fiery Spirit of life.

Water is elemental, absolutely essential for life as we know it, although like fire it too can kill. On this planet life began in the primeval seas, and human and other mammalian life continues to originate in the water of the womb. Sap in the tree, dew on the grass, blood in the veins, wine in the vessel, rain on the earth, water outpoured: all bespeak the active presence of God. As a symbol of the Spirit, water points to the bottomless wellspring of the source of life and to the refreshment and gladness that result from deep immersion in this mystery.

Scripture is replete with instances where water symbolizes the Spirit of life. Speaking through the prophet Ezekiel, God promises that the people will find their true heart: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you... and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ez 36:25-26). In Isaiah’s vision, justice and peace in the human world and the natural world are the gifts that result when the Spirit, like a cascade of water from a vessel, is poured out (Is 32:15-18). For Joel, sons and daughters will prophesy and even the old will dream again when drenched with this Spirit poured out on all flesh (Jl 2:28-29). This same Spirit is the living water Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman, a spring of love welling up at the core of creation (Jn 4:7-15). As Paul points out to the Romans, God overflows in the depth of the divine being and from there “the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us” (Rom 5:5).

The poetry of water and the Spirit enticed some early Christian theologians to flights of rhetoric. The second century bishop Irenaeus, for example, describing the life of his community,

wrote:

Just as dry wheat cannot be shaped into a cohesive lump of dough or a loaf held together without moisture, so in the same way we many could not become one... without the water that comes from heaven. As dry earth bears no fruit unless it receives moisture, so we also were originally dry wood and could never have borne the fruit of life without the rain freely given from above.... [we] have received it through the Spirit.³⁸

With an eye on the natural world Cyril of Jerusalem observed:

Why did he [Christ] call the grace of the Spirit water? Because by water all things subsist; because water brings forth grass and living things; because the water of the showers comes down from heaven; because it comes down in one form but works in many forms...it becomes white in the lily, red in the rose, purple in violets and hyacinths, different and varied in each species.

It is one thing in the palm tree, yet another in the vine, and yet all in all things.³⁹

To sum up: the Spirit is life that gives life. She is radiant life energy that like wind, fire, and water awakens and enlivens all things. Each of these symbols has a numinous quality that evokes better than abstract words the presence of the Creator Spirit in the world, moving over the void, breathing into the chaos, pouring out, informing, quickening, warming, setting free, blessing, dancing in mutual immanence with the world.

In the course of her visionary work on Christian doctrine Hildegard spun out variations on these images that bring home the Spirit's vivifying movement in a lustrous way. The Spirit, she writes, is the life of the life of all creatures; the way in which everything is penetrated with connectedness and relatedness; a burning fire who sparks, ignites, inflames, kindles hearts; a guide in the fog; a balm for wounds; a shining serenity; an overflowing fountain that spreads to all sides. The Spirit is life, movement, color, radiance, restorative stillness in the din. She pours the juice of contrition into hardened hearts. Her power makes

dry twigs and withered souls green again with the juice of life. She purifies, absolves, strengthens, heals, gathers the perplexed, seeks the lost. She plays music in the soul, being herself the melody of praise and joy. She awakens mighty hope, blowing everywhere the winds of renewal in creation.⁴⁰ Hildegard's rhetoric puts me in mind of the encouragement offered in the fourth century by Basil of Caesarea in his great work on the Spirit. Let us not be afraid of being too extravagant in what we say about the Holy Spirit, he writes; our thoughts will always fall short.⁴¹

FEMALE SYMBOLS

It is an interesting point, and one of the saving graces of the religious patriarchal tradition, that in addition to the natural world women's reality is also thought suitable to image the Spirit. The most extended biblical instance of female imagery of the Spirit occurs in the wisdom literature where the Spirit's functions are depicted as acts of Woman Wisdom. The female figure of Wisdom is the most acutely developed

personification of God's presence and activity in the Hebrew scriptures. Not only is the grammatical gender of the word for wisdom feminine (*hokmah* in Hebrew, *sophia* in Greek), but the biblical portrait of Wisdom is consistently female, casting her as sister, mother, female beloved, chef and hostess, teacher, preacher, maker of justice, and a host of other women's roles. In every instance Wisdom symbolizes transcendent power pervading and ordering the world, both nature and human beings, interacting with them all to lure them onto the path of life.⁴²

Early in the book of Wisdom this female figure is identified with spirit, a people-loving spirit: "Wisdom is a kindly spirit" (1:6). In a subsequent passage the metaphor shifts slightly to say that Wisdom has a spirit. Her spirit is then described in glorious vocabulary with twenty-one attributes, or three times the perfect number seven. She is:

intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from

anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all other intelligent spirits (7:22-23).

Poetic parallelism clinches the Wisdom-Spirit equivalence: “Who has learned thy counsel, unless you have given Wisdom, and sent your Holy Spirit from on high?” (Wis 9:17). These and other allusive wisdom texts point to the fittingness of speaking about the Spirit in female imagery, given Sophia’s undoubted female symbolization.

Understanding this equivalence, we read the wisdom texts and find magnificent renderings of creation and redemption themes in female symbols. As the Nicene Creed would later say of the Spirit, these texts say of Wisdom that she is the giver of life, she is a tree of life, “she is your life” (Prov 4:13). So intimately is the divine blessing of life associated with her that she can proclaim “whoever finds me finds life” (Prov 8:35). All life is a gift and Woman Wisdom, a personification of the Creator Spirit, gives that gift. She is the “fashioner of all things” (Wis 7:22), responsible for their existence and therefore knowing their inmost secrets. She knows the solstices and changes of the seasons, the constellations of the stars, the natures of animals

and the tempers of wild beasts, the variety of plants and the virtues of roots, and the ways of human reasoning (Wis 7:17-22). This passage from the book of Wisdom contains a poignant aside. Solomon, while rejoicing to learn about these things from Wisdom, admits “but I did not know that she was their mother” (Wis 7:12).

It is not just individual creatures who are the subject of Spirit-Sophia’s life-giving knowledge, but the world as a whole is shaped harmoniously by her guidance: “She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well” (Wis 8:1). This ordering is a righteous one, inimical to exploitation and oppression. Sophia hates the ways of arrogance and evil but works to establish just governance on the earth: “By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just” (Prov 8:15). Indeed, the echoes of the prophetic promise of shalom sound in her self-description: “I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice” (Prov 8:20).

Spirit-Sophia’s presence fills the world: “For Wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things” (Wis 7:24). This is the same divine presence

spoken about in the Jewish rabbinic tradition of the *shekinah*, the female symbol of God's indwelling, the weighty radiance that flashes out in unexpected ways in the midst of the broken world. Most significant is her work of accompaniment, for "Wherever the righteous go, the Shekinah goes with them."⁴³ No place is too hostile. She accompanies the people through the post-slavery wilderness, and hundreds of years later into exile again, through all the byways of rough times. "Come and see how beloved are the Israelites before God, for withersoever they journeyed in their captivity the Shekinah journeyed with them."⁴⁴ In other words, God's indwelling Spirit was with them and this accompaniment gave rise to hope in their suffering.

Virtually every aspect of the Creator Spirit's activity in the world, as delineated in doctrine and theology, is depicted in the wisdom literature in female symbolism. When things become damaged, the power to refresh them pours out from her: "while remaining in herself, she renews all things" (Wis 7:27). This renewing energy profoundly affects human beings in their relation to divine mystery and the rest of the world, weaving them round with a web of kinship: "in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends

of God, and prophets” (Wis 7:27). One aspect of Wisdom has not been seriously appropriated by Christian doctrine of the Spirit, but its time may be coming. The great creation poem of Proverbs shows us creative Wisdom actually playing in the newly minted world, delighting in it all, especially in those intelligent creatures called human (8:22-31).

In addition to the texts about Wisdom, biblical books hold a constellation of maternal images that delineate the Spirit’s work in the world. Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, for example, carries a clear presentation of God the Spirit as mother. A person must be born anew in order to enter the reign of God, Jesus insists, to which Nicodemus queries, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” (Jn 3:4). Jesus’ reply keeps the metaphor of physical birth and amplifies it to speak of Spirit: “No one can enter the reign of God without being born of water and the Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (3:5-6). Creator Spirit is here likened to a woman giving birth to offspring who are henceforth truly identified as “born of God.”⁴⁵

Other fragments of women's experience of mothering also provide biblical writers symbolic material for Creator Spirit. Like a woman with her knitting needles she knits together the new life in a mother's womb (Ps 139:13); like a woman in childbirth she labors and pants to bring about the birth of justice (Is 42:14); like a midwife she works deftly with a woman in pain to deliver the new creation (Ps 22:9-10); like a washerwoman she scrubs away at bloody stains till the people be like new (Is 4:4; Ps 51:7).

The early Christian centuries carried forward explicit use of female imagery to characterize God's Spirit. In Syriac Christianity, for example, the Spirit's image was consistently that of the brooding or hovering mother bird tending to her chicks. This symbolism of the motherhood of the Spirit fostered a spirituality characterized by warmth which expressed itself in private and public prayer. In one prayer the believer meditates:

As the wings of doves over their nestlings,
And the mouths of their nestlings toward their
mouths,
So also are the wings of the Spirit over my
heart.⁴⁶

In another prayer spoken in the context of liturgy the community implores the Spirit:

The world considers you a merciful mother.
Bring with you calm and peace, and spread
your wings over our sinful times.⁴⁷

In time most of this maternal imagery migrated away from the Spirit and accrued to the church, called Holy Mother the Church, or to Mary the mother of Jesus, venerated as mother of the faithful as well. The symbol of the maternity of the Spirit was virtually forgotten, along with the capacity of images of Wisdom and Shekinah to evoke divine presence and activity in female form. But this resonance abides in the texts of scripture and tradition, and can be retrieved.

Looked at against the background of hierarchical dualism, female and cosmic symbols of the Creator Spirit and the insights to which they give rise have unique potential to heal divided consciousness. The One who blows the wild wind of life, who fires the blaze of being, who gives birth to the world, or who midwifes it into existence does not stand over against it or rule it hierarchically

from afar but dwells in intimate, quickening relationship with humanity and the life of the earth. The female symbols in particular dramatize that being women and being fertile is not a dangerous, polluted state but a participation in the fecundity of the Creator Spirit and, conversely, a sign of her presence. Enfolding and unfolding the universe, the Spirit is holy mystery “over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:6). Remembering Creator Spirit this way dismantles the theological dualism that sets God apart from the universe, thus removing one of the pillars of support for dualism within the human community and between human beings and the earth. We are all woven into the fabric of the one cosmic community. Indeed, God is not far from any one of us, for in her we live and move and have our being, as some of our poets now say (cf. Acts 17:28).

DIVINE RELATION TO THE WORLD

Using cosmic and female images for the Spirit’s presence and action in the world enables our minds to attend to the pattern of divine

relation to the world in ways that are ecologically helpful. The Spirit is the great, creative Matrix who grounds and sustains the cosmos and attracts it toward the future. Throughout the vast sweep of cosmic and biological evolution she embraces the material root of existence and its endless new potential, empowering the cosmic process from within. The universe, in turn, is self-organizing and self-transcending, corresponding from the spiraling galaxies to the double helix of the DNA molecule to the dance of her quickening power. The Spirit's action does not supplant that of creatures but works cooperatively in and through created action, random, ordered, or free. Nor does the Spirit's dynamic power arrive as an intervention from "outside," but is immanent in the world that is becoming. In keeping with this view, the scientist and religious thinker Arthur Peacocke suggests that a fitting image for the Creator Spirit would be that of a choreographer of an unfinished dance, ingeniously improvising steps for a piece that requires the creativity of the dancers to complete.¹⁶ The relation is not one of dominating or commanding power over, but one of reverent, empowering love.

This does not exclude the enormous amounts

of violence, entropy, and suffering that exist throughout the cosmos. Stars are born and die, species appear and disappear due to natural catastrophe, individuals know debilitating pain. We may well wonder how Love could be empowering such a messy and at times tragic arrangement, made more so by the advent of conscious human beings with our historical propensity to sin, to hurt others. I have thought about this all my life, and have read what many wise minds have said, and the bottom line is that nobody knows. What can be ventured is that it has something to do with the nature of love. Love grants autonomy to the beloved and respects this, all the while participating in the joy and pain of the other's destiny. It vigorously cares and works for and urges the beloved toward his or her own well-being, but never forces.

In an open-ended, evolutionary universe death often becomes the matrix for the birth of the new: earth from an exploding star, mushrooms from a rotting tree trunk, a new community from the cross of Jesus. At other times there is no obvious productive outcome, simply the disastrous surd of evil. In either case, the Love who is the Creator Spirit participates in the world's destiny. She can be

grieved (Eph 4:30); she can even be quenched (1 Thes 5:19). When creation groans in labor pains and we do too (Rom 8:22-23), the Spirit is in the groaning and in the midwifing that breathes rhythmically along and cooperates in the birth. In other words, in the midst of the agony and delight of the world the Creator Spirit has the character of compassion. In multifaceted relationships she resists, reconciles, accompanies, sympathizes, liberates, comforts, plays, delights, befriends, strengthens, suffers with, vivifies, renews, endures, challenges, participates, all the while moving the world toward its destiny. Moved by this Spirit, human beings are similarly configured to compassion, taught to be co-creators who enter the lists on behalf of those who suffer, to resist and creatively transform the powers that destroy.

A theology of the Creator Spirit overcomes the dualism of spirit and matter with all of its ramifications, and leads to the realization of the sacredness of the earth. The Spirit of God dwelling in the world with quickening power deconstructs dualism and draws in its place a circle of mutuality and inclusiveness. Instead of matter being divorced from spirit and consigned to a realm separate from the holy, it is an intrinsic part of the cosmic

community, vivified, indwelt, and renewed by the Creator Spirit. The Spirit creates matter. Matter bears the mark of the sacred and has itself a spiritual radiance. Hence the world is holy, nature is holy, bodies are holy, women's bodies are holy. For the Spirit creates what is physical—worlds, bodies, senses, sexuality, passions—and moves in these every bit as much as in minds and ideas. About the Creator Spirit this can be said: loves bodies, loves to dance. The whole complex, material universe is pervaded and signed by her graceful vigor.

6. CONVERSION TO THE CIRCLE OF EARTH

This lecture began with the image of a unique blue planet, rapidly being ravaged in our day. We criticized traditional dualistic rationality for complicity in this destruction, seeing the origin of aggression in the failure of connection. Convinced that it would be a mistake to underestimate the role patriarchy plays in shaping the present crisis, we moved on to explore how feminist, scientific, and theological wisdom combine to present an alternative paradigm of the community of creation.

Throughout, I have been reflecting with a sense of urgency. Much of the havoc already wrought is irreversible, and the destructive pace is speeding up in general, despite zones of respite due to good will and good law. If we stay the present

course, life will continue to dim on this planet and misery to multiply. Undoing the earth like this is an act of violence against the earth itself, yes, but also against future generations of all species. What, then, are we to do?

There are tough ethical and political decisions to be made, decisions about constraint of consumption, restraint of population growth, development of pollution controls, evolution of industries and trade, and the like. Undergirding all of these is a religious matter. The Creator Spirit's dynamic activity, as we have seen, issues in abundance, diversity, interrelatedness, and manifold possibilities. Human beings violate these patterns by thoughtless or willful harm to the living earth that reduces diversity, breaks up relatedness, and cuts off future possibilities. Hence the damage can begin to be healed only by conversion, meant here in the biblical sense of *metanoia*, a turning around. We must allow ourselves to be converted to the patterns established by the Spirit in the giving of life itself. What is crucial for a viable future is a religious spirit that converts us to the earth.

Our intelligence needs to be converted to the earth, as does our heart, and this involves several

turnings at once. We must change from an anthropocentric, androcentric view of the world to a biocentric, life-centered one. We must leave a dualistic model for a kinship one, seeing every creature linked to each other and to God in the dance of the universe. We must transform a culture that is spreading death to one that cherishes life. Simply put, all of us, women and men alike, need to fall in love with the earth as an inherently valuable, living community in which we participate, and be creatively faithful to it.

Warning against the delusion of the separated self, Albert Einstein emphasized, "Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."⁴⁹ Widening our circle of compassion would rejoin us to the cosmic covenant made after the biblical flood "between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth," and whose sign is the rainbow (Gen 9:8-17). Such an embrace delivers us so to kinship with all creatures that we assume our responsibility as co-partners with the Creator Spirit in seeing to it that never again shall the earth be destroyed.

Coherent with feminist and other liberation spiritualities, being converted to the earth entails the mutually fertilizing elements of contemplation and prophecy.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplation is a way of seeing that leads to communion. The fact that the world is simply there, in splendor and fragility, gives rise to wonder, leading to a religious sense of the loving power that quickens it. “The world is charged with the glory of God,” exclaims poet Gerard Manley Hopkins,⁵⁰ echoing the ancient psalmist’s praise that “The heavens are telling the glory of God” (Ps 19:1). In contemplation the human spirit learns to see the presence of the divine in nature, and so recognizes that the earth is a sacred place. For such a spirit the biblical bush still burns, and we take off our shoes.

Through contemplation the religious spirit grows in the realization of how deeply humanity is embedded in the earth. We begin to know this experientially, to feel in the depths of our being

that we are part of the living cosmos. Consequently, we recover a capacity for subjective communion with the earth. We develop what Barbara McClintock, the Nobel prizewinning biologist, calls “a deep feeling for the organism,” which is a result of recognizing that we are all kin, related through ontological participation in the community of creation. Consequently, reciprocity rather than rape marks our approach. We reach out toward the earth not just with utilitarian intent, although that is appropriate within limits, but with non-violent appreciation for its own inherent value. The naturalist Louis Agassiz epitomizes this stance with his remark, “I spent the summer travelling. I got halfway across my backyard.”⁵¹

To the contemplative spirit, the vivifying power of God flashes out from the simplest natural phenomenon, the smallest seed. “Speak to the earth and it will teach you,” Job urges his ignorant but well-meaning friends (Job 12:7). “Look at the birds of the air” and “consider the lilies of the field,” Jesus teaches his disciples, knowing that they will find there testimony to God’s care (Mt 6:25-33). Earth, in a word, is a sacrament.⁵² Pervaded and encircled by the Creator Spirit it effects by signifying the subtly active presence of the holy

giver of life. Without the knowledge of contemplation, which is akin to prayer, prophetic action on behalf of the earth will in the long run fall short of the wisdom needed for its long-term cherishing.

PROPHECY

Prophecy is a way of speaking and acting in the face of powerful, oppressive interests that leads to repentance and renewal. On the one hand there is a dangerous edge to prophecy insofar as it denounces wrongdoing and thus incurs the wrath of special interest groups that are benefiting. On the other hand prophecy's critical edge also cuts through the despair of those who are suffering, for it announces comfort and hope in the approach of God's renewing Spirit.

Shaped by contemplation of the sacredness of the living earth, the prophetic stance names new sins against God's gracious will: biocide, ecocide, geocide. Several billion years of creative toil and several million species of abounding life are now in the care of one late-coming species in which mind and morals have emerged. By what right do we

even call ourselves *Homo sapiens* if we forget the wisdom of relatedness and ignore the immense creative investment that has gone into producing the earth? Words such as sacrilege, blasphemy, desecration are not too strong to label the violation.

Prophecy uses all the techniques of active, non-violent resistance to halt aggression against the vulnerable, be it ever so humble a species or ever so vast a system such as the ozone layer. Participating in the compassion of God, the prophetic community enters into solidarity with suffering creation and exercises responsibility for a new project of ecojustice.

In the process it takes one step further the sense of interconnection between the harmony of nature and social justice typical of the biblical prophets. Social injustice and ecological degradation are inextricably fused in theory and practice. In fact, structures of social domination are chief among the ways that exploitation of the earth is accomplished. Examples: the plantation system ruins biodiversity while it creates wealth for a few from the backbreaking labor of a class of poor people. Pressure on the rain forest from slash and burn subsistence farmers results from inequitable

distribution of land to begin with. Appalachian land and water are despoiled by coal mining done for subsistence wages by communities that live amid the depleted hills and hollows, while owners' profits enable them to live miles away in beautiful natural surroundings. U.S. companies export work to factories across the Mexican border (*maquiladores*) that cheaply employ thousands of young, rural women to make high quality consumer goods while they live in unhealthy squalor in an environment spoiled with toxic waste. The environmental crisis is intertwined with a social system that allows a few to benefit by making a profit at the expense of the many in the form of low wages, bad working conditions, and poisonous side-effects.⁵⁹ Prophecy knows that remedying environmental degradation involves addressing dehumanizing poverty as part of a wholistic ethic based on interdependence rather than exploitation among human beings themselves and between human beings and the earth.

Liberation ethics in our age has come to grips with the plight of poor people, with their power as a locus of theological insight, and with the essential need to include their well-being in the vision and action of the gospel. In a similar way,

being converted to the earth requires that we extend the justice model to embrace the whole earth. For westerners emerging from a heritage of dualism this is a new ethical horizon: that we extend moral consideration to species beyond our own, and moral standing to ecological systems as a whole. Such a move, however, is a logical outcome of conversion to the community of creation. Realization of our mutual kinship with the living earth leads us to encompass nature in the command to love one's neighbor as oneself. In the eloquent words of Brian Patrick:

Who is our neighbor: the Samaritan? the outcast? the enemy? Yes, yes, of course. But it also the whale, the dolphin, and the rain forest. Our neighbor is the entire community of life, the entire universe. We must love it all as our self....⁵⁴

A flourishing humanity on a thriving earth: such is the vision that shapes the prophetic course. Since it is the earth that is being destabilized by human practice, redressing the balance requires increased focus on the integrity of natural systems and the worth of non-human creatures. Accordingly,

prophecy converted to the earth sees that making a preferential option for the poor includes other species and the ravaged natural world itself. Healing and redeeming this world, this intrinsically valuable matrix of our origin, growth, and fulfillment, has the character of a moral imperative. It urges us to act according to the criterion crafted by the naturalist Aldo Leopold: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the life community. It is wrong when it tends to do otherwise."⁵⁵ We are as large as our loves. The prophetic option for a biocentric ethic transforms us toward great-heartedness in its demand for universal compassion and cosmic praxis.

CONCLUSION

In this lecture I have sought a new vision of the Creator Spirit enfolding and unfolding a reconciled human community and a healed, living earth, to practical and critical effect. The precise point has been to overcome sexist disparagement of the female in the three basic relationships of human beings among each other, with the earth, and with God, and thereby to serve the future of life

itself.

At the heart of physical reality we find a living communion, today under threat. Being converted to the earth in its hour of suffering places us in resonant cooperation with the deepest reality of creation, the Creator Spirit. When we work with people and movements committed to cherishing the earth and opposing its plunder, we are participating in the Spirit's own political economy of life. Instead of living as thoughtless or greedy exploiters we are empowered to become sisters and brothers, friends and lovers, gardeners and stewards, advocates and poets, priests and prophets, colleagues and fellow dancers, co-creators and children of the world that gives us life. Too much has already been lost. But the narrative memory of the dead, as always, has the capacity to bring about a living future if we cooperate with the compassionate power of the Creator Spirit. As a symbol of the solidarity between east and west on this issue, I close with the prayer uttered by Korean theologian Chung Hyun-Kyung in her Canberra address on peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. "Wild wind of the Holy Spirit blow, to us. Let us welcome her, letting ourselves go in her wild rhythm of life. Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation. Amen!"⁵⁶