RELIGION AND ECOLOGY, GANDHI'S KHĀDĪ SPIRIT AND "NEO-ASCETICISM"

BY

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is the ethical and religious effect of human contact with the natural world in light of both the modern ecological crisis and Mohandas K. Gandhi's cautionary approach to technological excess. Religion's recurring focus on ascetical principles that recognize the dangers of greed and materialism is highlighted as a potent contribution to the religion and ecology debate. This ascetical focus was also crucial to Gandhi's notion of "khadi spirit" which called for complete renunciation of all habits, possessions and activities that caused unnecessary injury to other living beings. Pluralistic and historical methodologies are used to uncover common ascetical and nature-mystical roots in various world religions. The call to join forces in facing the challenge of the ecological crisis also engages the interreligious dialogue aspects of this area of inquiry. This challenge, the thesis concludes, can act as a catalyst for an intensification of interreligious cooperation, as well as a revitalization of religion's role in modern culture.

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INTRODUCTION

The focus on ecology within religious studies is fast evolving from a peripheral concern taken on as a gesture of interest in one of secular society's besetting problems, to a field unexpectedly rich in opportunities for religion's renewal as a lively partner in the dynamics of humanity's struggle to curb its potential for irreversible destruction. Like every issue that is of profound interest to the human person, ecology is among those legitimate branches of religion's analysis of values and ethics, and the attitudes by which they are formed and informed. Whether in the caution against excessive materialsim, or in the universal religious ideal of non-violence, or in the nature mystic's quest to celebrate the transparency of nature to the divine, issues of the human contact with the natural world are not new to the arena of religious studies' concerns.

Embodied in the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi, work overtly dedicated to the betterment of social conditions in the India of his time, are a similar grouping of religion's ongoing foci on the ethical, the compassionate and the self-serving ends in human economic activity in particular. And his fervent espousal of the Hindu regard for *ahiṁsā* or non-violence extends the sphere of his ongoing influence beyond the human realm to that of all living beings and the earth itself.

Gandhi was a citizen of the world who endeavoured to incorporate a universal focus in all his ideas and programs. He was also a pioneer of twentieth-century efforts at worldwide interreligious dialogue. Encouraging a universal tolerance for all major religions since they all contained truth, which Gandhi came to feel was the best description of God, he did not naively hope for some utopian and generic "world religion", but rather counselled all people to delve deeper into the wisdom that their own traditions offered. Wisdom and truth never fear the expansion of their horizons wrought by an open heart and an eager mind. Other religions are best respected and learned from, according to Gandhi's approach, by living deeply one's own faith while deliberately seeking out the beauty, truth and wisdom of other faiths -- to complete one's total religious experience.

An effective dialogue is more than a meeting of minds. It is also a meeting of hearts in which the truth and beauty of the other shines through and is embraced by the truth and beauty of the heritage that has nurtured one's own journey. Today the dialogue between religions is undergoing a new urgency as divergent traditions face together the pervasive problem of worldwide ecological crisis. This writing is offered in hopes that the bond between people, between religions, and between the human and non-human, may be matured and strengthened by this challenge.

PART ONE: RELIGION AND ECOLOGY: RECONNECTING SPIRIT AND LIFE

Introduction:

Most of the probing questions that religions have always asked about our relationship with ourselves and each other, with the divine and the world around us, are addressed in the seemingly new religion and ecology interface. The religious person's understanding of the divine leads to certain attitudes, perspectives and approaches to life. If spiritual life is authentic, it cannot be divorced from one's personal goals and values, activities in the world and relationships. Human societies that were more dependent upon and vulnerable to nature's vicissitudes automatically incorporated awe and reverence for nature in the religious beliefs and rituals that governed their day-to-day affairs. As humanity's intellectual capabilities flourished, the ethical treatises of most religions included questions of how human activity in the world could best reflect, and not detract from, one's religious beliefs. The "new" concern to have religion address ecological issues is actually a simple continuation of this ongoing religious/ethical task of connecting life with spirit, so that our God-informed conscience can operate to suggest responsible approaches to the powers and choices that modern technology has proffered.

Whether or not the human consciousness experiences itself as interconnected with the rest of reality is crucial to its attitudes and values towards other living things and nature as a whole. Even if human depency on nature is recognized, it remains anthropocentric if humans are seen as the center and culmination of nature's *raison d'être*. The scientific revelations of humanity's small role in, or even threat to, the continuation of life on this planet call for a more biocentric view which addresses God with the cry of the Hebrew psalmist who exclaimed:

> I look up at your heavens, made by your fingers,
> at the moon and stars you set in place --
> ah, what is man that you should spare a thought for
> him, the son of man that you should care for him?
> (Ps 8:3-4)

The rest of the psalm, however, in glorifiying God for setting all things, including the animals, under humanity's feet reflects a role religion has often played -- the role of aiding and abetting humanity's sad tendency to trample underfoot whatever lay in its path. This rather schizophrenic view is typical of religion's complicity in the causes of the ecological crisis of our times. However, as the quoted verses here indicate, religion also contains values and worldviews that move towards a more biocentric and respectful view of the created universe.

Religions have always been in the business of informing values and worldviews; and as Henryk Skolimowski notes, much depends on these attitudes which underly human activity in the world:

> We need to create world-views which will sustain and nourish the whole human family along with other creatures of the globe and also be beneficial to the integrity of the earth, sustaining its richness and beauty. Such a world-view must recognise our spiritual nature and our inherent quest for meaning. It must also recognize the idea of justice for all and must include a principle of non-harming (*ahiṁsā*) as the fundamental mode of our interaction with all the beings of this world. (1989, 157)

There has probably been no greater exponent of such a worldview in the twentieth-century than Mahatma Gandhi. His insistence on *ahiṁsā* as the means for economic and political change, his concern for "justice for all" including every living creature, and his continual quest for spiritual integrity in all his work -- bear witness to the kind of worldview that Skolimowski portrays as the ideal for an ecologically healthy future. Part two of this work will discuss more extensively the possible role of Gandhi as model for religion and ecology. But first, a broader perspective of the question needs to be addressed.

Lynn White Jr.'s well-known 1967 essay on "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" called Western Christianity and its Hebrew progenitor "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" because of its engendering of the modern technological approach to nature as simply a resource for human consumption. Christianity, White claimed, usually operated from the basic premise of a dualism between humanity and nature, in which only the former participated in divinity, thus rendering the exploitation of the latter as an amoral issue to be carried out with impunity. However this view has since been widely challenged. As Robin Attfield put it: "the biblical position, which makes people responsible to God for the uses to which the natural environment is put, has never been entirely lost to view." Recent books with titles like Dominion as Stewardship by Douglas John Hall have further attested to this fact. Many writers are resurrecting centuries-old sources, thinkers from a broad range of religious traditions, to show that a respectful attitude that recognizes the immanence of the divine within nature is not new, although it has decidedly suffered through periods of relative obscurity.

Although White noted that there were some exceptions to this environmentally destructive attitude wthin Western Christianity (especially Francis of Assisi), he nonetheless observed that both ancient paganism and most of Asia's

religions had generally adopted a comparatively more respectful attitude to nature as an aspect or manifestation of the divine. Since then, much religion and ecology writing has juxtaposed the Eastern and Western religious perspectives towards nature, most often on a competitive basis, but the more productive and reconciliatory spirit encouraged by interreligious dialogue is suggestive of the potential of each to learn from the other. Learning more about other religions and cultures allows the possibility of new insights into the previously obscured potential of one's own religion to respond as a living entity to the ecological crisis.

CHAPTER ONE: EAST AND WEST IN THE RELIGION-ECOLOGY DEBATE

The basic difference that is usually discussed under the East-West rubric of ecological concern is that between the anthropocentric West, and the biocentric East. In the West, it is claimed, humans have rapaciously exploited nature for their own materialistic ends; whereas in the East, a greater respect for nature, and a traditional disdain for materialism, has led to a symbiotic interface -- a relationship between humans and the rest of nature in which the two-way benefits of each to the other are recognized. Such a generalisation is not without its foundation in truth, but often the structure that has been built on this foundation has been rather one-sided. Duane Elgin, for example, in his Voluntary Simplicity seems to indulge in a measure of oversimplification when he writes:

> ... the Western scientific view is profoundly material, and the Eastern view is profoundly spiritual. ... the Western view is dualistic (viewing mind and body as separate, as well as God and humankind as separate), the Eastern view is profoundly non-dualistic, or holistic. (225)
>
> ... where the Western view expresses its drive for growth in material progress and social change, the Eastern view expresses its drive for growth in spiritual attainment. ... the goal of life is to get

> off the wheel of an unchanging worldly existence by transcending or rising above it all. (226-7)

Such generalizations are subject to debate.[1] There are, in fact, many examples of non-dualistic and non-materialistic thinking in the history of Western thought as well and, on the other hand, the philosophical-religious systems of the East have also produced their dualistic and materialistic branches. Or perhaps more to the point, there are aspects of every living tradition that fall on one side or the other of this debate, and these "sides" often coexist. A certain complementarity has been seen as a benefit of such coexistence, with the materialists calling the spiritualists to greater social concern, and the spiritualists calling the materialists to a less cluttered life of the spirit. Even

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[1] See, for example, Lance E. Nelson's article "Reverence for Nature or the Irrelevance of Nature? Advaita Vedanta and Ecological Concern" in Journal of Dharma 16 (July-Sept., 1991), 282-301. Nelson encourages a balanced perspective:

> No doubt, Advaita represents a profound spirituality. In positive relation to the interests of ecology, it fosters values such as simplicity of life, frugality, and -- for the ascetic at least -- non-violence. But Advaita also encourages attitudes of devaluation and neglect of the natural universe. (283)

See chapter four of this work for further discussion of this issue.

to equate dualistic thinking with materialism as Elgin and others have done needs rethinking since dualists often avoid the material realm in favour of the spiritual one.

At the same time as recognizing the ambiguities present in such an oversimplification, we must pay attention to the realities that have engendered this East-West bifurcation in ecological thinking. In fact, Eastern religious and philosophical thought has most often stressed the importance of living simply and the evils of excessive materialism or consumerism. Heroes of these cultures (especially Hindu and Buddhist) were most often *rishis* and *saṁnyāsis* rather than warriors and kings as are many heroes of Western history. In spite of the reality of such a broad range of expressions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Toaism, they seem to have in common the view that a life of self-restraint is a necessity in the material realm, in order for the spiritual side of life to flourish.

Christianity in the West has also contained an ongoing element that recognizes the benefits of material or physical self-restraint for the sake of the spiritual life. The whole monastic movement in particular, which grew from the fervour of the early desert fathers and mothers and flourished especially during the Middle Ages, was popular for many centuries, a fact which, in part, attests to the ongoing human search for a life of integrity and simplicity. The life of the monasteries was seen as so holy, in fact,

that wealthy laypersons often left behind substantial bequests designed both to help carry on the admirable charitable, spiritual and intellectual activities of the monasteries, and perhaps also to cause the 'eye' of God to regard more favourably the soul of the recently departed. This unsought wealth led to grave temptations within monastic communities, especially in terms of accumulating lands, art, and other treasures. Although it is easy to be critical of this slide into power and materialism, especially in medieval European monasticism, one does well to also remember that art and culture were mainly preserved and patronized by such groups. As Theodore Roszak affirms;

> The monastic orders of the middle ages were wholly devoted to an economics of plenitude. The rule of life was simple. *Ora et labora*. A life of labor and prayer disciplined the appetites (especially sexuality) and incidentally produced a wealth of culture and invention. (1992 256)

Roszak's notion of "an economics of plenitude" will be further explored as our discussion unfolds.

On the other hand, however, in spite of its founder's admonition that one cannot serve both God and money (Mt 6:24), Christianity became outwardly triumphalistic and materialistic almost from the moment Emperor Constantine allowed it to come out of hiding and persecution in the fourth century. Since it was now the official (in fact,

compulsory) religion of the empire, it took on imperialistic trappings still highly visible today in some quarters. Although various movements and individuals (e.g., the Waldensians, Francis of Assisi, Erasmus of Rotterdam, the Anabaptists, the Puritans and others) attempted to counteract this trend, the appeal of power for the human psyche is never easily overthrown. As Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor explained to his unwelcome guest, the simplicity of Christianity's beginnings had apparently been outgrown, and there was no turning back.

Modern Christians with an ecological bent are nonetheless engaged, to some extent, in an *ad fontes* search for the humbler, anti-materialistic roots of Christian asceticism (more on this in Part Three). Still, such a notion is considered mainly an element of monastic history and such a focus is more often viewed as reactionary rather than evolutionary. Writing on "World Religions and the Ecological Crisis" in 1973 Klaus Klostermaier noted:

> The Christian churches have today more religious experts to solve the physical and theological problems of the thirteenth-century (and perhaps of the nineteenth-century) than they have people able to cope with the twentieth-century social or ecological problems from a genuinely Christian perspective. Some representatives of oriental religions have been rather aggressively capitalizing on the evident failures of

> Western religion. They speak as if Western man could do no better than to throw overboard the remnants of his tradition and accept the Eastern way of life. ... Others, more critical, have responded with a counter-attack, laying bare the equally evident shortcomings of Oriental religions especially in the area of social responsibility. (139-40)

This last statement suggests the further caution that all religious systems, in order to be adequately assessed, must be viewed both in theory and in practice. It is easy for Westerners to read beautiful Hindu, Buddhist or other scriptures and assume that the gentleness, egalitarianism and reverence for all living things that is articulated therein is a reality in the countries where these religions are predominant. A visit to such places often reveals, however, that the adherents of such faiths are just as susceptible to convenient and self-serving misinterpretations of their scriptures as are many adherents of, for instance, the Sermon on the Mount.

On the other hand, a growing number of Christian writers are rediscovering the legitimate heritage of nature mysticism (see ch. 3), the largely overlooked Christian tradition of reverence for creation as a manifestation of the divine. This strain within Christianity has the potential for dislodging "the old anthropocentric rut of individual salvation, justification and atonement" (Bradley

10). Like the "living churches" that were not marked on the map of Leningrad that E.F. Schumacher was using in 1968 to find his way around (Guide 9), a Christian theological map of reality that omits ecological concern will not be trusted by people who experience themselves as living in a shared, fragile and threatened cosmos.

In the major Eastern religions, a number of important scriptures contain passages that advocate a life of austerity and renunciation in the physical realm for the sake of a higher good. Gandhi found, as shall be discussed in part two of this work, that his personal life had to take on the elements of austerity and renunciation in order to seek the higher good of a life of freedom and service. To find joy, or even liberation in consuming less and in avoiding materialism is not just the latest ecological craze, it is the heartbeat of so much of Buddhism and Hinduism and the primary way to *mokṣa* or liberation. Here are some representative examples from a few sacred texts:

> Dhammapada 6:89: For he whose mind is well-trained in the ways that lead to light, who surrenders the bondage of attachments and finds joy in his freedom from bondage ... even in this mortal life he enjoys the immortal Nirvana.
>
> Vivekacūḍāmaṇi 82: If indeed thou hast a craving for liberation, shun sense-objects from a good distance as thou wouldst do poison, and always cultivate carefully

the nectar-like virtues of contentment, compassion, forgiveness, straight-forwardness, calmness, self-control.

Bhagavad Gītā 7:8,9,11 [Krishna speaking]: I am the taste of living waters and the light of the sun and the moon ... I am the pure fragrance that comes from the earth and the brightness of fire I am. I am the life of all living beings, and the austere life of those who train their souls. ... I am the power of those who are strong, when this power is free from passions and selfish desires. I am desire when this is pure, when this desire is not against righteousness.

Buddhism, in particular, is known for its understanding of the interconnectedness of everything in the universe, the Zen Buddhist image of Indra's Net being its most popular expression. It is out of this awareness that Buddhist compassion for all suffering beings (which is all beings) is born. The Boddhisattva, who is the Buddhist ideal person, has lived so purely and well that he or she is on the brink of entering Nirvana, but then refrains from entering this blessed state, turning back instead to assist others to find the way. Francis H. Cook, in his book Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra, cites the image of Indra's net as "the favorite Hua-Yen [Zen] method of exemplifying the manner in which things exist" (2). There is a glittering jewel in each eye of the net which reflects the whole rest of the

net. Every jewel reflects all the others "so that there is an infinite reflecting process going on." This image, Cook goes on to explain, "symbolizes a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the members of the cosmos." This has karmic implications about all our actions: "...the whole web is shaken when one strand is touched ... Who truly knows the outer limits of the radiating karma of one man?" (117) Therefore we must sharpen our awareness of all possible implications of our thoughts, words and deeds. Cook explains this Buddhist 'right awareness' and the gratitude and respect for nature or the world, to which it leads:

> ... in a world in which I must destroy and consume in order to continue to exist, I must use what is necessary with gratitude and respect. Part of this is a frugality born of this respect and gratitude, for to waste, out of greed or carelessness, is the rankest sort of ingratitude. It nullifies the thing we depend on, murders it, and in so doing we murder ourselves and others. The attitude of respect and gratitude towards all things, which I would consider part of ethics, is extremely important in Buddhism. (119)

To not waste or be careless or greedy, and to use only what is necessary with gratitude and respect -- this is precisely what modern ecological concern demands of our treatment of the world around us.

Elegant Frugality

In introducing the notion of frugality as a natural and wholesome outcome of such gratitude and respect, Cook resonates with Henryk Skolimowski, the modern Western philosopher who called for a new lifestyle of "elegant frugality" in the preface to his 1981 book called Eco-Philosophy. To most moderns, the words "elegant" and "frugality" are almost contradictory. Skolimowski's approach is thus a provocative one; and his historical methodology provides a concise summary of the Western philosophical developments that have led to our current state of ecological crisis.

He feels that the West has been so zealous in its pursuit of knowledge that the time-honored relationship of knowledge and values has been eroded. And that this has ultimately brought a "value-vacuum to our society, to our universities [and] to our individual lives" (3-4). He traces this value-vacuum back at least to the seventeenth-century and cites the philosophies of Bacon, Descartes, Galileo, Newton, Hobbes, Locke, Hume and others as "remolding the world, or rather our picture of it, to make it independent of religion"(4). Without having to answer to religion, science and philosophy began to operate with the dizzying independence of supposed "objectivity," that is, without values. And then, continues Skolimowski:

> The eighteenth century ... enlightenment ... paved the way to vulgar materialism, shallow positivism and the annihilation of values in the nineteenth century ... [which] marks the triumph of science and technology and an unprecedented expansion of the scientific world view. The aggressive assertion of positivism and materialism ... and of scientific rationality and technological efficiency; of the age of industrialization, which, alas, turned out to be the age of environmental devastation, all pointed to a brave new world in which traditional (intrinsic) values were consigned to limbo. (8)

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, according to Skolimowski, modern men and women were divided into halves. Empirical analysis became the predominant intellectual operation. Knowledge came to be seen in the West as separate from human essence and from transcendental concerns (13). And this sense of the separateness of things in the universe is the primary cause, Skolimowski feels, of the contemporary alienation that has led to the ecological crisis (14). It is the opposite of the message of Indra's net, not vast interconnectedness, but rather vast disconnectedness.

In calling for a reappraisal of this view that has led to such devastation, Skolimowski calls us to go beyond the basically self-centered ethos of sustainable development

(which he does not mention by name but implies) that calls for a cautionary approach to nature in order to preserve resources that might otherwise no longer be available for human consumption in the future. Being ecologically conscious, he writes, "also entails reverence for nature and a realization that we are an extension of nature and nature an extension of us" (39). This, of course, is the essential difference between an anthropocentric worldview which sees human wants and needs as the axis round which environmental work should be conducted, and a biocentric worldview which sees nature as having its own inherent right to existence apart from its usefulness to humans. Although Skolimowski is a thinker from the West, he refers to Eastern thought throughout his work and has lectured in India. He is critical of the former view as the pervasively Western one, which is an increasingly popular position among today's ecological writers around the globe.

Skolimowski is also careful to distinguish between what is commonly taken as the Western "scientific" worldview and the much more enlightened view of actual modern science:

> The conception of the universe as a factory is behind ... the ideology of consumerism. But curiously enough, this conception is much less prevalent ... at the frontiers of science today. ... sub-atomic physics, quantum theory, and the recognition that, in the last analysis, observer and observed merge ... modern

> science does not lend much support to what is popularly called the scientific-technological world view. (71)

This insight from quantum physics that ultimately "observer and observed merge" is crucial to the most recent ecological thinking which is critical of the notion of sustainable development and even of the use of the word 'environment'. If humans can grasp fully the reality that we are an intrinsic part of nature, that nature does not "environ" us who are at the center of its reason for existence, then our perspective on nature will be radically altered. Reassessing the common human belief that it is possible to observe nature objectively calls also for a self-image update on the part of a humanity re-educated to see itself as an intrinsic part of the nature it had previously thought was "out there". Recognition of the merging of observer and observed implies a radical transformation of the collective human consciousness.

Like 'environment' other buzzwords in ecological thinking are viewed in some quarters as problematic due to their anthropocentric perspective. The focus on stewardship, for example, was such an improvement over the earlier biblical understanding of humans having "dominion" over nature; but alas, "stewardship" also implies that humans are in charge of administering nature which otherwise could not possibly run smoothly. In the same way the notion of "sustainable development" has been criticized for its

concern to preserve the earth's resources so that future human generations might not be deprived of them. The trend towards treating nature with greater regard, for its own inherent worth, is gradually gaining ground over those formative and still important approaches.

Using terminology that is reminiscent of Martin Buber's I-Thou, I-It distinction, Skolimowski notes:

> There is a significant difference ... between the two propositions: 'We have to take care of the ecological habitat because it feeds us,' on the one hand, and on the other, 'We have to take care of the ecological habitat because it is a part of us and we are a part of it.' In the former case 'we' and 'it' are one, and this is a necessity of a symbiotic and holistic attitude. (83)

Buber's well-known (1920's) I-Thou appellation for relationships between equals is what is being recommended for our relationship with nature. The attitude of respect and gratitude for nature, and the habit of frugality as opposed to prodigal waste that Skolimowski recommends, helps reveal the lost truth that we are very much a part of nature rather than its master. He writes that we must "adopt the idiom of frugality which is a precondition of inner beauty" if we are to fulfill our human potential and transcend our present condition (87). No doubt the dictum of "simple

living and high thinking" is implied in his emphasis on "elegant frugality."

Skolimowski also explores this concept's applicability to architectural design. In designing spaces in which people live, the architect automatically is designing human habitats which either enhance or dissuade lifestyles of ecological soundness. Unfortunately though, the architect is most often constrained in his or her designs by the demands of the paying patron. Skolimowski laments the "anti-life environments" that are commissioned by the "industrial sharks who destroy our ecological habitats for profit" (100). Apologizing for any implied elitism, he also criticizes the notion that public places should be designed according to the ideas of the average person on the street:

> Only when people transcend their obsession with material acquisitiveness -- which is one of the chief causes of environmental destruction and of our inner emptiness -- will it be time for the architect to relinquish his role as the designer of complete environments. ... For the egalitarian ethos (or the anti-elitist stance) too often tends to be standard, undistinguished, careless and morbid, thus ultimately leading to anti-quality spaces. (101)

Just as we do not direct the surgeon in operating on us, we should also respect the architect's greater knowledge of what constitutes a quality environment. The quality-of-life

criterion is, according to Skolimowski, the architectural formulation of the ecological imperative, and this imperative:

> ...implies frugality and durability in the things we produce (the throw-away society is the arch-enemy of quality) ... quality-of-life environments are not a luxury but a necessity. (104)

This throw-away society, then, is not only the "arch-enemy" of a healthy ecosystem, but of the quality of human living. The ultimate meaning of Skolimowski's "elegant frugality" is not frugality as a painful duty but as an awareness that life's beauty will shine and thrive the more it is left uncluttered and unsuffocated by the trappings of excessive consumerism.

Greed and Wellbeing

The "acquisitive instincts" (101) of this "throw-away society" which Skolimowski claims are the "chief causes of environmental destruction and of our inner emptiness" are also studied in a 1976 book by Canadian William Leiss called The Limits to Satisfaction: An essay on the problem of needs and commodities. Leiss, like Skolimowski, is critical of excessive consumerism not only for its destruction to the environment but also for the toll it takes on the human psyche. This latter concern seems to require something on

the scale of a religious conversion in the West, which normally equates greater consumption with greater freedom and happiness and a "higher" standard of living. Leiss writes:

> There is no apparent end to the escalation of demand and no assurance that a sense of contentment or well-being will be found in the higher reaches of material abundance. ...The personal objectives sought in the frenetic activity of the marketplace are more and more obscure. (7)

Leiss deals extensively with the "psychological [and physiological] risks inherent in a high-consumption lifestyle" (17) in which the individual is prompted to continually reinterpret his/her needs in light of ever new products that claim to be necessary for happiness and health, though they may not have existed yesterday. Leiss feels that the experiments on his/her desires that a complex market demands of the individual lead to a "fragmentation of personality" (18). One of the results of this exclusive focus on consumption of things as the way to happiness is that other desires "that are not dependent on the consumption of things" are depreciated (20). Thus, for example, a desire for a life of spiritual integrity, presumably still so vital in large sectors of the East, would not even be part of the measuring scale of human happiness in this complex market system, nor would

intellectual or artistic pursuits, except those designed for market consumption.

The language of the rights of nature makes little sense considering that:

> Increasing material demands alter our perceptions of our relationship to the environment, so that we tend to regard the rest of nature almost exclusively as a warehouse of resources and a dumping ground for wastes. (32)

Unless we can demonstrate beforehand that a certain action will damage the environment, we cannot hope for any restrictions (35). Leiss traces the historical roots of our destructiveness of nature to the seventeenth-century thought of Francis Bacon who felt that the human conquest of nature had the simple practical objective of the "relief of the inconveniences of man's estate" (37). Implied in this view is the belief that non-human nature had no inherent purpose other than to serve human ambitions. Bacon apparently viewed nature as a free-of-charge raw material just waiting to be turned into something useful by human ingenuity, and to leave it untouched was to waste it. Humans have since then been busy developing ever more complex needs for ever more complex "useful things" manufactured by human ingenuity out of "nothing."

In dealing with the psychological risks of over-consumption, Leiss cites Abraham Maslow's and Erich Fromm's

concepts about human needs. Maslow spoke of a "hierarchy" of needs in which the physical and material should be the most rudimentary and the first to be outgrown:

> For a mature person the 'material' objectives ... should find a satiation point where the accumulation of things ends, whereas the non-material objectives [love, affection, belongingness, self-esteem, self-actualization] ... open up a vista of potentially endless personal growth. (55-6)

This implies that to continue living as if buying and selling were the main functions of living, once one has supposedly become mature, must be reconsidered. To recall a consumeristic society to a reassessment of mature human needs is a challenging undertaking, since needs are such subjective creatures. Leiss cites Fromm's attempt at such an endeavor:

> ... Erich Fromm has argued ... that a 'sane society is that which corresponds to the needs of man -- not necessarily to what he feels to be his needs, because even the most pathological aims can be felt subjectively as that which the person wants most; but to what his needs are *objectively*, as they can be ascertained by the study of man.' [The Sane Society (New York: Rinehart, 1962) p.20] (58)

The advent of the billion dollar advertising industry in the West has increased the difficulty of assessing which are

genuine human needs and which are responses to the highly-developed and subtle psychological manipulations of clever advertising. After all, the job of "good" advertising is to develop new "needs" of which people had been previously unaware. As Leiss notes, there is no longer the luxury of endless time to deal with this, since the earth is being crushed under the weight of human excesses: "understanding and managing the relationship between humanity and the natural environment is now a 'need' of the species" (68-9), and a pressing one at that. Implied in the reassessment of this understanding is a profound reappraisal of the Western concept of progress: "In actuality the motor of progress was and is oiled by the drives of greed, envy, and indifference to suffering" (43). If Leiss is right about these three lubricants of the motor of progress, three items that have been viewed as sins by most traditional religious system, then the question of finding the 'off' switch becomes acute.

This trend of criticizing excessive materialism and consumerism is becoming increasingly commonplace. To be fair, one must acknowledge that the free enterprise system that has engendered current levels of materialism and consumerism (especially in the West) has also provided tremendous impetus for human inventiveness and productivity. In writing of "ecopsychology" in 1992, Theodore Roszak cautions against a "stern asceticism" that is overly

critical of consumerism without adequately acknowledging the personal and societal benefits it provides (253). Roszak points out that even the most seemingly unnecessary and wasteful manufactured object still provides a means of livelihood for those involved in its production and distribution, as well as providing a measure of personal fulfillment to the purchaser with discretionary income (248-52). Habits of profligate consumption will not change until such fulfillment is taken seriously by its critics, and the desires that undergird such habits, "the craving for specialness, distinction, personal worth -- must be uncovered, examined, reshaped" (252). Technology, Roszak reminds us, has brought many benefits:

> Industrial power is one of the great achievements of our species, the closest we have come to building a world in which health, leisure, long life, material security, and a truly global community become possible. But we are in danger of losing all these benefits if we cannot find a moral equivalent of wretched excess. (253)

Even Gandhi himself, presumably a champion of an anti-industrial stance, welcomed Western know-how regarding sanitation and related issues. There is a difference between reasonable material security and dangerous-to-the-environment material (or "wretched") excess. For Roszak the "golden mean" is to be recovered through a renewed

appreciation of plenitude, of the personal completeness and sense of life's abundance that comes from choosing a lifestyle[2] that is celebratory of life's gifts by being cautious of the ill effects of over-indulgence on a number of levels. The values that inform our lifestyle choices reveal our regard (or disregard) for nature, the earth and other humans with far fewer such choices.

Going back to the "value-vacuum" which Skolimowski identified as the scientific heritage of enlightenment thinking, we see some signs of hope today that those who deal in scientific and technological knowledge are beginning to realize their authentic need for a system of ethics, or values, to inform further "progress." In 1989, for instance, an economist and a theologian, Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr. jointly authored a book called For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future. Their effort is a

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[2] Interestingly enough, even the word 'lifestyle' is quite new and not found in first-rate English dictionaries of the early seventies -- an indication perhaps that the ability to choose different 'styles' of living has become both possible and necessary only in recent times. Post World War II prosperity in the West combined with the advent of the ecological crisis have probably been the main factors in current lifestyle issues.

fine example of the 'remarriage' of values and knowledge that Skolimowski sought.

Daly and Cobb plead strenuously for an end to the tyranny of purely economic measures of personal and national well-being. GNP and per capita income figures do not address issues of compassion. They demonstrate the amorality of modern Western economics: "According to economists we really cannot say that food for the hungry yields more utility than a third TV set in a rich family's second house" (93). Many Canadians, for instance, stress the need to "stimulate the Canadian economy" by spending (and charging) as much as possible on Canadian goods and services. To spend a hundred dollars for cataract surgery for four children in the Third World is not an investment in Canada's future. Spending that hundred dollars on Canadian-made clothing or at a Canadian-owned restaurant, is therefore considered more economically sound and patriotic. Relying on economists' advice about how to help our own country be "better off" can lead to choices that suggest a somewhat short-sighted consideration of all the values involved. Daly and Cobb question the economic assumption that the more goods and services are "consumed" by the public, the better:

> For example, the excessive consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and fatty foods are all counted positively. Few suppose that these actually add to welfare, but the

> task of sorting out approved and disapproved expenses would be formidable indeed. ... However a person spends money on the market is assumed to be in the interest of satisfying that person's wants, and no further consideration of value is possible. (83-4)

Daly and Cobb call for a variety of remedial measures in reappraising the ethics of current economic practice in the West. Economics for community (as opposed to simple self-interest), and an objection to free trade because of its detrimental effect on local "homespun" goods, are among their strongest recommendations.

"Buddhist" Economics

The British economist and philosopher E.F.Schumacher made a similar plea in his book Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered. Schumacher's great admiration for what he calls Buddhist economics[3] also helps bring our discussion back to the Eastern perspective:

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[3] Schumacher's "Buddhist economics" have been understood as largely influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. This connection will be more thoroughly explored in Part Two of this work. Roszak's more recent (1992) concept of the economics of plenitude also resonate with these ideas, though Gandhi is not mentioned in his Voice of the Earth.

> ... the aim should be the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption. ... The ownership and consumption of goods is a means to an end, and Buddhist economics is the systematic study of how to attain given ends with the minimum of means. ... We need not be surprised, therefore, that the pressure and strain of living is very much less in, say, Burma than it is in the United States, in spite of the fact that the amount of labour-saving machinery used in the former country is only a minute fraction of the amount used in the latter. (48)

Keeping in mind the Hindu and Buddhist aversion to violence expressed in the ideal of ahiṁsā (Gandhi's major focus in all he did), we read in Schumacher how this ideal relates to ecology:

> From a Buddhist point of view ... Non-renewable goods must be used only if they are indispensable, and then only with the greatest care and the most meticulous concern for conservation. To use them heedlessly or extravagantly is an act of violence, and while complete non-violence may not be attainable on this earth, there is nonetheless an ineluctable duty on man to aim at the idea of non-violence in all he does. (50)

The Buddhist eightfold path enumerates specific aspects of the larger Buddhist goal of "right living" -- one which has

been important to most world religions. Schumacher examines what "wrong living" means in Buddhist economic thinking:

> Economically, our wrong living consists primarily in systematically cultivating greed and envy and thus building up a vast array of totally unwarrantable wants. ... wisdom ... can be <u>found</u> only inside oneself. To be able to find it, one has first to liberate oneself from such masters as greed and envy. ... How could we even begin to disarm greed and envy? Perhaps ... by resisting the temptation of letting our luxuries become needs; and perhaps by even scrutinising our needs to see if they cannot be simplified and reduced. (30-1)

In decrying the systematic cultivation of greed and envy, and in encouraging instead the deliberate effort to continually trim down our wants and reassess our "needs," Schumacher brings us back to the heart of the Eastern view of living rightly.

But to adopt Buddhist ethics drawn from the eightfold path without seeking first the religious enlightenment that inspired their creation is somewhat of a cart-before-the-horse situation. The "cart" of ethical behaviour is always an imposition of the onerous burden of "oughts" and "ought nots" unless it is driven or empowered by the "horse" of some strong inner conviction. In Gautama Buddha's case, for example, it was only after an initial rude awakening into

the harsh realities of human suffering, followed by a long period of reflection and soul searching, that the empowering experience of enlightenment occurred and further propelled his ethically prescriptive eightfold path.

With an expansion of consciousness (something his father tried to protect him from) came a reawakened conscience, an awareness and concern for the alleviation of the suffering of all creatures. Although it is not our task here to probe the Buddha's awakening and enlightenment in any depth, the familiar story of his crucial movement from increased consciousness to increased response to questions of conscience is highly suggestive for further understanding the potential of religion for informing ecological concern. Roszak's current understanding of "ecopsychology" works along similar lines: shortsighted views of the ecologically destructive aspects of "wretched excess" take their toll not only on the outer or physical environment, but also on the psyche that is weakened by the distractions of possessiveness. The classical theologies of most world religions contain similar warnings about the danger to the soul of various temptations to excessive worldliness. Schumacher's understanding of "Buddhist economics" will be further explored in Part Two's study of Gandhi's thought, since Gandhi bridged these various aspects of the pollutant effect of excess materialism.

Conclusion

In looking at East and West in the religion and ecology debate, we see that there has already been a good measure of cross-fertilisation and/or a foundation of common values and attitudes towards both the material and the spiritual realm of human existence. Mahatma Gandhi was, among other things, a significant agent for such cross-fertilization in this century and he was clearly influenced by both East and West. One of his immediate predecessors on the other side of the Atlantic, Henry David Thoreau also engaged in such cross-fertilization by immersing himself in certain Hindu sacred texts and found there a companion spirit to his quest for a life of integrity at Walden Pond. In describing his daily routine there, Thoreau wrote:

> In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmological philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta ... in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. (321)

Like many Eastern sacred texts, the Bhagavadgītā counseled, above all, an escape from egoism and an acceptance of the dictates of a properly informed conscience and of duty.

The attitude toward nature in a variety of religions and cultures is largely coloured by the centrality of the notion of greed as a vice or sin or obstacle to salvation. Where greed is seen as detrimental to overall wellbeing, and frugality, on the other hand, is seen as a virtue or aid to a life of greater purity, then nature can be approached less as a commodity and more as the nurturing ground from which all life, including human, emerges and thrives. "Buddhist economics" exemplifies the traditional wisdom of the East which observes a sort of continuum between material frugality and spiritual wellbeing.

CHAPTER TWO: FROM CONSCIOUSNESS TO CONSCIENCE: THE ROLE OF THE SOUL IN ECOLOGICAL CONCERN

"The individual who seeks for his own true soul" writes Huston Smith in speaking of Taoism, "will discover it to be the same as the soul of heaven and earth and all things" (Barbour 73). Erazim Kohák sensed something similar through a philosophical stance he called generic naturalism: "By speaking of "naturalism" in a generic sense ... we shall mean any philosophy which recognizes the being of humans as integrally linked to the being of nature ... " (8). If the soul is the spark of the divine within the human, then Kohak further observes the continuity between humans and nature that is integral to Christian belief:

> The Christians, repeating each Sunday that they believe in one God, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible, could never quite lose sight of nature as God's creation or of the continuity of their own being with that of the *kosmos*. (11)

At the center of every religion's self-consciousness is an awareness that the individual soul or self or spirit is merely an aspect of the All, of Ultimate Reality, of the Divine, of the Infinitely Manifest, and so on. Partaking in divinity, the soul or spirit of the human person longs to be reunited with the source of its divinity and immortality, a

source more readily accessed if it can be discovered through the immediacy of the natural world.

As the Upanisads put it, *tat tvam asi*: "That thou art", the spirit of the human person, being an aspect of the divine, is restless so long as it feels separated from its source. The highly influential fifth-century Christian theologian Augustine of Hippo expressed a similar sentiment in his famous prayer: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee". So much of the history of religious thought in every corner of the globe has been focused on precisely this longing, and on condemning the many forces that have threatened to obscure the human consciousness of this natural and healthy spiritual quest.

In words reminiscent of the Buddhist Nāgasena's *neti, neti* to King Milinda's query about the nature of reality or existence (*Milindapañha*), Kohak uses the phenomenologist's methodology to point out the continuum between human being and Being as a whole:

> Being as such is *not this*, it is *not this* and *not this*. Being is what emerges when all particularity has been bracketed, not a predicate common to all beings but rather what is basic to them all and not restricted to any or to the sum of them. (58)

When humans adopt such an approach towards nature, a biocentrism emerges which radically shifts the focal point away from an anthropocentricism that sees humans as entirely

distinct and superior. The biologist Edward O. Wilson takes biocentrism a step further and writes of "biophilia" which he defines as "the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (1). He suggests that greater understanding of other species should arouse in humans a bond of empathy and oneness with the rest of nature. The greatest obstacle to experiencing this oneness is the delusion that humans are superior and have a right to use nature with rapacious greed to satisfy their various appetites. Hinduism's understanding of *moha, lobha* and *krodha* -- delusion, greed and anger -- as being the roots of evil (Klostermaier 1989, 165) are of ongoing significance for the interaction of humans with nature. The delusion of anthropocentrism is the foundation upon which human greed operates in its exploitation of nature. Naturally, the shift from anthropocentrism to biocentrism questions the legitimacy of human arrogance in using nature simply as a resource. Such questioning is viewed as a threat and easily arouses the anger of those who rely on this resource. Most of the world's religions denounce greed as the enemy of the soul's longing for God. The Christian writer of most of the epistles, Paul of Tarsus, equates it, in fact, with idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Kohák comments on the commandment "Thou shalt not covet" to show the insidiousness of greed as obstacle to a biocentric view of nature:

> It is an urgent warning against turning the world from the place of our dwelling into an object of possession, rendered dead and soulless by greed. ... No force is more destructive than greed, no drive more elemental. Greed is not an extension of need, since a need can be satisfied. It is the desperate attempt to fill with possessions the emptiness which humans create ... The rediscovery of the presence which fills that emptiness, setting humans free from greed and envy is the greatest gift of the forest peace. (78)

Almost every religious hero has undergone a period of wresting herself or himself from the deliberate incitements to greed and envy (that have vastly increased with the advent of modern advertising) in order to focus more freely on the compelling task of finding one's soul or one's inner self. An increased consciousness of such inner realities has generally taken one further away from the original focus on seeking the center of the self towards the greater consciousness of other souls and the Ultimate Soul, Self or God. This is perhaps most obvious in the Hindu understanding of Ātman as being an aspect of Brahman, of the individual self searching for its completion or fulfillment by realizing its identity with Brahman, the Ultimate Self. And furthermore it is primarily in this way that the individual can aspire towards *mokṣa*, towards liberation and salvation.

In Hinduism's most famous and rebellious offspring, Buddhism, there is less emphasis on such theistic elements as the soul and the Divine, which may in part be seen as an ongoing rebellion against Hinduism's parental influence. However, to interpret Buddhist Nirvana as nothingness, and the goal of each "soul" as extinction, as the West has often done, falls far short of the mark or goal of compassion that characterizes Buddhist thought and practice. By taking to oneself and becoming concerned with the sufferings of all creatures (as does the Bodhisattva), a person realizes the oneness of all being. Thus the consciousness of oneness arouses the conscience to respond with compassion.

Self-Preoccupation and Self-Realization

Again we see this momentum within the self-consciousness of the individual, moving away from preoccupation with the self into a creative and positive form of self-annihilation in which the smaller self surrenders and is penetrated and absorbed by the larger Self, Reality or Divine Essence. In a rudimentary way this is the universal human growth momentum from the self-preoccupation of infancy and childhood, through the often torturous quest of adolescence for self-realization, and into the (now increasingly rare, especially in the West)

mature state of other-centeredness and the self-discipline needed to actualize creative potential.

Like Hinduism and Buddhism, Taoism too is premised on the transformation of individual consciousness away from a self-serving focus and towards a realization of the self's submergence within the vast interconnectedness of the All. In speaking (above) of the discovery that one's "own true soul" is the "same as the soul of heaven and earth and all things" (Barbour 73), Huston Smith attributes the word Tao to the Chinese designation of "this complete divine ecology" and despairs of the possibility of its objective description. Tao is not so much an entity or state of being as it is an acquired and continually evolving perspective:

> It requires long years of cultivation, for it requires altering not one's imagination but one's self; transforming one's sentiments, attitudes, and outlook until, a new perceptual instrument having been forged, a new world swings into view. (Barbour 74)

A radical but slowly developing change in consciousness is the outcome of "a new perceptual instrument having been forged". One looks at the same world but sees it with the renewed consciousness of new sensitivities, of a sharpened awareness of the deeper ties that bind all living things and perhaps the earth as a whole. This leads, Smith explains, to an experience of "freedom and elation as the boundaries of confining selfhood melt down ... a dramatic awakening in

which the world's undifferentiated aspect is realized" (Barbour 77).

Radical monism is a danger in this line of thought, a danger not articulated by Smith but implied in his critique of the Taoist tendency to quietism:

> For Taoism the danger is quietism, the reading of its pivotal *wu wei* (no action) doctrine as admonishing us to do as little as possible or in any case nothing contrary to natural impulse. If everything is an aspect of Tao and thereby holy exactly as it is, why change it? ... The path that winds past this precipice is a narrow one ... Indeed, one can read the entire history of philosophical Taoism, as well as Buddhism in its Taoist version (Ch'an), as one long struggle to keep from reading Chuang Tzu's "Do nothing, and everything will be done" as counselling sloth and rationalizing privilege.

Across the lines that divide one religion from another we find this ongoing tension between the two extremes of, on the one hand, a monism that leads to a passivity since any conflict or suffering is an illusion, and, on the other hand, an excessive individuality in which the differentiation of the "I" from others leads to an unconcern for all but the soul's union with God. Thus, for example, Thomas A Kempis could write in his Imitatio Christi: "If you really desire true peace and union with God, attend to

yourself, and set aside all else" (Book 2, ch.5), a truly compelling temptation for some types of religious people.

At the same time that a sense of communion with the rest of creation is a desirable end of an enlightened consciousness, an obscuring of genuine diversity and differentiation contains the peril of indifference to the needs or sufferings of others. Communion, oneness or even equality does not require uniformity and, indeed, individuals or groups with many differences in their cultural characters can experience their common and universal heritage as citizens of the whole earth. Although there is a certain life-force that is broadly shared, as E.F. Schumacher noted, amongst the obvious factors of reality not normally acknowledged on philosophical "maps" (Guide 24ff.), it is the balancing factor of conscience that must assess whether a "do nothing" stance is appropriate in given circumstances. As Smith points out:

> Unobscured by attachment to one's one perquisites, the suffering of the dispossessed will draw one spontaneouly to their side. Until that point is reached there must be labors that are not wholly spontaneous as we try to act our way into right thinking while concomitantly thinking our way into right action. (Barbour 79)

In Part Two of this work we will see that Gandhi moved personally from obscurity, incompetence and a crippling

self-consciousness to effective and powerful service of his country and humanity in general in just this way. Although most religious systems embody a 'love of neighbour' ethic, few individuals of any creed are able to make so extensive a move into the kind of thinking and action that reflects a thoroughgoing other-centeredness and compassion for all.

To Love the Neighbour as Oneself

To act our way into right thinking is to be attuned to a conscience that highlights the wellbeing of the other as amongst our most legitimate concerns. To think our way into right action is to meditate on our commonality with all creatures and to grow in our consciousness of that which is the unifying factor. Jesus addressed these two elements of "right thinking" and "right action" in his focus on the two greatest commandments:

> 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Mt 22: 37-40, NRSV)

According to the first of these two great commandments, the Christian is encouraged to apply the whole strength of his heart, soul and mind to as broad and whole a consciousness

of God's presence as possible. Applying the whole heart and soul and mind to one's love of God inevitably leads to an expansion of our consciousness of the nature of the divine. Such an application is a deliberate effort, as Huston Smith suggests, towards right thinking about God -- in this case rightness is determined by a refusal to remain satisfied with any circumscribed pictures of the wholeness, omnipresence and immanence of the divine.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith has noted the implications of this commandment from an Advaitan (specifically Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭadvaita* way) perspective which sees God or Brahman as ultimately one reality with all that is:

> For Christians, to adopt this ... way of seeing the world history of religious life ... would mean seeing and worshipping a God more grand and all-embracing, more alert and enterprising, more active, more loving, than has been our traditional wont; and would of course mean relating to our neighbours with much more respect and mutuality, more genuine love. (19)

Smith argues that different religions are better understood as "ways of being human -- ways that people have adopted and developed" both with divine guidance and with human limitations and fallibility. The academic study of religion (to love God with all one's mind) would seem to require an ongoing hermeneutical reinterpretation of the expansiveness

of a divinity that was already present in the other "ways of being human" that are expressed by other religions.

So today, when ecology informs us of our vast interconnectedness with, and interdependence upon, all other living things, and on the health of the earth as a whole, the mandate of this greatest Christian commandment, to love God with the strength of all one's mind, strongly suggests an expansion in our consciousness of God to now include the broader picture of the creation that is God's self-expression. "Religion" wrote E.F. Schumacher "is the re-connection (*re-legio*) of man with reality, whether this reality be called God, Truth, Allah ..." (Guide 85), and he saw this reconnection as hampered mainly by human egoism, or self-centredness as opposed to other-centredness.

As for the other side of the coin, acting our way into right thinking, the well-known second commandment which is "like" the first one, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" has always excited an immensity of controversy in interpretation. In our Freudian influenced age, the question of how far self-love should precede love of neighbour has had an army of psychological and religious commentators. As Schumacher observed:

> It is indeed more convenient to assume that other beings, including other people, do not really suffer as we do and do not really possess an inner life as complex, subtle and vulnerable as our own ... Since,

> moreover ... we tend to see ourselves primarily in the light of our intentions, which are invisible to others, while we see others mainly in the light of their actions, which are visible to us, we have a situation in which misunderstandings and injustice are the order of the day. ... To be able to take the inner life of my neighbour seriously, it is necessary that I take my own inner life seriously. (Guide 99)

The ethics involved in the seemingly simple commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself are further extrapolated in the famous last judgment scene of the Christian gospel (Mt 25: 31-46) in which any act of compassion that was either done or omitted towards "one of the least of these who are members of my family" (v.40) is rewarded or punished with nothing less than salvation or damnation, so the pressure to get it right is considerable.

As our consciousness of who are these "least of the members of [God's] family" is expanded by science's undaunted foraging into ever new areas of the diversity of interconnected life on this planet, the ecological implications of how these "least members" are treated become *a fortiori* questions of conscience that we dare not ignore. In response to the lawyer's question, "And who is my neighbor?" (Lk 10:29), Jesus told a parable in which a member of a group whom the Hebrews of his time did not appreciate (the Samaritans), turned out to be the real

neighbour of the injured Hebrew traveller (v. 30-37). An ecological reinterpretation of this well-known parable might give us pause to reflect on our new consciousness of just how dependent human life ultimately is on such previously insignificant-seeming creatures as ocean plankton. Who is the neighbour who will help us survive the assaults of modern excessively-industrialized life? Unless the ocean plankton, for one, are protected and preserved and treated with some neighbourly regard, we will apparently not survive the journey into Jericho -- into a future where, if our conscience is not pricked by the new consciousness of "who is my neighbour", our very survival as a species is threatened.

Although this second commandment has, then, an overt focus on self-love, it is an enlightened or far-sighted self-love whose opposite, paradoxically enough, is egoism. As Schumacher notes:

> When a person loves himself, there is nothing standing between him who loves and him who is being loved. But when he loves his neighbour, his own little *ego* tends to stand in between. To love one's neighbour as one loves oneself, therefore, means to love without any interference from one's ego; it means the attainment of perfect altruism, the elimination of all traces of egoism. (Guide 116)

This movement from egoism to altruism, from self-centeredness to other-centeredness, suffers somewhat from the reputation, in the West, of being a reactionary movement, in which the legitimate "needs" of the ego are to be sacrificed in favour of serving the "needs" of the other. Feminists, and other groups arising from a history of oppression, would naturally put up their guard at the encouragement of such a notion. And yet the opposite extreme, the often total unconcern, in the West, to battle the forces of egoism needs to be reconsidered.

This laxity in battling the caprices of the ego was undoubtedly a significant deterrent to a Hindu like Gandhi when he, as a young student in England, was pressured by friends to become a Christian. There was much he admired in the teachings of Jesus, but in the end, it was Hinduism's persistent invitation to rise above the ego by refuting its whims, that gave him the moral, mental and spiritual strength to take on the task he did. The Hindu and Jain focus on *ahiṁsā* required a healthy form of self-abnegation that was not a prominent feature of nineteenth and twentieth-century Western Christianity.

From Egoism to Altruism

The continuum from egoism to altruism is a complex movement on the human psychological plane involving an

infinite gradation between a total focus on the self and a total focus on others. Neither extreme is healthy, and yet to say simply that the answer lies somewhere in the middle is trite and a truism. Where the "middle" is located fluctuates wildly according to cultural, religious and other factors of a particular group, location and historical time. Many of the everyday habits of late twentieth-century North Americans are easily seen as heinously self-indulgent or egotistical by the vast majority of world citizens who have neither the wealth to waste nor the cultural sanctions to allow such lifestyles. Though it sounds unfair, such a situation is actually fortuitous for the earth's resources since the impact of the high-consumption lifestyles of even twice as many North Americans as now exist would be not the "straw" but indeed the cataclysmic boulder that would break the ecological "camel's back". If almost one billion Indians, for instance, and a similar number of Chinese could suddenly afford to use as many automobiles per capita as are used in North America, the earth's atmospheric conditions would be hard-pressed to last the year (month?) in a condition fit for sustaining biological life.

Therefore the definition of an egoistic lifestyle is elusive at best, and impossible to pinpoint at worst. The term 'altruism' is almost as slippery to grasp, mainly because its meaning is usually opposed to that of egoism. In philosophical ethics, altruism is simply the doctrine

that the general welfare of society should be the guidepost for the actions of the individual. But how broad a society, and whose understanding of "general welfare" are to be used remain open questions. Webster's (New World 1970) defines altruism less formally as unselfish concern for the welfare of others or selflessness. But selflessness, even if there were agreement as to its being necessarily and always a good, is somewhat of an oxymoron since the objective cannot be experienced by the subjective. How can the self, then, experience selflessness? According to Peter A. Angeles' Dictionary of Philosophy:

> Altruism may be motivated by (a) a disinterested sense of duty to humans and society, or (b) the disciplined attempt to overcome one's self-centeredness and selfish desires in love of others, which involves such qualities as compassion, sympathy, and selflessness. Altruism may involve (a) self-abnegation or self-denial in which one's own good is thought less of, or not considered at all, or (b) a self-interest in which one's own good is taken into account and is a requisite for promoting and achieving the good of others. (The former is related to the concept of martyrdom and the latter to the concept of enlightened self-interest.) Contrast with EGOISM. (7)

Clearly there is a considerable psychological distance between martyrdom and enlightened self-interest. To seek

martyrdom is often considered pathological unless it is the only route for rescuing others in some heroic way. And heroism, of course, can be motivated by egoism as well as by selflessness. Enlightened self-interest has a more positive reputation but the advertisers who titillate the egoistic appetites of the affluent West often do so under the guise of a you-deserve-the-best version of "enlightened" self-interest. Even the most admired acts of heroic martyrdom can fall under the suspicion of some form of self-aggrandizement; and even the most carefully-planned programs of enlightened self-interest can harbour an unconscious or subconscious egoism as their source and end.

In the ecological movement, human beings are asked to move away from an egoism that would devour the earth itself in its insatiable pursuit of various appetite gratifications. In focusing away from such ego-gratifications and towards a way of living that often involves certain elements of personal sacrifice in order to "live and let live", there is an implicit call to altruism, to an unselfish concern for others and the earth. The first line of Angeles' definition of altruism speaks of a "disinterested sense of duty". This notion of disinterestedness is at the heart of a number of Eastern sacred texts, including the circa fifth-century B.C.E. Bhagavadgītā (which was Gandhi's favorite Hindu scripture); Sankara's eighth-century Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, a cornerstone of

the Advaita Vedanta movement; and the third-century B.C.E. Buddhist Dhammapada. In each of these texts, egoism is seen as the most dangerous delusion to which human nature is subject. Greed is born from the deluded ego's sense that all things are meant for its own gratification, and anger ensues when such gratification is thwarted. Each of these texts has its own way of counselling as an antidote to the bondage of egoism, a life of disinterestedness or passionlessness in which is cultivated a deliberate disregard for the cravings or whims of the ego. Life is to be lived not according to what the ego decrees as right or good, but rather according to the duties that befit an awareness of our interconnectedness and of the transitoriness of material existence.

The ancient and pluralistic religion of Hinduism, having perhaps had the longest opportunity of any religion to observe human vices and virtues, has repeatedly concurred, as mentioned earlier, that these three are the roots of all vices: *moha, lobha, krodha* -- delusion, greed and anger (Klostermaier 1989, 165). Such vices are seen as aspects of egoism, with delusion being the encompassing vice that causes the ego both to believe that it "needs" what it craves (greed), and that anger is justified when such cravings are thwarted. In this understanding, delusion can

be compared to the traditionally pivotal place of 'pride' in the Christian list of deadly sins.[4]

The person who becomes truly disinterested in his or her own rewards and benefits is thus better enabled to focus altruistically on the needs of others. E.F. Schumacher felt that compassion and altruism were the prerequisites of both a profound self-knowledge and an in-depth knowledge of others (Guide 116). The ideal of altruism has, in a sense,

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[4] In twentieth-century Christian theology, Reinhold Niebuhr was perhaps the most forceful voice warning against the new forms of insidous pride inherent in the American political system. Although in time, he came to be personally guilty of such pride (sanctioning the use of the atom bomb to defend the 'American' way of life), his focus on the power of pride to permeate even "good causes" (such as democracy) was perhaps too summarily dismissed by groups such as liberation theologians and feminists who pounced on this focus as counter-productive to their programs of self-advancement for the oppressed. Although their concern is a valid one, the subsequent total disdain for pride's opposite, humility, in modern Christian theology, has removed the taint of sin from egoistic pursuits. The repercussions to the environment, and even to social relations in North America, have been highly destructive. See Gordon Harland, The Thought of Reinhold Neibuhr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), especially pp. 132-40.

fallen from grace in the Western worldview of the late twentieth-century. As recently as 1948, however, as prestigious an academic establishment as Harvard University established the Harvard Research Centre in Creative Altruism under the directorship of its founder, Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889-1968), a Russian sociologist in exile. His 1948 book, Reconstruction of Humanity had a worldwide readership and was "reverently dedicated to the deathless Mohandas K. Gandhi" (9). Gandhi had been murdered in January of that year, but Sorokin saw the spirit of Gandhi as an undying force for a renewal of altruistic ideals.

Sorokin believed that in order for altruism to again be counted as the highest ideal of human living:

> It is essential to recover a vital sense of the living presence of God, of union with the Infinite Manifold, such as has been experienced by the mystics and other deeply religious persons. ... A truly religious person, feeling vividly the presence of God, walks humbly and reverently on this earth and loves the other children of God and all living creatures to his utmost capacity. (143-4)

Sorokin's terminology for God, the "Infinite Manifold" was meant to convey his theory that in all major religions, mystics sought the same oneness with the *infinite* under *manifold* names:

> "[T]he Inexpressible" of mystics consist mainly in differences of terminology, in the accentuation of this or that aspect of the Infinite Manifold, and in even more subsidiary differences of rationalized dogmas and cults. ... Likewise, the moral commandments of all genuine religions are fundamentally identical. Their ethics is the ethics of unbounded love of man for God, for his fellow men, for all living creatures, and for the entire universe. (142)

However, Sorokin realistically realizes that moral commandments are more effective if somehow sweetened with the knowledge of their potential for life's greater happiness. To try to transform humanity in the direction of altruism by the supposed force of moral commandments is not the way. Instead Sorokin depicts altruism as an avenue of joyful but challenging creativity:

> Edison rightly observed that "Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration." ... altruism ... is a special kind of creativeness in the field of goodness entailing principally ethical values ... Famous altruists such as Saint Francis of Assisi, are as truly creative giants in the field of goodness as are the foremost scientists, philosophers, founders of religions, and artists in their own particular fields. Since creativity in any form requires active effort, altruism requires it also. It demands it

> perhaps even more than the other forms, for genuine altruism has to be practised incessantly. (167)

Not only does Sorokin 'sweeten' the mandate of the universal moral commandments towards altruism by calling it a "special kind of creativeness", he further points out that although all creativity requires disciplined, sometimes agonizing effort, it brings with it as well an irreplaceable fulfilment and joy:

> This need of effort, with its pains and frustrations, does not mean that altruistic or other creative activities are boring, joyless, or depressing. Quite the contrary. The most effortful creative moments are those of the purest, richest, and most intense happiness. No real creator would exchange them for any effortless or painless experience. Beethoven ecstatically describes this in the choral movement of his *Ninth Symphony*. Few, if any, persons could match the inexhaustible cheerfulness of Saint Francis, that singing "jester of God," who was happy under conditions of utmost hardship, poverty, hunger, and humiliation. The same is true of the ineffable joy of the true ascetics, mystics, and altruists, in the moments of their union with the absolute or of the full performance of their duty. In spite of the incessant effort, fatigue, trials, frustrations, and even moments of black despair, the highest altruistic creativity,

> like any other, is a source of supreme gladness. (167-8)

Thus altruism which, as stated earlier, can be seen as the opposite of egoism, is not an onerous burden under which one puts aside one's own pleasure for the sake of duty. Rather it is a way to a far deeper experience of joy than is otherwise available. Sorokin identifies the "true ascetics" as among this group of joyful creative altruists -- a group whose membership surely includes Mahatma Gandhi.

Ecology's foundational more-with-less philosophy speaks precisely to this optimistic view of altruism not as a deprivation but as a liberation to the higher reaches of the creative and spiritual life. By succumbing less often to the cravings of the ego for materialistic gratifications, humans can experience *more* joy through creative altruism than through voracious consumption. By inviting an expansion of consciousness that encompasses the reality of all other living beings and their inherent right to thrive alongside of us, the human conscience (same root: Latin *conscientia:* consciousness, moral sense) also expands to include a new altruistic sense of our creative duties in order to 'live and let live'.

Conclusion

Although religions are called upon, at this time of ecological crisis, to reawaken the conscience of humanity to the destructive tendencies of unbridled egoism, their primary role is not that of disciplinarian or taskmaster, but rather of exposing the deeper levels of joy available in a move away from egoism and towards altruism. Such a move goes beyond mere sensory consciousness of individual physical existence as interpreted by the ego, to an awareness of one's interconnection and commonality with all that lives. A creative self-realization is seldom experienced without leaving behind the self-centeredness of spiritual immaturity in favour of the other-centeredness called forth by various religious ethical systems, as our study of Gandhi in Part Two will confirm. The full implications of love of neighbour, for instance, have been debated within every major religion, and the modern scientific understanding of human interdependence with all living things and the earth itself extends the scope of such debates even further. In one sense, the soul is the *jīva*, the individual self as expressed in part by the ego. But in another sense, the soul is somewhat synonymous with the conscience that informs the ego of the rights, needs and inherent worth of the "neighbour" ultimately including all of creation. Although ethical constraints demand a measure of self-sacrifice in order to allow for the needs of the other, the cosmic consciousness of a shared or universal

soul introduce a happy ambiguity in which self-sacrifice and authentic self-realization are inextricably combined.

CHAPTER THREE: NATURE AND THE SACRED: FROM MYSTICISM TO RESPONSIBILITY

Introduction

Mysticism has been viewed by some as the most hedonistic branch of religious practice since it often focuses on the ecstasy experienced when one senses one's affinity or union with the divine. Many serious scholars of religion have shied away from the semi-erotic insinuations of such mystical experience as depicted, for example, in Bernini's sculpture of the ecstasy of Teresa of Avila. Like newlyweds or young lovers, the mystic's absorption with the experience of the divine seems like an embarrassing self-absorption in which the "other" is just a euphemism for one's own pleasure. One loves the "other" because through such love comes one's greatest happiness. Anything the least bit enforced, like duties and responsibilities, seem out of place in this blissful picture of mystical joy. Where, then, does self-sacrifice belong in such a picture?

Responsibility, on the other hand, seems to lie somewhere on the opposite end of the spectrum from such a blissful state. It connotes burdens and deadlines and sometimes onerous tasks which one feels compelled to undertake as a result of the dictates of conscience. In the typical progression of human romantic love, for example, the carefree days of free-flowing affection and spontaneous

outings usually give way to the burdensome days of bills, diapers, housecleaning and in-laws. What is the link, if any, between the bliss of mysticism and the challenge of respnsibility?

Responsibility often entails a measure of self-sacrifice, whereas mysticism is seen by many religious traditions as the way to self-realization. And yet the mystics whose names have endured throughout history, and whose teachings or examples continue to strike a chord of resonance in the human experience, are those whose experience of the living God left them not only titillated into self-realization, but also challenged into the self-sacrifice which true compassion always demands.

The nature mystics exemplify the connection between self-sacrifice and self-realization. Shedding worldly desires for wealth or fame, they have sought a deeper, more exuberant joy not in the exclusively spiritual realm of an Augustine or a Śaṅkarā, but rather in the most rudimentary part of the 'world', in the bosom of nature's own transparency to the divine. Thus these innovative souls have rejected 'the world' on one level in order to be penetrated by the sacred via 'the world' on another level. Often viewed as fools by the leaders of both the religious and the secular worlds, they live according to a different order, marching, as Thoreau put it, to the beat of a different drummer (350).

Nature Mysticism

Seeking or finding God through creation is a continually reappearing motif throughout the history of most world religions. Its popularity rises, and then falls into the suspicious category of idolatry, or at least pantheism, and is forbidden for a time, so it goes underground for a while, then rises again. This ebb and flow of nature mysticism has proceeded undisturbed for many centuries and might have been left alone to continue to do so, according to the poetic imaginations of the new mystics that arise with each generation, except that today's ecological concerns have enlisted its support. A 1990 appeal by astronomer Carl Sagan and other leading scientists calling world religious leaders to join their efforts at environmental protection, stated that "efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred" (Sheldrake 34). It is in response to this mandate that nature mysticism must again rise to the forefront of a world religious consciousness.

Nature mysticism can ultimately be traced back to the so-called primitive religions in which most world religions have their roots. It was then derived from early homo sapiens' fear, awe and reverence of nature's powers. Aboriginal spiritualities have especially maintained their awareness of this reverence for nature. The much more left-

brained heritage of both Greek philosophy and the Judeo-Christian tradition have often opposed such reverence, however, seeing in it the supposed deification of objects of nature such as trees or the sun. The Western religious traditions largely reacted against early nature worship with an anthropocentric shift in focus towards the human inner self, the soul, and ultimately the Supreme Soul or God.

Through this reaction a dualism arose between nature and spirit, with nature as flesh, as the material, physical world, as opposed to the world of spirit. In the Christian tradition, the fifth-century theologian Augustine of Hippo was the great architect of spirit-versus-flesh thinking. The result was that nature, beginning with one's own body, became the enemy of the spiritual life. Similar developments are recognizable in Asian and other religions. For example, in Hinduism, there has been an ongoing tension between the monotheistic, basically world-negating way of knowledge, *jñānamārga* or Advaita Vedanta, and the *bhaktimārga*, the way of devotion with its many popular *avatāras*, or incarnations of God, including God's appearance as elements of nature. And Buddhism could be said to have arisen as a reaction against the excessively anthropocentric (in terms of the powers of the Brahmin priest) dependence on Brahmanic ritual worship in the Hinduism of the time. In the Hebrew tradition, Spinoza similarly reacted against the excessive Yahwist dependence on ritual sacrifice, and

stressed instead the road to inner freedom by means of "following nature's order."

In trying to escape from "serving the flesh," many seekers after a life of perfection lived without possessions, homes or other material comforts, in remote natural settings which became fairly indispensable to their spiritual quest. Therefore, reverence for nature inadvertently reenters the human religious consciousness, as with Francis of Assisi who sought God as the artist of all the beauty he saw around him in nature. As mentioned earlier, there is a certain paradox in this, since nature is the material world, and yet, seeking escape from excessive materialism and consumerism is often done by retreating, at least temporarily, into nature.

In speaking of nature mysticism here a general understanding of mysticism that takes in both its generic and pervasive nature is assumed, as well as acknowledging its persistent evasiveness of definition. As Louis Dupré has written in the Encyclopedia of Religion, "No definition could be both meaningful and sufficently comprehensive to include all experiences that, at some point or other, have been described as 'mystical'" (10:245). At the same time he confirms the thought of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Abraham Heschel, Aldous Huxley and others that:

> Mysticism belongs to the core of all religion. Those religions that had a historical founder all started

> with a powerful personal experience of immediate contact. But all religions, regardless of their origin, retain their vitality only as long as their members continue to believe in a transcendent reality with which they can in some way communicate by direct experience. The significance of such an experience, though present in all religion, varies in importance. (247)

Evelyn Underhill, perhaps the twentieth-century master of investigations into mysticism, warned that the term is one of the most abused words in the English language:

> ... it has been used in different and often mutually exclusive senses by religion, poetry, and philosophy: has been claimed as an excuse for every kind of occultism, for dilute transcendentalism, vapid symbolism, religious or aesthetic sentimentality, and bad metaphysics. On the other hand, it has been freely employed as a term of contempt by those who have criticized these things. It is much to be hoped that it may be restored sooner or later to its old meaning, as the science or art of the spiritual life. (xiv)

Little has changed in the 84 years since Underhill's astute assessment. Books on mysticism are still to be found on many bookstore shelves under the category of the occult; and sophisticated suburban pastors in North America rarely mention the mystical life as an ideal. But mysticism is not

crushed but rather flourishes the more its validity is denied, as Underhill explains:

> The most highly developed branches of the human family have in common one peculiar characteristic. They tend to produce -- sporadically it is true, and often in the teeth of adverse external circumstances -- a curious and definite type of personality, a type which refuses to be satisfied with what other men call experience, and is inclined, in the words of its enemies, to "deny the world in order that it may find reality." We meet these persons in the east and the west, in the ancient, mediaeval, and modern worlds. (3)

In Mysticism East and West, Rudolph Otto compared the mysticism of the Hindu philosopher Śaṅkarācārya with that of the Christian Meister Eckhart to prove the lack of real boundaries between East and West in this area. Otto expresses an aversion to bridal mysticism (34), emotional mysticism (35) and nature mysticism (76-9) -- and admires these two figures because of his view that they share an intellectual approach, or way of knowledge (*jñānamārga*) (33-5). For Otto both these mystics "express themselves in a metaphysic which seems to be essentially "ontological," essentially a speculation as to the nature of being" (8). Although "speculation as to the nature of being" would seem to have space in it for the nature of nature's being, Otto insists that Eckhart and Sankaracarya share a common

opposition to nature mysticism (76)[5] which he further feels is so obviously in contrast to a "mysticism of the spirit" that such difference is "apparent even to the most superficial observer" (76). Otto admits that in Eckhart "God has in Himself the fullness and the essence ... of all things from the angel to the stone"; and yet he maintains that Eckhart "views things and the essence of things from the standpoint of the significance and value of the divine, in absolute contrast to nature" (77). Although it would require a separate and lengthy treatise to fully investigate Otto's apparent prejudice against the idea of nature mysticism, this brief mention of his perspective helps contextualize the often controversial reputation of this tenacious human approach to the divine.

A more inclusive approach (though perhaps less intensive) is provided by Ben-Ami Scharfstein in Mystical Experience. Scharfstein defines mysticism broadly as "a name for our infinite appetites" and less broadly as "the

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[5] Meister Eckhart is, on the other hand, viewed as a nature mystic by a number of thinkers; and a case has been made for Śaṅkarā's Advaita Vedanta as a system that, because of the singularity of its focus compared to other branches of Hinduism, might lend itself to an approach that celebrates nature's transparent revelation of the Creator. However, this latter view has been subject to debate.

assurance that these appetites can be satisfied" (1), and he classifies mystical states into three types (4):

1) the type of passion or involvement,
2) the type of passionlessness or detachment, and
3) the type of both passion and passionlessness, which is the union of involvement and detachment.

Scharfstein's second category refers to the quietist approach that has characterized a great deal of mystical thinking. He cites the eighteenth-century Japanese Zen thinker Hakuin Zenji as an opponent of such a quietist approach:

> As a result of his experiences, Hakuin argues against the commitment of one's life to solitary meditation. ... He recalls that the early Zen masters used to haul stones, move soil, carry water, cut fuelwood, peel vegetables and build. They sought inward strength, he says, within the 'way of activity', for their activity was their meditation. In this spirit, anyone's clothing are monk's robes ... anyone's saddle a meditation cushion. (20)

Creativity is the greatest distinguishing characteristic of mysticism for Scharfstein -- something good must be produced by the mystic's experience. Recalling our earlier discussion of Sorokin's understanding of altruism as creativity, a picture of the centrality of creativity in a vibrant spiritual life begins to emerge. William James

(Varieties of Religious Experience) concurred with this view, and as a physician also noted these characteristics that Scharfstein suggests:

> ... creative men are likely to be at once more sick, more troubled psychologically, and more healthy, more resourceful in surmounting inner difficulties, than other people. (72)

Scharfstein also refers to James' belief that "there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds its accidental fences" (39). Such a cosmic consciousness is perhaps the most potent weapon against the anthropocentrism that has engendered the ecological crisis, especially in its mammoth proportions in the industrialized West.

The creative person, then, is moved by his or her awareness of the oneness of all existence to a compassionate concern for the well-being of all creatures. This awareness, according to Klaus Klostermaier, is often linked to the realization of the sacredness of nature:

> One of the quite frequently occurring 'mystical experiences' is the sudden realization of the 'sacredness of nature' -- of the immanence of God in all things. ... this kind of experience leads to the realization of a 'cosmic religion', an awarenes of the togetherness of man, nature and the ultimate, an

> insight into, and acceptance of, the 'goodness' of all things. (1973, 141)

Thomas Berry attributes this same insight into the 'goodness' of all things to Thomas Aquinas:

> Saint Thomas ... deals with the diversity of creatures. Beyond planetary socialism he proposes an ultimate socialism where he says that because the divine goodness "could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, he produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in god is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided; and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly and represents it better than any single creature whatever." (79)[6]

The thirteenth-century Aquinas is regarded as THE doctor of the Roman Catholic church, and the extensive legalities of his overall Scholastic approach have been used to bolster a seemingly infinite minutiae of dogmatic and doctrinal detail. However, he did exhibit the theological daring (for

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[6] Berry does not identify the source of this quote, but W.C. French, in speaking of the Thomistic foundation of Catholic creation spirituality, pinpoints it as Summa Theologia 1a, q.47, art.I, 1:459. Quoted in French p.71, note 74.

which his work suffered its periods of suspicion) of continually citing the thought of the "pagan" philosopher Aristotle who is recently coming to be recognized as the great-grandfather of cosmic consciousness.

Like Thomas, Francis of Assisi, though quite unlettered and not counted as a 'doctor' of the church, managed to practise an extensive form of what Klostermaier called 'cosmic religion' as witnessed especially by his well-known "Canticle to Brother Sun" in which he calls the earth, sun, fire, water and other aspects of nature his sisters and brothers. Francis praises the Creator for the goodness of all these things, and praises these elements for showing him the goodness of their Creator. Using Francis as his model, Edward A. Armstrong comments on the difference between the nature mystic and those who merely love nature but do not experience anything of the sacred in it:

> The theologian or psychologist might define the ... nature mystic as a person of ... faith who, through the apprehension of the beauty, goodness and glory of God revealed in Creation, is uplifted to an ineffable experience, but there are many gradations between the pangs of delight and thankfulness in the presence of earth's loveliness felt by ordinary ... folk and the raptures of such as Saint Francis. ... He is the patron saint, not of those who view the enjoyment of nature as an end in itself nor in pantheist appreciation, but of

> those who, taking pleasure -- sometimes rising to ecstatic delight -- in the exuberance and diversity of Creation, thankfully regard them as expressions of divine splendour, sacramental intimations of glories beyond human apprehension.[7] (17)

There are, of course, many more historical religious figures, of a wide range of religious expressions, who cherished nature's transparency to the divine, than can be dealt with here. According to Jaroslav Pelican (1132), it was Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) who was the most brilliant expositor of cosmic mysticism that saw the immanence of God in all things.

Spinoza is considered a pantheist, though perhaps panentheist is a better term, because of his doctrine of an impersonal God immanent in the world. He differentiates between "The God That Is" and "The God of Man's Making." The first is the cosmic and immanent divinity of panentheism: "Whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be ..." (167). Spinoza expresses God's cosmic nature when he writes:

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[7] As an experiment, I left out the adjective "Christian" in the first three ellipses of this quote. Since the statement makes sense without them, it is obviously unnecessary to be specific -- an interesting thought re: religious pluralism.

> From the necessity of the divine nature must follow an infinite number of things in infinite ways -- that is, all things which can fall within the sphere of infinite intellect. God is the indwelling and not the transient cause of all things. (167)

Spinoza further comments on God's immanence that "[i]ndividual things are nothing but modifications of the attributes of God, or forms by which the attributes of God are expressed in a fixed and definite matter" (167-8). This first portrait of "the God that is" is a pluralistic one that allows for a variety of expressions within different religious systems. All created things partake of the common divinity in which they originated.

The second portrait, of "the God of man's making," is an amazingly relevant-to-our-times critique of a Baconian cosmology. In fact one wonders whether Spinoza may have had Bacon's New Atlantis (1624) in mind when he wrote about this anthropocentric view of God:

> ... it is said that God made all things for man, and man that he might worship Him. (171)
>
> After men persuaded themselves that everything which is created is created for their sake, they were bound to consider as the chief quality in everything that which is most useful to themselves, and to account those things the best of all which have the most beneficial effect on mankind. (177)

Spinoza points out that the whole course of nature, in such a view, is understood to be directed by God "for the satisfaction of his [humankind's] blind cupidity and insatiable avarice" (173).

Against this whole view that God centered creation on "man", is Spinoza's view that God gave nature its own value:

> ... the perfection of things is to be reckoned only from their own nature and power; things are not more or less perfect, according as they offend or delight human senses, or according as they are serviceable or repugnant to mankind. (180)

Thus modern ecological thinkers who speak of the "inherent worth" of nature apart from its usefulness to humans owe a great debt to Spinoza's ideas. His image of God is again a pluralistic one as he explains that love toward God "is the more fostered in proportion as we conceive a greater number of men to be joined to God by the same bond of love" (147). This cosmic picture of God, then, is of an indwelling deity within all people and in the rest of creation as well.

The subtitle of Spinoza's Ethics, "The Road to Inner Freedom" suggests certain psychological implications. In modern ecological thought, the connection with psychological concerns is relatively new (e.g., Roszak), but it is precisely here that the intervention of the sacred into the ecological makes most sense. At a superficial level, one wonders: how does saving trees and recycling certain

materials help the human spiritual quest? Spinoza far predated our current ecological crisis yet he wrote eloquently about the contradiction between personal freedom and living an undisciplined or wasteful, materialistic and thoughtless life:

> Most people seem to believe that they are free, insofar as they may obey their lusts, and that they cede their rights insofar as they are bound to live according to the commandments of the divine law. (161)

In much medieval writing, the notion of controlling one's lusts is understood (at least in retrospect) as having mostly sexual connotations. Spinoza's view is clearly much broader:

> ... it is with the notion of money that the mind of the multitude is chiefly engrossed: nay, it can hardly conceive any kind of pleasure which is not accompanied with the idea of money as cause. ... But they who know the true use of money, and who fix the measure of wealth solely with regard to their actual needs, live content with less. (133)

More-with-less in the seventeenth-century! Spinoza is proclaiming aversion to human greed and praise for simple living as wisdom and the road to greater freedom.

Spinoza's ethics as relating to nature mysticism are complex but fascinating. He seems to have been a thorough psychologist who thought and wrote on the relationship of

the emotions, personal characteristics and the virtues in order to assess authentic human freedom. To the extent that humans are slaves to their whims and passions, they are not free; and freedom is essential for human happiness. Therefore humans must become self-disciplined masters of their passions, whims and greedy and selfish tendencies. The cosmic, impersonal "God that is"[8] is as much concerned with all living creatures as with mere humans. Therefore to acknowledge such a cosmic, impersonal God is to share a broad concern for all creatures AND to keep in check typical human rapaciousness towards nature.

In summary, Spinoza's ethics demand that humans act according to a broad picture of a God of all creation, and according to a self-disciplined life that refrains from causing unnecessary suffering in the world. Such ethical behavior and such an attitude toward God is conducive to an ecological spirituality by keeping human appetites towards nature in check, and by keeping in mind that God cares for all and therefore so should humanity. Gandhi and his idea of *khādī spirit*, which will be analysed in Part Two will reveal his potential as a model of a such a self-

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[8] Spinoza's understanding of the "God that is" also bears an affinity with the understanding of the divine in process thought. A God that is, in the present, continues to become, to develop, to unfold in intimate contact with, and response to, the created world through which God's self is expressed.

disciplined, compassionate, creative and universalistic approach to life. And in part three's examination of Heschel's portrait of the pious person, a similar ethos will be revealed.

Among contemporary Christian theologians writing about the relationship of nature and religion, a significant contribution has been made by Jurgen Moltmann with his book God In Creation: A New Theology of Creation and The Spirit of God. In it Moltmann announces his adoption of an "ecological doctrine of creation" which implies a "new" kind of thinking about God in which the distinction between God and the world is no longer central: "The centre is the recognition of the presence of God in the world and the presence of the world in God" (p.13). Moltmann's panentheist understanding of the immanence of God is based on the Jewish theology and practice of the sabbath as the "best creation wisdom" (xv): "The resting God, the celebrating God, the God who rejoices over his creation ... it is only the sabbath which completes and crowns creation" (6). Moltmann does not feel that the perception of God's immanence in the world suggests a departure from biblical traditions:

> On the contrary, it means a return to their original truth: through his cosmic spirit, God the creator of heaven and earth is present in each of his creatures and in the fellowship of creation they share. (14)

Moltmann's reference to the cosmic spirit of God is somewhat of a breakthrough for the Eurocentric Christian tradition with which he is usually associated, and bodes well for the future of a broadly based interreligious dialogue that goes beyond the "ecumenism" of different Christian churches. He also cites as significant the ancient theological doctrine of the *vestigia Dei*:

> Anyone who understands nature as God's creation sees in nature, not merely God's 'works', but also 'traces of God', ciphers and hidden tokens of his presence. (63)

Both nature mysticism and process thought are implied in this understanding that God continues to be present in the unfolding of the natural (includung human) world. Nature is not simply a static example of divine self-expression, like a deceased artist's painting hanging untouched and unchanged in a gallery. On the contrary, it is a work in progress which both affects and is affected by the living artist's experience of all of life.

Moltmann also helps elucidate the reluctance of modern European Christian theology to accept anything reminiscent of the horrible pre-World War II "natural theology" which Hitler's Nazis used to suggest a "natural" superiority-of-race religious doctrine. At that time it was the exclusive focus on Christian "revealed theology" ("which hears and holds fast to Jesus Christ as the 'one word of God' as the Barmen theological declaration put it in 1934" p.xiii) that

was used to counteract the dreadful implications of Hitler's "natural religion":

> But today new questions have come to the fore which were still completely unknown at that time. Faced as we are with the progressive industrial exploitation of nature and its irreparable destruction, what does it mean to say that we belive in God the Creator, and in this world as his creation? (xiii)

Robert A. Pois has been among those who have written specifically on the subject of National Socialism and the Religion of Nature, and although we will not here look into this issue extensively, it is important for advocates of nature mysticism to be aware of this unfortunate use of a focus on nature and religion. In fact Pois claims that the 'naturalism' of National Socialist religion "certainly has parallels with a sort of fuzzy nature-mysticism which can be observed throughout the West" (3) His description of the roots of this 'religion' echo such parallels:

> An increasing sense of estrangement from nature, combined with a growing revulsion against technological, urbanised society, was responsible for a general reaction against modernity. This reaction was particularly strong in Germany, where industrialisation had occurred at an unusually frenetic pace. (26)

Today's eco-nature-mystics can readily identify with a "revulsion against technological, urbanised society," and

must avoid the naive assumption that a focus on nature is automatically benign and benevolent. Such a society can seem harsh and anonymous until one empathetically considers that the common human desires for fulfillment and peace are the motivation for the seemingly frenetic pace of life in the cities; and that a 'return to nature' has sometimes masked a contempt and disregard for human society. As Pois points out, "National Socialist ideologues were in no small way concerned that man, or at least some men, live in harmony with the environment" (58). This does not mean, of course, that environmentalists today are guilty by association and should abandon environmental concern, but, to use a fitting cliche, 'forewarned is forearmed.' All "good" causes, as a number of religious thinkers have pointed out, need eternal vigilance to keep from slipping into dangerous ambiguities.

On the negative side, then, some forms of nature mysticism have been taken to mean that anything humanly manufactured out of 'raw' nature, from houses to penicillin to art to electric stoves that conserve trees, is destructive and ought to be stopped. Most diatribes against the evils of technology today are probably typed out and carefully edited on expensive high-tech computers in centrally-heated homes while automatic clothes washers rumble independently in the basement. The cause of 'conquering nature' is too easily dismissed as all bad. The

early pioneers of the North American continent, for example, had to conquer a lot of nature in order to survive, grow food, build houses, schools and places to take care of the sick and suffering. To question the excesses of late-twentieth-century North Americans is certainly necessary but to assume that any human disturbance of the forest primeval is an action to be regretted and reversed if possible is a naive outlook. Few would prefer to have dental work or surgery done without anaesthetics, for instance. An overly romantic view of nature also does not take into account nature's disregard for those whom humans call the mentally or physically disabled ("challenged"). Nature generally subjects any such "defects" to an early victimization by a stronger, predatory force. There are no neo-natal wards or special needs classes in the forest primeval.

In spite of the portrait sometimes painted by cynical ecologists, which depicts humans as a blight on the earth and a cancerous growth on an otherwise benign ecosystem, humans have the capacity to bear responsibility both for the consequences of their actions, and for what appear to be some of nature's foibles. Human freedom has not always been used destructively towards nature, and its most thoughtful expression has always included a sense of responsibility as its natural counterpart.

Responsibility as Responding to the Divine

Abraham Heschel was a twentieth-century nature mystic who combined an exuberant admiration for nature's transparency to the divine with a keen sense of the importance of human responsibility in the life of faith. His portrait of the self-disciplined life of the pious person will be examined in Part Three's analysis of the role of asceticism, but first Heschel's understanding of the sense of wonder as the "root of knowledge"(11) needs to be introduced. Heschel cites Plato's understanding that philosophy begins in wonder (13) and feels that wonder is the only fitting approach to a world filled with evidence of the sacred.

Like the people living in Plato's famous cave who do not realize that they are only seeing shadows rather than the outside world, Heschel speaks of the courage needed to recognize the "cage" of ordinary human shortsightedness about the sacredness of the world:

> The world in which we live is a vast cage within a maze, high as our mind, wide as our power of will ... But even those who have knocked their heads against the rails of the cage and discovered that life is involved with conflicts which they cannot solve ... that the drive of possessiveness which fills streets, homes and hearts with its clamor and shrill, is constantly

> muffled by the irony of time ... even they prefer to live on the sumptuous, dainty diet within the cage rather than look for an exit to the maze in order to search for freedom in the darkness of the undisclosed. (77)

Without an attitude that wonders at the "ineffable" reality behind the seemingly ordinary, humans remain safely on the shore of the known where the possibility of ecstacy is bartered away in exchange for the security of familiarity. Familiarity may seem like a type of knowledge but often it is a hindrance to a deeper level of awareness not accessible without the humble admission that reality contains depths we rarely plumb. The biologist Edward O. Wilson speaks of a similar concept in scientific research:

> Nothing comes harder than original thought. ... Stick to the coast too tightly and only minor new data will follow. Venture out of sight and you risk getting lost at sea. ... The fate of the overly daring is to sail off the rim of the world. (66)

In order to adopt an attitude of wonder so that the ordinary might be made to reveal the extraordinary, humans must have the courage to leave the shore of the known and risk getting lost in a sea of new awareness in which old meanings make way for a greater depth of consciousness. Heschel calls this level of awareness "the pristine insight into the sacredness of life" and suggests something of a

phenomenologist's approach to pierce through the apparently known into the enigma of deeper realities:

> The sense of the ineffable does not hush the quest of thought, but on the contrary, disturbs the placid and unseals our suppressed impressionability. ... [T]o the minds of those who do not make the universal mistake of assuming as known a world that is unknown, of placing the solution before the enigma, the abundance of the utterable can never displace the world of the ineffable. (15)

The elusive insight into the sacredness of life which modern ecology asks religion to uncover is difficult to get hold of because "the soul rarely knows how to raise its deeper secrets to discursive levels of the mind" (87). Heschel asks us to begin from the perspective of *wonder*, an open-minded, open-hearted attitude of humble amazement at reality's spiritual suggestiveness, and an unwillingness to take anything for granted:

> Wonder goes beyond knowledge. ... Wonder is a state of mind in which we do not look at reality through the latticework of our memorized knowledge; in which nothing is taken for granted. Spiritually we cannot live by merely reiterating borrowed or inherited knowledge. Inquire of your soul what does it know, what does it take for granted. It will tell you only

> no-thing is taken for granted; each thing is a surprise, being is unbelievable. (12)

Through wonder, rather than intellectual curiosity, our search for the divine causes us to see the world around us differently, beginning with the world of nature, in order to begin to sense its further reference point (and the sacredness of the universe):

> To knock timidly at distant gates of silence, inquiring whether there is a God somewhere, is not the way. We all have the power to discover in the nearest stone or tree, sound or thought, the shelter of His often desecrated goodness. ... It is a travail to perceive the unfolding of the divine in this world of strife and envy. Yet a force from beyond our conscience cries at man, reminding and admonishing that the wanton will fail in rebellion against the good. (75-6)

Heschel's nature mysticism is revealed here when he directs us to "the nearest stone or tree" to seek for God. Referring subsequently to the "world of strife and envy" as a place where it is difficult to experience God, he suggests that nature is a more direct course than the human world. And he further offers the poetically powerful solace, to those discouraged by human behavior, that "the wanton will fail in rebellion against the good."

Since the time of early Greek philosophy, and through the influential Scholastic period in the West, logic or

reason or (later) Baconian science has defined and attempted to manipulate reality. The question 'What is that?' has most often been perceived as causing dis-ease, a condition that should be rapidly overcome so that the supposedly more significant question might be asked: 'How is it useful to us?' Heschel asks us to back up to the what-is-that? stage and to appreciate the potential of wonder:

> Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is ... a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of what is ... Wonder rather than doubt is the root of knowledge. ... the business of doubt is one of auditing the mind's accounts about reality rather than a concern for reality itself; it deals with the content of perception rather than with perception itself. (11)
>
> How shall we remain deaf to the throb of the cosmic that is subtly echoed in our souls? The most intimate is the most mysterious. Wonder alone is the compass that may direct us to the pole of meaning. (16)

The state of wonder or radical amazement can lead us then to an awareness of "the throb of the cosmic." Heschel's unique phraseology touches the pulse of a new cosmic perspective in religious understanding. Through a radical openness to all being, we come to hear the "cosmic throb," the heartbeat of Gaia perhaps, that confirms the ultimate oneness of

creation. Observing reality in a sustained state of wonder, we become amazed at its unsuspected depths:

> What we encounter in our perception of the sublime, in our radical amazement, is a spiritual suggestiveness of reality, an *allusiveness* to transcendent meaning. The world in its grandeur is full of a special radiance, for which we have neither name nor concept. (22)

Although Heschel wrote his "philosophy of religion" almost half a century ago, he was far from naive or overly romantic about the reasons for the general human failure to see this "spiritual suggestiveness" in the world of nature. "Most of our attention" he wrote, "is given to the expedient, to that which ... would enable us to exploit the resources of our planet" (36).

Heschel has been, on the one hand, among the most poetic and passionate of this century's nature mystics -- some of his imagery reaching the point were articulation becomes almost suffocated by his ecstatic devotion to the ineffable source of all that is. As he confesses, "[w]e cannot endure the heartbreaking splendour of sunsets" (7). On the other hand, Heschel's prophetic voice, accusing humanity of desecrating the sacred which lies so near the surface of the ordinary, remains a vital critique to today's ecological crisis:

> Dazzled by the brilliant achievements of the intellect in science and technique, we have been deluded into

> believing that we are the masters of the earth and our will the ultimate criterion of what is right and wrong ... We are today beginning to awake from a state of intoxication, from a juvenile happiness with the triumphs of our wisdom. We are beginning to realize in what a sad plight both nature and man would be if they were completely at the mercy of man and his vagaries. (39-40)

Human hubris about our 'brilliant' technological achievements must be balanced with the realization that the human tendency to greed and self-interest are often waiting to take over. In his last years, Heschel was a neighbor and good friend of Reinhold Niebuhr in New York, the Protestant theologian so concerned that American politics remain informed by a religious understanding that recognized human sinfulness as well as celebrated human goodness. In passages like the foregoing, one sees evidence of their common focus on, and struggle against, the human tendency to self-interest. Though encouraging people to be vigilant and to feel guilty about such things has been theologically out of style for several decades, it is likely a necessary step in the conversion process necessary for ecological survival. Heschel asks us not to 'feel good about ourselves' but rather to be horrified at the human potential for destruction:

> Horrified by the discovery of man's power to bring about the annihilation of organic life on this planet, we are today beginning to comprehend that the sense for the sacred is as vital to us as the light of the sun; that the enjoyment of beauty, possessions and safety in civilized society depends upon man's sense for the sacredness of life, upon his reverence for this spark of light in the darkness of selfishness ... (146).

Sadly enough, the human destruction of the planet is largely an act of thoughtlessness rather than of deliberate malice. If we have been 'psychologized' into avoiding anything judgmental, we will not recognize the atmosphere of "the darkness of selfishness" and therefore will not be motivated to seek the spark of light that upholds the sacredness of all life. "Life is concern" (137) Heschel continually insists, and "God is everywhere save in arrogance" (145).

The freedom to enjoy nature's gifts and its transparency to the divine must be balanced by the responsibility of sharing God's concern for the respectful and protective treatment of all the created universe, and by avoiding the arrogance of anthropocentrism. Heschel deplores the situation in which good and evil "which were once as distinguishable as day and night, have become a blurred mist," and the audacity of human beings in trying to shift the responsibility for this situation onto God, "the ultimate Scapegoat" (151-2). The "blurred mist" of

humanity's justification of its ongoing desecration of the natural world, in order to pursue its freedom to satisfy presumably legitimate appetites, easily leads to a shirking of responsibility with the excuse that we cannot "see" what harm is being done by our behaviour.

In a similar vein, Douglas John Hall speaks of "reimagining ourselves" in order to view the real consequences of the freedom of the West to buy and use nature in its presumably unquestionable right to pursue pleasure. He chooses an interesting statistic with which to attempt the arousal of human indignity at the suffering wrought by its blind pursuit of appetite gratification. Every twenty-four-hour day, he points out, citizens of the United States of America consume 2,250 head of cattle in the form of McDonald's hamburgers (1). For Hall, this in itself suggests that "there is something fundamentally wrong with our civilization" and points to a "distorted relationship between human and non-human nature":

> Without asking themselves any questions whatsoever, multitudes on this continent munch their hamburgers, drive their acid-rain-producing vehicles five blocks to the local church or supermarket, pay their taxes to governments ... for "national defense" and all the while imbibe from the "hidden persuaders" yet more exaggerated images of what they and their progeny have a "right" to. (12)

North Americans represent the majority of the "six percent" of the world's population that consumes 40 percent of its raw materials, and as such, Hall questions the underlying assumptions involved in the irresponsible consumerism of the West. He sees the role of such irresponsibility in a modern perspective on the apocalypse:

> There is ... an entirely new factor in the modern apocalypse: the end of the world is ushered in, not by divine intervention or the long-range planning of an ultimately benevolent providence, but by human error, stupidity, malevolence, or the lure of oblivion. When the scientists look for the causes of the bleak prospects they spy through their sophisticated instruments, they do not see an angry or omnipotent Deity but a selfish and myopic biped who has more knowledge than wisdom, and who is almost wholly devoid of mercy. (9-10)

The oblivion to which Hall's myopic biped is lured is a forgetfulness of the reality that all our actions have consequences, and a deliberate or accidental ignorance of science's overwhelming consensus that all entities on earth are ultimately interconnected and therefore interdependent.

Hans Jonas has written on <u>The Imperative of Responsibility</u> in searching for an ethics for the modern technological age. He too fears the apocalypse of the "too

much" that will desolate the planet, and he thinks it might be easier to avert a nuclear disaster than this one because:

> Here averting the disaster asks for a revocation of the whole life-style, even of the very principle of the advanced industrial societies, and will hurt an endless number of interests (the habit interests of all!). (202)

Jonas also recognizes that America "consumes much too great a share of the world's treasures for its prodigal lifestyle" (161); and encourages a "living for the whole" that cannot occur unless there's a willingness to do without (147). Like Skolimowski, he hopes for the return of a spirit of frugality in order to liberate people and the earth from the destructiveness of excessive consumerism. Jonas' understanding of the imperative of human responsibility in a technical age sees care for the future as "the overruling duty of collective human action" (136).

Jonas' search for an appropriate ethics for our age is shared by a number of ecologists and religious writers who draw from many backgrounds their shared concern to awaken a sense of responsibility in the human relationship with the rest of nature. In a 1990 study of ethics of environment and development, Chinese contributors noted that their sages have emphasized that "the building up of ethics ...is ... the cultivation of heart and mind" (Chau 224) as opposed to the cultivation of appetite gratifications. The readoption

of the ancient perennial philosophy of non-greediness will mean a greater willingness to sacrifice, "giving up our possessions in order to help those in need, so that basic human needs will be met universally" and "the prevalent consumeristic way of life will fade away" (Chau 230).

Feminist contributors referred to women's lived understanding of the tie between relationship and responsibility (Salleh 245). Women have usually had less choice about shouldering responsibility, especially for offspring and for the nature that must be "stewarded" in order to provide food, shelter and clothing for their families.[9] As Salleh explains:

> While the UN Economic Commission on Africa found that women and their children produce 70 per cent of the continent's food, are responsible for the transport of that food, and work a 14-16-hour day, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) describes only 5 per cent of them as employed. ... the female half of the world's population owns less than 1 per cent of the

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[9] The history of the development movement has revealed little progress in this regard. Most often, richer countries have agreed to the "male" demands for bigger machines to work in fields, factories or industry, for instance, while concerns about providing good drinking water in a village, or acquiring stoves that use less wood, are relegated to the low (i.e., female) end of the priority list.

world property. Major breadwinners in the Third World, women receive less than 1 per cent of UN aid. (246)

Salleh further cites Selma James' point that "by the logic of the present economy, 'the woman who cleans a house is not "working" but the military man who bombs it, is'." (247) Ultimately Salleh feels that the "unconscious connection between women and nature needs to be made conscious, and she joins ecofeminist Ynestra King in suggesting that "men must stop trying to control nature and join women in identifying with nature" so that the wisdom of 'live simply so that others may simply live' can be recovered (252). This is quite similar to the type of feminism that we will see Gandhi espouse in Part Two of this work, a feminism that celebrates <u>not</u> woman's ability to be like man, but, on the contrary, her greater "natural" ability to relate to the world in a compassionate and responsible manner.

Unfortunately, the "ideal" woman of consumerism's ethos has, in many cases, allowed herself to become as much an object to attract men's appetites as the other objects that the "free" market offers. Decades before the term "ecofeminist" was coined, Gandhi encouraged women to reject any suggestion that they were born to be a plaything for man, and in their new freedom as persons in their own right, to teach men how to shoulder responsibility for their treatment of all other living beings.

Conclusion

The relationship between nature and the sacred has run the gamut from an Augustinian view of diametric opposition to a Heschelian view of their inextricability. Nature mystics of every religious tradition have found nature's transparency to the divine to be the most compelling feature of a spirituality reconnected with life. Through some form of asceticism, mystics have sought transcendence from the world in order to experience greater spiritual freedom. Nature mystics have, at the same time, been keenly aware of the immanence of the divine in the created universe. To experience the vibrant reality of the divine as present in the physical world conflates our awareness of God's immanence and transcendence. Although transcendence is a cherished goal of the mystic, the compassionate soul (e.g., the bodhisattva) wishes to help others find this way to experience the divine, and thus reveals the immanent power of the infinite within the finite. To have recourse to the divine within is to experience a deep level of human freedom in which one's affinity with the infinite lends an exuberant strength and grace to one's struggle to redeem the finite.

Discerning the sacred in nature requires a movement away from seeing it as a mere commodity. As its powers, beauty, complexity and poetry are sensed, a reverence grows for its inherent worth. Abraham Heschel felt that the

cultivation of the sense of wonder was the best tool for reaching this sublime level of perception in which the ordinary becomes luminous with its revelation of the extraordinary. This search for nature's "soul" often leads to an awareness of its being an expansion of one's own soul. At this point, treating nature with respect hardly needs to be dictated as an ethical mandate, since no thinking person would treat an extension of their own soul as a commodity. As a result, realizing the sacred within nature leads to a response to nature that avoids unnecessary injury by accepting a measure of ascetical self-sacrifice for the sake of a higher good.

CHAPTER FOUR: NEO-ASCETICISM AS RELIGION'S GIFT TO ECOLOGY

> Every time we give way to ourselves we may unawares be laying an additional limitation on ourselves, forging our own chain. That is the metaphysical justification for asceticism.
>
> -Gabriel Marcel (26)

Introduction

The popularity of asceticism as a deliberate avenue of purification and integrity has decidedly waned as twentieth-century secularism encouraged the discarding of what were seen as religious negativities. In the affluent West, an increasingly pervasive feel-good-about-yourself Christianity, focuses on Christ's saying that "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," conveniently neglecting the fact that these words were addressed to "all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens" (Mt 11:28-30). And Christ's "do not worry about tomorrow" teaching (Mt 6:25-34) has been used as license to consider only our present pleasure rather than feeling some measure of responsibility about distant problems of various kinds. When measured against the Christian gospel's overall call to compassion, such interpretations sound hollow and self-serving. Yet this perspective persists since it dovetails so neatly with

modern psychology's focus on the individual pursuit to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

The advent of a new century and millenium in which ecological concern cannot be ignored may, however, require the services of a renewed ideal of ascetical living. Some kind of counsel to renunciation has been part of every religion's understanding of pious living, especially for the mystic who craves a closer contact with the reality of the divine. Even without such a goal, however, many ascetics have reaped the rewards of living a self-disciplined, focused life in which worthwhile and difficult goals become more attainable. In its most positive forms, asceticism is simply a methodology for achieving certain higher aims than those available while one remains subject to the various distractions of sensual living. And yet, the image of asceticism as life- or world-negating persists. We must begin, then, with a brief exploration of this tenacious negative view of asceticism.

Asceticism as World-Negating

Most of the great mystics of every religious tradition have believed it necessary to undergo a period of purification in order to prepare for penetration by the spirit of the divine. This self-purification invariably involved some measure of an ascetical renunciation of the

gratification of the senses in order to focus more readily on spiritual verities. In extreme cases, as is well-documented in many historical sources, such purification involved self-inflicted injuries as a penance meant to subdue the ego and make it compliant to the soul's quest for spiritual perfection. A dualistic view in which the "flesh" or "world" were seen as antagonistic to spirit has often been the result, with the further consequence that many spokespersons of religions have disdainfully rejected the concerns of *mundus* as irrelevant. Thus the ascetical renunciations practised by many mystics were sometimes a "holy" rejection of the physical world.

Even a nondualist view, like that of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta school, has its ecological drawbacks. As mentioned earlier, Lance E. Nelson contends that "its potential contribution to environmental ethics has been vastly over-estimated":

> No doubt, Advaita represents a profound spirituality. In positive relation to the interests of ecology, it fosters values such as simplicity of life, frugality, and -- for the ascetic at least -- non-violence. But Advaita also encourages attitudes of devaluation and neglect of the natural universe. ... such attitudes carry the potential to seriously undermine environmental concern. (283)

In other words, the nondualistic notion of the world as one Reality (Brahman) often implies a negation of the physical world as illusory. This ambivalence of Advaita Vedanta's usefulness to an eco-philosophical perspective is probably easily paralleled in a variety of religious traditions that have been touted as THE answer to ecology's prayers. Even when religions have demonstrated ecologically-sound principles, these have often been largely restricted to the realm, as Nelson points out, of the ascetic -- the one whose zeal for the faith requires heroic expression to match its fervour for the infinite.

However, ecology's more-with-less philosophy, or its adherence to Gandhi's notion of "simple living and high thinking" has necessarily implied an ascetical willingness to reduce material wants and to practise self-denial for the sake of the planet and all its inhabitants. The "grace" of realizing the sacredness of nature is to be sought partly through a new asceticism that is motivated by an expanded biocentric consciousness which challenges a narrower anthropocentric view of reality. A human conscience awakened to its new responsibilities as a member of a broader community of living things, necesarily moves to an unburdening of the possessiveness of egoism, and to a simplification of life on the material level, in order to embrace a more altruist approach that considers the needs of others to be as valid as one's own. The self-sacrifice or

other-centredness of altruism engages asceticism as a methodology for freeing up resources to use in addressing the welfare of others. The movement towards the austerity, renunciation and self-denial of "elegant frugality", and away from the greed that feeds the ego's selfish cravings, easily qualifies as a renewed or perhaps "neo-" asceticism that accepts some measure of self-sacrifice for the sake of a higher good. Before such a neo-asceticism is further elaborated, a glance at asceticism's rudiments is in order.

Outward and Inner Asceticism

In the Encyclopedia of Religion, Walter Kaelber notes that the modern word 'asceticism' "has eluded any universally accepted definition" but feels that within a religious context, a certain consensus of definition is possible:

> ... *asceticism* ... in a religious context, may be defined as a voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual, or profane gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred. Because religious man (*homo religiosus*) seeks a transcendent state, asceticism -- in either

> rudimentary or developed form -- is virtually universal in world religion. (441)

After briefly perusing the origins of asceticism, Kaelber goes on to note the "virtually universal" outward forms of historical ascetical practise:

> (1) fasting, (2) sexual continence, (3) poverty, under which may be included begging, (4) seclusion or isolation, and (5) self-inflicted pain, either physical (through such means as whipping, burning, or lacerating) or mental (e.g., contemplation of a judgment day, of existence in hell, or of the horrors associated with transmigration). (442)

These forms are found, to greater or lesser degrees, within different religious contexts (e.g., as Yoga in Hinduism or as monastic discipline in Christianity). The fifth form, self-inflicted pain, is no doubt the most controversial one for modern times, and is precisely the target of popular asceticism-haters like Matthew Fox (more on this later). To address the pathological aspects of this fifth ascetic form is beyond the scope of our focus here, except to note that if athletes and artists can live by the slogan of "no pain, no gain," then it seems rather presumptuous to dismiss all other possibilities of acceptance of "pain" as a way to reach a noble objective. Although asceticism is viewed as an antiquated and dangerous notion by many modern thinkers, it finds its way back into the everyday lives of ordinary

people by way of such commonsense notions as the understanding that "nothing worthwhile is easy to achieve."

Although these outward forms are the most conspicuous aspects of asceticism's history, they are by no means its final expression. Kaelber notes that "inner asceticism", though far more difficult to define, is probably more significant "consisting essentially of spiritual rather than physical discipline":

> Such asceticism ... is reflected in the biblical attitude of being "in the world, but not of it," or in the *Bhagavadgita's* "renunciation in action, rather than renunciation of action." (442)

This is a difficult concept to grasp, especially in the West, but it was one that Gandhi tried to live. Inspired by his devotion to the Gītā, he sought to renounce his attachment to the fruits of his actions while devoting himself fervently to the duty of service. However, the violence and bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims, in spite of his many efforts to foster peace, was a "fruit" he could not ignore and which devastated him to the end.[10]

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[10] This is not to suggest that such violence was Gandhi's fault. And yet, since it occurred, he felt the weight of the failure of his efforts. To agonize over the failure of one's efforts is to be anxious over the fruit of one's actions. And yet compassion for the great human anguish caused by this violence forbade indifference.

In Indian asceticism in particular, a variety of methods (postures, breathing techniques, etc.) help the ascetic to block out the distractions of the outside world, leading, in some cases, to the criticism that inner asceticism is indifferent to the sufferings of other creatures. The same criticism naturally applies to those elements of all religious expression in which the outer world is blocked out to enhance the spiritual life.

As a further development, Kaelber cites Max Weber's term "inner-worldly asceticism" which "abandons specific ascetic activities as well as monastic life to attain salvation in the midst of worldly activity" (444). This is also a type of asceticism to which Gandhi and people like Dag Hammarskjöld adhered, those who found an intense self-discipline and self-scrutiny essential to their functioning as servants and leaders of twentieth-century humanity. In The Sociology of Religion, Weber had contrasted the activism of asceticism with the transcendent contemplation of mysticism, a distinction that has remained controversial (and is too complex to be fully addressed here), but bears interesting implications for asceticism's potential role in all crises that require an ethical human response:

> The ascetic's assurance of grace is achieved when he is conscious that he has succeeded in becoming a tool of his god, through rationalized ethical action completely

> oriented to god.[11] But for the contemplative mystic who neither desires to be nor can be the god's "instrument," but desires only to become the god's "vessel," the ascetic's ethical struggle ... appears to be a perpetual externalization of the divine in the direction of some peripheral function. ... On the other hand, the contemplation of the mystic, appears to the ascetic as indolent, religiously sterile, and ascetically reprehensible self-indulgence -- a wallowing in self-created emotions prompted by the deification of the creaturely. (171)

Weber's contrasting of the mystic and the ascetic is a rather unique perspective that highlights, among other things, asceticism's potential beyond the realm of the purely mystical pursuit of union with God.

No doubt many ecological thinkers are accused of "deification of the creaturely" in their efforts to infuse ecological concern with a vision of the sacred. Weber, in fact, seems to have provided a rather prophetic portrait of the ascetic as potential ecological hero or model:

> From the standpoint of a contemplative mystic, the ascetic appears ... to be forever involved in all the burdens of created things, confronting insoluble

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[11] This sounds like the brand of *karmayoga* in which Gandhi found both his religion and his vocation to work for India's emancipation.

> tensions between violence and generosity, between empirical reality and love. ... But from the converse standpoint of the ascetic, the contemplative mystic appears not to be thinking about god, the enhancement of his kingdom and glory, or the fulfillment of his will, but rather to be thinking exclusively about himself. (171)

To some extent, what we are confronting here is the age-old argument between quietism and activism. The person whose faith becomes central to life is often torn between a desire to "wallow" more or less in the delightful courting of an intimate relationship with the divine, and to respond to the divine with a willingness to be of service in concrete ways. Augustine and Pelagius argued over this, as did Luther and Menno Simons as well as many others from a variety of religious traditions. Often the argument is an internal one, waged within the heart and mind of a faithful soul that does not wish to divide its attention away from the infinite, and yet knows its duty to be of service in the world.

Max Weber's interesting notion of "inner-wordly asceticism" suggests not world-negation, but rather treating life in the world as an arena in which the struggle for an integral life that expresses the compassion of the divine is played out against the backdrop of other religious forces that "wash their hands" of any such contamination with

worldy concerns. According to this view, the ecological crisis in today's world would be a dominant aspect of the arena in which the ascetic must prove his or her mettle as compassionate servant of divine concern. And the mystic who ignores such an issue as too mundane and non-spiritual risks being indifferent to, and therefore alienated from, that same divine concern which extends over the creation that is its expression.

Aversion to Asceticism

Matthew Fox is an example of an influential modern thinker who adamantly refuses to give a place to asceticism in his efforts to infuse ecological efforts with a vision of the sacred. In writing about what he calls creation spirituality in the 1980's, Fox reintroduced Christians and others to a long-standing but much obscured tradition of valuing nature as an expression of God's goodness and immanence in the world.[12] Fox's subsequent popularity

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[12] This focus was, however, hardly new in Catholic thought. As mentioned earlier, William C. French has noted that Thomistic creation theology dominated Catholic thinking during the centuries before Vatican II when Protestant thought had grown increasingly "subject-centered" (i.e., largely focused on the salvation of the individual soul). Vatican II (1960's) ushered in a subsequent era in which Catholic

suggests that his perspective echoed a deeply-felt hunger among North American religious people of various kinds, to celebrate life, the world, nature, and the flesh rather than to denigrate it as so many of their authorities had recommended. This creation spirituality was to be viewed, according to Fox, as an alternative to the fall-redemption theology that had dominated Christianity since the fifth-century writings of Augustine of Hippo. Creation spirituality and nature mysticism have some definite common ground but they also have divergent goals and methodologies.

Fox qualifies his approval of any form of mysticism with the proviso that it must exclude asceticism in order to be positive enough to fit into creation spirituality. He interprets asceticism as a repression or negation of life and nature's beauty, and as basically opposed to things of the spirit. He is, furthermore, absolutely opposed to the dualist's perspective that sees flesh and spirit as antagonistic forces. Creation is a gift and a blessing, to be celebrated and nurtured. However, many of the historical sources he uses were ascetics who believed in depriving themselves of a variety of physical gratifications in order

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theology incorporated certain basic tenets of the modern psychology of the individual. And most recently, a further paradigm shift, thanks to creationists (like Matthew Fox) as well as feminist and liberation theologians, has returned the spotlight to creation-centered thought (49-62).

to sharpen their appetites and appreciation for spiritual joys. To portray a Francis of Assisi, for instance, as joyously laughing with the birds, etc., is only half the picture. Francis himself felt that the deeper joys he sought necessitated the sacrifice of many everyday pleasures that most people took for granted. Leonardo Boff, a recent biographer of Francis, does not shy away from the necessity of Francis' "terrible asceticism" as an aspect of the saint's "channelization" of his passions towards the service of God:

> Mortification, as the etymological meaning of the word suggests, lies in the activity of putting to death the overflowing of the passions so that their creative power may be directed towards holiness and humanization. This was the meaning that Francis gave to privations: the subjugation of the body so that it might be faithful to his plan to serve God in a full and radical way. (21)

Furthermore, in elucidating Francis' great love of poverty as an aspect of his asceticism, Boff indicates the broad implications of a renunciation of "the instinct to power":

> Poverty, fundamentally, does not consist in not having things, because individuals always have things: their body, their intelligence, their clothes, their being-in-the-world. Poverty is a way of being by which the individual lets things be what they are; one refuses to

> dominate them, subjugate them, and make them the objects of the will to power. One refuses to be over them in order to be with them. This demands an immense asceticism of the renunciation of the instinct to power, to the dominion over things, and to the satisfaction of human desires. ... Possession is what engenders the obstacles to communication between human beings themselves and between persons and things. ... Universal fraternity is the result of the way-of-being-poor of Saint Francis. (39)

If Boff's analysis is correct, then Francis' asceticism is extremely relevant to religion and ecology's efforts to move away from an arrogant anthropocentrism and towards a biocentrism that approaches Francis' "universal fraternity". To portray Francis as only joyful -- and to ignore the ascetical-penitential side, is overly selective and ultimately detrimental to ecology's concern to rid humans of their instinct to power and dominion over the earth and its inhabitants.

Thus our concern, in examining Fox's use of ascetical sources, will be threefold: 1) whether a neglect of this aspect of the mystic's spirituality has occurred, 2) whether the picture of the faith hero is accurate without them, and 3) whether a renewed interest in nature mysticism with an ecological perspective <u>needs</u> an ascetical focus. Asceticsm may be the missing link between Fox's style of creation

spirituality and a type of nature mysticism that can be of real succor to those struggling with the ecological crisis.

But first, a brief look at the structure of Fox's creation spirituality, presumably an offshoot of the nature mysticism tradition, beginning with his seminal book, Original Blessings: A Primer in Creation Spirituality. This book is divided into the four paths of an in-depth spiritual journey that Fox sees as supplanting "the three paths -- purgation, illumination, and union -- upon which "Neoplatonic mysticism has based itself" (26). The first path is called the Via Positiva or "befriending creation" and is the celebration of creation's beauties and joys, a panentheistic approach that glorifies the Creator's manifestation through creation. Fox calls into question the validity of the notion of original sin which has been so foundational to Christian theology. He feels that 99% of Christians, including the non-practicing ones, know about original sin "and barely one percent have ever in their lives heard of original blessing" (46) He points out that:

> The concept is not a Jewish one. Even though the Jewish people knew Genesis for a thousand years before Christians, they do not read original sin into it. As the twentieth-century Jewish prophet Elie Wiesel points out, "The concept of original sin is alien to Jewish tradition." This is strong language -- to call a doctrine "alien" that Christians believe they found in

> Jewish scriptures! But today biblical scholars who are themselves Christian agree that original sin is not found in the Bible. (47)

Tied in with the Augustinian pivotal doctrine of original sin is a denigration of women since it was supposedly Eve who was fooled by the serpent's argument and then she in turn persuaded Adam to follow her in this original sin of disobeying God. In Christian theology since Augustine, woman has decidedly borne the lion's share of the blame for this monumental transgression; and in Catholicism in particular it was only through the compensating factor of the Virgin Mary's exceptional blessedness that woman's image was at all redeemed. The story of how "Augustine mixed his doctrine of original sin up with his peculiar notions about sexuality" (48) is an interesting one, but peripheral here.

The Via Positiva views women as well as men, nature, creation and all of life's elemental pleasures as positive expressions of "Dabhar," of God's creative energy. Fox brings together a plethora of sources to substantiate this view, and contrasts it with the old Catholic understanding of sin as something to be tested by asking "Did you take pleasure in it?":

> The lesson learned, that the taking of pleasure is the sign of sin, plays havoc with any temptations one might have to entertain a biblical, blessing theology. That constantly-used word in wisdom literature, "delight,"

> is replaced ... by that word ... "sin." The fall/redemption spiritual theologian Tanquerry begrudgingly talks in a rare instance about pleasure, and says: "The moderate enjoyment of pleasure if referred to its end -- moral and supernatural -- is not an evil." It strikes me, however, that this sense of puny-minded pleasure is not pleasure at all! Why must pleasure be limited to being "moderate"? It is my experience that ecstasy is quite grand. (52-3)

Fox makes clear, however, that the Via Positiva is incomplete without the complementary forces of the other three paths. Fox's effort to debunk the doctrine of original sin from its prominent place in Christian theology is laudably aimed at moving away from the attitude that creation is flawed from its origins.[13]

The Via Negativa (path II: befriending darkness, letting go, letting be) stresses that suffering is not to be sought, but neither is it to be shunned. It is not considered redemptive, as in fall-redemption theology, but is nonetheless valuable, inescapable and character-building if embraced and lived <u>through</u>. To Fox's credit, the common error of identifying his "creation spirituality" only with a

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[13] W.C. French believes this to be a major factor in the Vatican's (Ratzinger's) silencing of Fox calling his failure to stress the doctrine of original sin "dangerous and deviant" (63, note 44).

celebration of life is one committed more by readers with their own agendas. He cautions, for example, against using drugs, alcohol, soap operas or shopping (141) to escape the pain of life. In general he also cautions against blocking out or distracting pain by allowing life to be too full of superficial pleasures -- pain is to be met head on. Though not identified as such by Fox, seeing the "good" in pain and avoiding the mindless pleasures that distract from it is an approach that is akin to asceticism. Fox identifies five ways that pain can be beneficial:

1) helps us to understand other people's pain (143),

2) helps us to understand and criticize pleasure, and increases our appreciation for the true pleasures in life which are the simplest, shareable kind (143-4),

3) energizes us by toughening us up, makes us stronger by testing us: "A new kind of strength ... the strength that solitude requires, the strength that vulnerability is about." (145)

4) pain links us with others, therefore "All social movements and organizations were born of pain" and "Nonviolence is born of the shared experience of the pain of violence" (145),

5) pain energizes us by opening us up -- pain as a cosmic experience. Suffering accompanies all significant "birthings" in the universe. (145)

Fox advocates, then, letting pain be pain, at least for a while, in order to ultimately let go of pain (147). "[T]he Via Positiva" he writes in a crucial statement, "is cheapened without the Via Negativa and the Via Negativa without the Via Positiva becomes sick asceticism ... " (154). He reinforces the necessity of accepting pain by quoting Gandhi as saying "To make any progress we must not make speeches and organize mass meetings but be prepared for *mountains of suffering*."

As this quote suggests, Gandhi was an enthusiastic ascetic (as shall further become evident in part two of this work). In order to tap the energies he needed for his immense projects of Indian personal and national liberation, he not only accepted the suffering that fell into his path, but he deliberately sought out all kinds of suffering (e.g., fasts, sexual abstinence, silent days, strenuous walking and menial labor) designed to discipline himself towards selfless service to humankind. This is an example of the problem with Fox's apparent prejudice against asceticism. Gandhi is among the ones whose "negative" ascetical side is not taken seriously although it is acknowledged. As part of the Via Negativa, creation spirituality is also concerned with suffering and salvation (158-9). Clinging is sin in the Via Negativa (Hindu, Buddhist detachment/asceticism) and Fox focuses especially on the sins of addiction in the consumer society (160), a focus that is suggestive of an

ascetical reduction of wants in the face of an enticing marketplace.

In the third path, the Via Creativa (befriending creativity, befriending our divinity), creativity is seen as divine (182). But it can destroy us as well:

> ...if not in the form of nuclear war, then in the form of multiplication of McDonald's hamburger stands and agribusiness conglomerates... Consumerism after all is a kind of creativity, albeit a perverse one. (182)

Art becomes a meditation in the Via Creativa; it becomes a way to the experience of the holy. Fox further points out that our industrial/consumeristic society has squeezed out authentic art (191). In realistically assessing the self-discipline necessary for the creation of art (or other acute levels of accomplishment, understanding, etc.) Fox insists that although discipline is a must, asceticism is the wrong approach (201).

Fox cites Francis of Assisi extensively as a prime example of a creative spirit, but as mentioned earlier, neglects the integral aspect of Francis'asceticism. As Boff points out:

> Whoever tries to romantically imitate Saint Francis in his love for nature without passing through asceticism, denial, penitence, and the cross falls into a deep illusion. ... Only he or she is able, without falling into empty words, to call fire one's brother destroyer,

> water a humble and chaste sister, the agony and illness of death one's sister who, by means of an arduous penance and a profound stripping, has removed all of the obstacles placed between the individual and all creatures. It was at the end and not at the beginning of his life that Francis composed the hymn to Brother Sun. To begin where Francis ended is a disastrous illusion. Making the effort to retrace the path, in great humility, trying to become one with things, especially the smallest, is to feed the hope that perhaps our world may also be transformed and may reveal its fraternal and filial character. (40)

According to Boff, then, the creativity of Francis' way, for example his famous poem praising creation as aspects of God, simply cannot be cut off from his ascetical way of life. The Greek noun *askesis*, from which the English asceticism is derived, was an athletic term meaning practice, training or discipline. When an accomplished athlete displays his or her skills in front of an audience, an important part of the goal is to achieve an apparent effortlessness, a smooth, almost automatic execution of a difficult feat. In the same way, Boff suggests that the rigorous ascetical training that preceded Francis' joyful celebration of even nature's

scariest elements (e.g, death), was essential to the level of nature mysticism that he "achieved"[14].

Fox observes that "we discipline by way of love, not by way of threat, intimidation or control" and, in the next sentence he equates asceticism with this latter way (205-6). The objection must be raised that authentic asceticism can never be imposed by others. It is the voluntary taking on of a yoke, for the sake of a greater good than the pleasure that is being sacrificed. Fox's example of the pianist is a good one: the accomplished pianist usually puts in many back-breaking, eye-straining, finger-swelling hours to hone her/his skills. But as Fox says "all this pain is not counted."(206) He insists therefore that it is not called "mortification" or "asceticism" but rather "discipline," a loving activity that brings out the best in us. Perhaps this is only a semantic battle, but Fox refuses to acknowledge that accepting pain as a necessary way to a goal <u>is</u> asceticism. And with the ban-all-pain mentality of a

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[14] One hesitates to use the notion of achievement, bearing in mind the God-given grace aspect of the illumination experiences of Francis and other mystics. However, in the majority of these mystics' lives, such a grace was not given until they had deliberately and sometimes painfully cast out of their lives the various distractions that prevented the awareness of the "beatific vision" which is presumably always available for the asking.

consumer society inundated with advertising pressures, the potential benefits of the whole ascetical tradition for the various crises of our times, especially ecology, is undermined. Fox writes:

> An ascetic spirituality is a kind of mechanistic spirituality: behind rules of self-abnegation there lies a hidden assumption that something good will result from not indulging in pleasure[15], that by controlling matter we somehow arrive at divinity. (206-7)

In fact, most world religions teach a measure of self-abnegation in order to make contact with the Self, ultimate Reality, or God. Both the Bhagavad Gītā and the "Sermon on

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[15] The self-sacrifice and self-denial of both dieters and athletes, to name only two common examples of people who accept suffering in order to reach their goals, easily attests to the realities of the colloquial saying: "no pain, no gain". The entire Yoga systems of Indian asceticism provide a larger example. Artists and intellectuals of various kinds have also often clung tenaciously to a life of relative deprivation in order to be free to pursue their art, or truth, or other noble goals. Indian asceticism recognizes study, for example, as an important area in which our preferences and pleasures must be sacrificed for higher aims. And yet Fox dismisses the possibility of something good resulting from "not indulging in pleasure."

the Mount", for instance, counsel the putting aside of the present pursuit of one's own happiness, or the acceptance of painful duties, or unsought but largely inescapable and difficult situations in life, in order to reach the eternal bliss of a final liberation in conscious union with the divine. Though commendable on other levels, Fox's efforts to eradicate the virtue of humility from the Christian understanding of human goodness, poses a serious threat to the hopes of an ecological *ahiṁsā* which Gandhi defined (as shall be further elaborated in part two) as "the farthest limit of humility" (Autobiography 454). To move from anthropocentrism to biocentrism, is, in fact, nothing more nor less, than for humans to adopt a position of greater humility vis-a-vis their relationship to other living creatures including the earth itself.

Fox further objects to traditional Christian theology of the cross, and prefers a perspective in which the cross is mainly seen as "labor pains for the birthing" of Christ's eternal life (239-44). Fox's Via Negativa says you must never seek out a painful experience, only find the grace available in the unavoidable ones. However, Christians view Jesus as freely choosing the way of the cross. In choosing to accept the cross, to submit himself to it, he did what he understood to be unavoidable in God's plan, but he nonetheless chose this painful route; and he left such

choosing behind as a condition of discipleship.[16] In ordinary human life we are continually asked to choose between the easy and the difficult. Is all choosing of the difficult "masochistic"? Or is it rather in choosing the difficult or challenging that human beings grow, change and aim towards the actualizing of their potential? The ecological challenge, as well, calls for many daily rejections of the easy, pleasant and convenient in favour of the courageous shouldering of the often inconvenient and difficult path of ecological integrity, a path that ultimately leads to deeper joys than anticipated.

The fourth and last of Matthew Fox's paths of creation spirituality is called the Via Transformativa and is essentially a metanoia or conversion to compassion process. After discussing the importance of the Via Creativa, Fox cautions that "our creativity *in all instances* is to be put to the use of compassion" (p.247, emphasis mine). This is an amazing statement -- not that our creativity can or might be put to the use of compassion, but that it is to be put to that use "in all instances." As Fox points out:

> Much creativity, after all, went into Hitler's ovens for efficient human extermination at Auschwitz; and an

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[16] "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mt 16:24, also Mk 8:34 and Lk 9:23).

> immense amount of creativity and skill goes into planning and building a Trident submarine today. (247)

Fox is not naive, then, about the potential for destructive creativity or even the hidden destructiveness of seemingly benign creativity. The acid test seems to be the element of compassion. He believes that every person can respond to a prophetic call to transform the world from slavery and bondage to freedom and justice (261). Fox contrasts this compassionate use of creativity with asceticism's supposedly narrow focus on personal or "privatized" (298) salvation. He concludes that:

> [The Via Transformativa] ... is happening all around us, in and out of church structures, wherever people are responding to the call of the spirit to compassionate living, to simpler lifestyles and letting go of surplus things. (305)

But greed, which Fox cites as the cause of ecological sins (296), has often been precisely the target of asceticism's fervour. As previously discussed, the pursuit of a simpler lifestyle, through the painful break from greedy consumerism, is asceticism at its best.

Fox is clearly not devoid of this important link in his thinking, and is to be commended for many insights into the positive potential of sacrifice and suffering. And yet some skeletal remains of the history of a pathological and masochistic asceticism prevent him from recognizing the

dangers of throwing out this precious "baby" of asceticism as the athleticism of an integrated faith -- with the "bath water" of the sometimes mistaken human use of this invaluable tool. Fox's "Family Tree of Creation-Centered Spirituality" (his Appendix A) is rife with ascetical mystics from John of the Cross to Julian of Norwich to Teresa of Avila, to name but a few, whom he insists are misinterpreted as ascetics, or for whom asceticism was presumably an unfortunate addendum to their otherwise positive spirituality.

In The Coming of the Cosmic Christ, Fox uses the concept of the Cosmic Christ as a universal divine principle which can supposedly be adapted to many faiths. He claims that such a living cosmology has "the power to launch an era of what I call[17] deep ecumenism ... the movement that will unleash the wisdom of all world religions" (228). He equates the notion of the cosmic Christ with Buddhism's understanding of "the buddha nature" (231-2), and endorses (without mentioning him) Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's well-known dictum that "making mysticism central to our faith again" (233) is the key to religious and world harmony. Again the foundational commonality of asceticism in the mystical traditions of most world religions is overlooked.

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[17] This book was published in 1988 and Fox claims ("what I call") to be inventing what amounts to religious pluralism by giving it his own label of "deep ecumenism"!

Echoing Gandhi, Fox sees the outcome of such "authentic ecumenism" not as abandoning one's tradition but as demanding more of it (236). He concedes that:

> ... it may still be that, because of the sins of Christians toward persons of other faiths over the centuries, the term "Cosmic Christ" carries too much baggage with it that might hinder deep ecumenism. If that is the case, there is another phrase which carries a similar message: "Cosmic Wisdom." ... I prefer the term "Cosmic Christ" because I am a Westerner ... (243)

Although Fox is somewhat remiss in naming the founders or sources for the interreligious dialogue or cosmic consciousness that he is advocating in this book[18], he nonetheless performs the invaluable service of calling Christians to a wider perspective that is more inclusive of other faith expressions. However Christianity remains as Fox's framework, and other sources are presumably content to be interpreted through its sieve of wisdom.

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[18] In many ways this was already admirably done this century by the publication of Aldous Huxley's The Perennial Philosophy in 1944. In this seminal book, the asceticism that bolsters the perennial philosophy of seeking a life of integrity that leads to union with the divine is continually, if often implicitly, hailed as the rock upon which authentic mysticism is built. See especially chapter VI, "Mortification, Non-Attachment, Right Livelihood".

Leonardo Boff, in contrast, recognizes that the wisdom of seeking out a way of living that manifests one's inner convictions, crosses interreligious boundary lines; and intersects at all the critical junctures in which a healthy, altruistic asceticism is adopted as a means to an integrated and compassionate life:

> All spiritual masters lived and preached a life of poverty as an ascetic way of liberating the spirit of the instinct to possess and the drive to enjoy material goods. This virtue is not specifically Christian. It is imposed as a demand for any spiritual ascent and any true creativity in any dimension of the "poetic." Poverty as a virtue is situated somewhere between the scorn of goods and their affection. It deals with moderate and sober use of goods, which may vary in accordance with places and cultures, and whose meaning, however, is always retained: the freedom of the spirit for the works of the spirit, which are freedom, generosity, prayer, cultural creativity. Poverty-asceticism signifies wisdom of life. The opposite of this form of poverty is prodigality and irresponsible waste. To make an option for poverty, within this understanding, translates into an ecological mentality, responsible for all the goods of nature and culture, for a sober and anticonsumeristic life, in the face of

> a society of production for production's sake and consumerism for consumerism's sake. (62-3)

Although focused on Francis of Assisi, Boff's portrait here could easily be a description of Gandhi as well. One wonders, in fact, if Boff's view of Francis has not been creatively blurred with the Gandhian ideals of this century. Gandhi also felt that all religions are equally valid as ways to the divine so long as they manifest an inherent humility that leads to respectfulness towards other faiths, and an altruisitic compassion that passionately demands the sacrifice of all personal preferences for the sake of the welfare of all.

Conclusion

Asceticism has been both embraced and shunned by a variety of seekers after wisdom and mystical oneness with the divine. Observing the hypocrisy, egotism and arrogance that has attended various ascetical strains throughout the history of most religions, reformers (like Gautama Buddha) have often rejected ritualized ascetical practices in particular, in favour of works of compassion and service.

At the same time, many of the most revered leaders of humanity have found that a serious measure of personal asceticism was necessary to keep them focused and energized towards the issues to which they were devoted. As greed is

such a common factor in oppressive systems of power and injustice, the asceticism of a greed-consuming self-denial was also often recommended, whether directly or not, as a potent weapon for undermining evil. Altruism implies an ascetical restraint of self-centered whims to make room for its other-centered focus.

Outward forms of asceticism have been most suspect as having dubious motivations. Matthew Fox's popularized version of 'creation spirituality' is largely viewed as one-sidedly opposed to all such forms. A closer examination of his ideas reveals, however, a more profound appreciation of the "Via Negativa" than he is normally given credit for. The "popular" interpretation of Fox tends to overlook this side of his extensive work. As W.C. French verifies, creation theology is no stranger to Catholic thinking.

As Boff wrote of Francis, many faith heroes felt the necessity of taking on a "terrible" outward asceticism in order to harness the inner resources needed to carry out their divinely-inspired missions. Ultimately Mohandas K. Gandhi probably qualifies more as an inner-worldly ascetic as per Max Weber's perspective in which, unlike the contemplative mystic, the ascetic finds the fulfillment of his or her spiritual essence and vocation in serving and loving the world. A Gandhian form of neo-asceticism may prove to be among religion's greatest gift to modern ecology.

PART TWO: GANDHI'S KHĀDĪ SPIRIT AS THE SOUL OF ECOLOGY

> If we have the khadi spirit in us we should serve ourselves with simplicity in every walk of life. ... Khādī spirit means fellow-feeling with every living being on earth. It means the complete renunciation of everything that is likely to harm our fellow creatures ... - Gandhi, 1927 (Collected Works [CW] 34:520)

Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand ("Mahatma") Gandhi's (1869-1948) name has long been associated, as mentioned earlier, with the notion of "simple living and high thinking" which has recently also gained importance as an ecological guideline. Gandhi's convictions about the immense physical, social and moral benefits of simple living were born of his economic thought, and the underlying ideals for this thought were drawn from his religious convictions. The self-purification he advocated, in order to observe the law of nonviolence towards all living things, occurred on several levels. On the physical level he encouraged a natural and simple life, including daily participation in "bread labour", in order to become as resourceful, responsible and healthily contented as possible. On the social level, his concern was to see India's poor millions meaningfully and gainfully employed by discouraging an industrialism that displaced the handicrafts and cottage industries which had previously provided their

livelihoods. And on the spiritual level, the conscientiousness, compassion and ascetical reduction of wants that Gandhi encouraged, combined with his pluralistic regard for the truth of all major religions, led to a 'cosmic' religion in which humanity could only find fulfilment and liberation by living harmoniously and respectfully with all other living entities.

For Gandhi, however, the physical, social and spiritual aspects of life could not be separated. The individual search for *mokṣa*, salvation or liberation, was the still point round which the concentric circles of physical, social and spiritual life were enacted. His Autobiography states:

> What I want to achieve -- what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years -- is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. (14)

At the nucleus, then, of this gravitational field of the individual human life, is the search for *moksa* which enlivens as well as constrains the range of human actions. Gandhi's message of ultimate human liberation was permeated throughout by his fervent desire to constrain and restrain the egoistic human tendencies that generally prefer a violent grasping of immediate gratification to the disciplined submission to the yoga of a cosmic consciousness. Though broad and presumably all-

encompassing, such a consciousness cannot accommodate the violence of a narrow, egoistic perspective which wantonly injures or destroys other lives in order to grasp immediate pleasures for itself. The arrogance of disregard for the suffering bespeaks an egoism that precludes both human compassion and divine concern.

Although Gandhi died in 1948, before earth's ecosystem was widely viewed as being in crisis, his own *sādhana*, his way to the *mokṣa* that he continually sought, was a way of living that embodied sound ecological principles. His notion of the "khādī spirit", a spirit of simplicity, renunciation and compassion, is especially relevant for modern ecology's more-with-less approach. Gandhi respected the interconnectedness of all of life, and he recognized the mind-, spirit-, and body-polluting effects of excessive materialism. The *ahiṁsā* that was at the center of all his work was based on this interconnectedness, an identification with all that lives:

> To see the all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. ... Identification with all that lives is impossible without self-purification; without self-purification the observance of the law of *Ahiṁsā* must remain an empty dream ... (Autobiography 453)

CHAPTER FIVE:

GANDHIAN ECONOMICS AND THE SIMPLIFICATION OF LIFE

Gandhi's life and thought have been studied from many angles, and he has been both praised and criticized by a broad range of thinkers in the political, religious and socio-economic spheres. For Gandhi, the economic and the spiritual were always intertwined since ideals were meaningless without their pragmatic manifestations. He spoke, for instance, of a khādī (homespun cotton) "spirit"; and he advocated "bread labour" as a concrete way of living out a day-to-day program of non-violence and seeking truth. However, the simplicity he had in mind included a highly-developed consciousness of multi-faceted human and non-human needs, interactions and goals.

Although Gandhi's khādī spirit called for "fellow-feeling with every living being on earth," it did not necessarily translate into equitable treatment for India's poor in the decades following his death in 1948. As Mario Carvalho has stated:

> ... in respect to the Gandhian "Khādī Spirit" ... serious issues that resulted ... [included] moral justice, the attitude to family size and education, the negation of life, self-denial and the perpetuation of patriarchy. Such asceticism can I believe be

> regressive and negates the spirit of emancipation of freedom and pursuit of life.[19]

Carvalho's critique of the negative affects of Gandhian khādī spirit is based on extensive experience of post-Gandhian India, and is echoed by other critics ranging from the forces that favored India's industrialization to the outcastes or "Untouchables" class, whose overall situation has hardly improved since Gandhi's time. This latter group, whom Gandhi dubbed "*Harijan*," children of God, have become increasingly frustrated at the mounting inequities that have restricted their roles to the most subservient functions of Indian society.

From the point of view of the oppressed classes, Gandhi did not go far enough in condemning the injustices that kept them largely enslaved. Nothing short of a denunciation of the caste system, a step which Gandhi largely resisted, would suffice to address this issue. A 1994 news item from New Delhi speaks of the "*Dalits*'" rejection of Gandhi's approach in this regard:

> Gandhi's ... role as the revered and saintly "father of the nation" is being challenged by leaders of the people he called Harijans or children of God -- the

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[19] Quoted from a November 8, 1995 letter to Dr. Kenneth Hughes at the University of Manitoba. Dr. Carvalho is from the Department of City Planning in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba.

> Untouchables. Now calling themselves Dalits -- the Oppressed -- the leaders of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which was swept to power in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh last year, have denounced Gandhi as "the biggest enemy of the Dalits". ... [T]heir hero [is] the late Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar ... the Untouchable who beat the system by going to the United States and Britain, becoming a brilliant lawyer and drafting India's constitution. ... For much of his life [Gandhi] believed in caste as an orderly system of doing one's duty and "following one's father's calling" which would protect India from the greed and venality of the West. But as a result of his long dispute with Ambedkar, he gradually accepted that the rigid caste system was unjust, and he even advocated inter-caste marriages.[20]

Although it is not within the range of this thesis to gauge the ongoing effect of the khādī movement on the social and economic development of India's poorer classes[21], the

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[20] John Rettie in New Delhi, Manchester Guardian Weekly newspaper, April 24, 1994.

[21] The larger question of Gandhi's whole approach to caste is also beyond the range of the present work. Gandhi always preferred organic growth to the "slash and burn" approach, and he may have been too tolerant, as a result, of the tenacious injustice inherent in the ancient Hindu system of caste.

potential misuse of Gandhi's khadi spirit ideal is not to be overlooked. Although he believed that this spirit meant the complete renunciation of all that is likely to harm one's fellow creatures, such renunciation has continued to be more forced on the poor than enacted by the rich.

In suggesting Gandhi's khadi spirit as the potential "soul" of modern ecology, we focus here instead on the soft technology approach advocated as a result -- a technology that aims for minimum destruction of nature and maximum human resourcefulness. Gandhi's two main ideals, *ahiṁsā* and *satyagraha*, unfolded into a broad range of pragmatic concerns, including the best use and management of limited natural resources and, in India's case, abundant human resources. In his autobiography, Gandhi described his whole life as a series of experiments conducted in pursuit of an integrity of living which revived the ancient Hindu ideals of physical austerity and spiritual magnanimity as avenues to profound human compassion and joy. The way of life that allowed such integrity for Gandhi turns out to be an ecologically healthy one. Klaus Klostermaier calls Gandhi "an articulate 'ecologist' in an era which did not seem to have much use for such thoughts":

> His own tradition -- a Vaisnavism strongly influenced by Jainism -- predisposed him towards respect for all life. His endeavour to develop -- both for himself and others -- a fully integrated philosophy of life, in

> which rightful needs were balanced with deeply understood universal duties made him think already a century ago of the balance between economy and ecology. While his attempts to found self-sufficient rural settlements may have failed ... and while his ideal of an India consisting of 500,000 self-sufficient villages may have been unrealistic from its very beginning, his search for economies that were both indigenous and soft, that satisfied the needs of people and also left the environment intact, his example of frugality and reduction of demands and wants in all areas (his principle of "plain living and high thinking") have inspired many people and have led to realistic concepts of "Gandhian economics". (Klostermaier, "Possible Contributions ..." 42)

"Gandhian economics" was originally mainly aimed at the economic revival of India's poor, especially in preparation for the Indian home rule sought by the end of Britain's occupation of the country. Gandhi sought a revival of a thorough-going self-reliance attainable through better agricultural methods and a renewal of traditional handicrafts to both supplement incomes and to remove the idleness of unemployment that presented many dangers to India's stability. But he sought such pragmatic goals against the above-mentioned backdrop of the larger ideal of "a fully integrated philosophy of life in which rightful

needs were balanced with deeply understood universal duties". Klostermaier has captured in a nutshell the profound implications of Gandhian thinking for ecological concern. Khādī spirit is probably a succinct Gandhian microcosm of that philosophy.

By Gandhi's time, Indian homespun cotton, "khādī", which had for centuries clothed the nation, had been replaced by British factory-manufactured textiles and as a result, the ancient Indian arts of spinning and weaving had been all but forgotten. By reviving both the hand production of Indian khādī and a renewed Indian preference for it over imported cloth, Gandhi hoped to provide not only some work and income for the vast millions of India's peasants, but also a heightened sense of personal and national self-respect in appearing in front of the world clad exclusively in what Indian hands had made with pride and skill.

Khādī became for Gandhi a symbol of breaking away from addictions to an artificial-for-India European lifestyle that downgraded local products and craftspeople by cultivating tastes for supposedly more "refined" products and behaviour. Gandhi himself had been highly susceptible to such thinking as a young adult training in England to be a lawyer. And it was only after a complex metamorphic process that he came to adamantly prefer such 'simple' Indian-made products as coarse khādī to the "fineries of

Regent Street." As this complex process unfolded, Gandhi realized that such choices had far-ranging ethical implications and could not be ignored as merely practical questions without abdicating the responsibilities inherent in the right to make these choices.

In encouraging a "complete renunciation of everything that is likely to harm our fellow creatures", the khādī spirit is a call to a reassessment of ways of living previously considered benign. Such a reassessment demands, on the first level, a complexification of approach that uncovers the subtle or indirect effects of behaviours in which many people in a given society engage without reflection. According to the Hindu karmic view firmly espoused by Gandhi, all human actions have consequences. Decisions that seem, for example, purely economic, like purchasing manufactured goods, actually have a wideranging effect according to the materials used for production, the intended longevity and means of disposal of the product, and which people or nations will benefit or suffer from the choice. One supports or rejects a certain ethos as well by the way that one provides for life's needs and wants. Gandhi persistently questioned the "spirit" behind every human choice and behaviour, tirelessly encouraging the fellow-feeling of khādī spirit.

However, the "simplicity in every walk of life" that Gandhi recommended was clearly different from a culpable

form of naivety or ignorance, in which it is considered "simpler" to leave things as they are than to unearth potentially highly-challenging realities that lurk beneath the surface of a complacent way of life. Like Henry David Thoreau, Francis of Assisi and many others, Gandhi was a powerful advocate of the benefits of "the simpler life". A greater depth of approach may be attributable to Gandhi, however, in that his life and thought revealed the challenging and dynamic complexity of this seemingly simple approach.

All real growth and development is ultimately a complexification on a certain profound level even if it wears the guise of a simplification on the most outward level. To discard material things upon which one used to depend, for example, requires a thorough reassessment of the complexities of that dependence as well as a multi-levelled plan of attack on the dependency's hold over one's life. Then there are the interests of the producers and sellers of these material things to be considered. Naturally, as an element of furthering their own survival, they would tend to discourage the process of gaining one's independence in this regard. Gandhi's notion of khādī spirit engages all these levels of human economic activity and its ramifications on the ethico-spiritual realm. Economics as a broad *oikonomia*, as a way of living that is conscious and respectful of the vast household of all living creatures on

earth, was what Gandhi called "real economics", an economics complexified by a broad range of moral and ethical concerns.

Gandhi as Ecological Model

As early as 1916 Gandhi wrote "in so far as we have made the modern materialistic craze our goal, in so far are we going downhill in the path of progress" (CW 13:314). For him, progress and materialism were on divergent paths. Although Gandhi was a profoundly religious person who feared the ill effects of materialsim, he nonetheless addressed many material concerns. From latrine-cleaning to dietary issues to the hand-spinning of Indian-grown cotton, as well as his own intensive political involvements, Gandhi saw no discrepancy or dichotomy between these and the religious aspects of his life and thought. In criticizing "the modern materialistic craze," therefore, Gandhi was far from shunning the most rudimentary concerns of physical existence. His was not a life-negating religious outlook that dismissed physical concerns as illusory or insignificant, but drew instead from the Hindu understanding of *dharma* as encompassing all of life's real concerns.

Shortly after Gandhi's return to India from South Africa in 1914, he addressed the Muir College Economics Society in Allahadad on the subject of "real economics", discussing whether economic progress clashes with real or

moral progress. Citing the scientific understanding that "there is no such thing as perfect rest or repose in this visible universe," he went on to postulate that "If therefore material progress does not clash with moral progress, it must necessarily advance the latter" (CW 13:312). In other words, "material progress" and "moral progress" cannot help but affect each other, either for better, or for worse. Conceding that "no one has ever suggested that grinding pauperism can lead to anything else but moral degradation," he questioned whether affluence, on the other hand, guaranteed moral integrity.[22]

As the Gandhian economic thinker E.F. Schumacher pointed out: "There are poor societies which have too little; but where is the rich society that says: 'Halt! We

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[22] A similar point is made by Klaus Klostermaier in his article on mokṣa and critical theory. "Liberation thinking" is rightly concerned to alleviate economic-politico-social domination:

> ...but only to the extent to which it is a hindrance to freedom. If lack of adequate food and shelter and excessive physical work are forms of unfreedom, that does not mean that excess of food, luxurious dwelling, and absence of physical work constitute the ultimate freedom.

-from "Moksa and Critical Theory" in Philosophy East and West 35, no.1 (Jan. 1985) University of Hawaii Press, p. 69.

have enough'? There is none." (Small Is Beautiful 19) Gandhi reminded his audience that many historical societies "suffered a moral fall" once wealth became abundant and he saw this phenomenon as continuing in the "disease of materialism" evidenced in the affluent Western nations:

> That you cannot serve God and Mammon is an economic truth of the highest value. We have to make our choice. Western nations today are groaning under the heels of the monster-god of materialism. Their moral growth has become stunted. ... American wealth ... is the envy of the other nations. I have heard many of our countrymen say that we will gain American wealth but avoid its methods. ... such an attempt ... is foredoomed to failure. (CW 13:314-5)

American wealth remains, according to the thinking of many developmentalists in particular, a synonym for utopia in addressing third world problems. Gandhi was an early pioneer in rejecting the American developmental model for India's economic revival, a model whose dubious methods had already been viewed as negative by many influential Indians. In his famous insistence on the necessity of observing a purity of means, rather than overlooking unscrupulous means which supposedly were justified by desirable ends, Gandhi excluded as an ideal a system of wealth whose means remained insensitive to those who suffered unjustly as a result.

"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" observed Henry David Thoreau of American society in the 1840's and 50's (32)[23], and Gandhi did not view such lives as enviable. Clearly American wealth had not procured the overall happiness of the populace. Thoreau, of course, was one of Gandhi's early mentors, along with Tolstoy and Ruskin. It is most commonly believed that it was Thoreau's notion of non-violent resistance or civil disobedience that inspired the beginnings of Gandhi's *satyāgraha* movement.[24]

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[23] At this relatively early stage in the industrialization process, Thoreau already observed that:

> Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious and superfluously coarse labors of life that its inner fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that (30).

[24] Judith M. Brown questions the credit given to Thoreau on this account, and says that Gandhi "did not read Thoreau's work on civil disobedience until he was in gaol for that offence. ... it [*satyāgraha*] was not so much the result of ideology but of sheer necessity ..." in Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989),p.55. As differentiated from Thoreau's notion of passive resistance, Brown points out:

And since *satyāgraha* was so central, especially to his political methodology, the potential influence of Thoreau's economic ideas in Walden have been much less highlighted. However, in Walden, Thoreau describes his taking on of a life of voluntary simplicity in a precise and conscious way in order to free himself from the necessity of excessive, mind-distracting toil in supporting a more extravagant lifestyle. In other words, Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond was precisely one of plain living and high thinking. Perhaps the first American person of letters, along with R.W. Emerson, to mention his ongoing study of the Gita and other eastern texts (e.g., Walden 120), Thoreau advocated simplifying life to avoid its being "frittered away by detail:"

> ... Gandhi argued that the Indians [in South Africa in 1906] were using what he called 'soul force' rather than passive resistance: it was the power of courageous, loving spirit, pitted against the wrong.... It was based on a belief in 'the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person' ... In order to avoid confusion he organized a competition through Indian Opinion to find a name for what the Indian community was doing. The outcome was the name, satyagraha, from the words for truth and firmness, which he used thereafter, sometimes in English using alternately 'truth force' or 'soul force'. (Ibid., p.55-6)

> Simplicity ... I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand ... Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. ... The nation itself ... is ... an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it as for them is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. (115-16)

Such a rigid personal economy of embracing poverty was enthusiastically adopted by Gandhi who further pointed out that "the greatest teachers of the world ... Jesus, Mohamed, Buddha, Nanak, Kabir, Chaitayna, Shankar, Dayanand, Ramakrishna" had done the same (CW 13:314). Thoreau had acknowledged earlier that "[w]ith respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meagre life than the poor" (38). Wisdom, then, which is hopefully antithetical to "simple-mindedness" and complex in its perceptions of the interrelatedness of seemingly disparate things, chooses, according to Thoreau, a life of outward simplicity in material things.

Thoreau has often been accused of some form of elitist judgmentalism towards his fellow Americans, and a lack of compassion for their weaknesses and goals. But, as in Gandhi's espousal of the dictum of plain living and high thinking, Thoreau wrote about the success of his experiment at Walden in order to invite people to a new level of freedom from unnecessary toil. In all the getting and spending that he saw around him, he deciphered not a celebrative enhancement of life, but rather a compromising of its essence. He wrote that "the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run" (55). Seeing so many people exchange so much of life for such paltry things, Thoreau set about to persuade people that the cost was too high -- life was too precious and its duration too unpredictable (he himself died a few years later in 1862 at the age of 45), to waste it exhausting oneself paying for unnecessary trinkets.

Gandhi had spent the early part of his adult life collecting many of the trappings of worldy success, even imposing his attachment to them on his family, and undergoing considerable difficulties in paying for them through the ordinary barrister's work for which he was eminently unsuited. By 1914, however, he had grown to appreciate the wisdom of Jesus' response to his disciples after instructing the wealthy young man to sell all he had

and give to the poor: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mk 10:25). Calling this "an eternal rule of life stated in the noblest words the English language is capable of producing" (CW 13:313), Gandhi was not encouraging an ostracization of the rich but rather pointing out the sad plight of those who are overly distracted by the cares of the world. This was complexity as a negative factor, the burdens of wealth as a ball-and-chain which impede and shackle the journey through life, and the free and energetic pursuit of higher values.

But Gandhi knew that the destitute were also distracted by their economic situation because the precariousness of their survival left little mental or spiritual space for loftier interests. In this early address to the Economics Society, Gandhi identified "real economics" as an ideal in which the citizens of India would:

> ... show more truth than gold, greater fearlessness than pomp of power and wealth, greater charity than love of self. If we will but clean our houses, our palaces and temples of the attributes of wealth and show in them the attributes of morality, we can offer battle to any combinations of hostile forces without having to carry the burden of a heavy militia. ... These are real economics. (CW 13:316)

Gandhi's "real economics" is suggestive, then, of an asceticism and an altruism that are not often listed among the prominent subtitles in economics texts.

Oikonomia in the Greek, from which economy is derived, referred to the management of a household or state. Such management necessarily reflects, or at least is affected by, the priorities and goals of individual members. Gandhi's understanding of real economics fits in well with this broader scope of *oikonomia*, rather than with the persistent modern attitude that economics is largely an investigation into the ways and means of continually increasing the material wealth of the individual and nation. The management of *oikos*, of the "house" or environment in which we live is being approached today from the broader perspective of ecology (from the same Greek root as economy). As Klostermaier points out:

> Ecology and economy both derive from ... *oikos*, home, and originally had the same meaning: the order according to which a family would live its life, a large part of which concerns the supply of material goods and their fair and equitable use. Even under the changed meanings ... their mutuality ought to still be in evidence. Ecology makes economic sense, at least in the long run, and economy must follow the rules of ecology, if it is responsible. ("Possible Contributions ..." 45)

In speaking of "real" economy, Gandhi stressed the necessity of doing economics in a responsible way that avoids waste and unnecessary destruction and considers what is fair and equitable. In considering what is fair and equitable, especially in the interchange between ecology and economy, Klostermaier further points out that:

> Many of us realize today that the affluence of the Western world in the mid-twentieth century was acquired on borrowed money; the luxuries of the few were dependent on the exploitation of the many and on the mortgaging of the future. (45)

Not only is the link between economy and ecology an entirely legitimate one but furthermore our economic prodigality, and the ecological crisis it has engendered have wide-ranging and insidious effects beyond the purely physical realm:

> We also become increasingly aware that the "ecological crisis" is not only a threat to our economy, our physical well-being and the supply of essentials for survival, it is also a crisis of the mind, of the psyche, of the soul. (45)

This latter point is still so rarely understood as is evidenced by the overwhelmingly pragmatic nature of most ecological projects. Government grants rarely, if ever, fund investigations into the underlying mindset, the psychological effects, or the spiritual ramifications of ecological destruction. A local program that addresses such

concerns as reducing waste production in a particular industry, on the other hand, is usually first in line at the grants table. It is probably the visible and concrete nature of these latter projects that accounts for their appeal. However, as Klostermaier suggests, the deeper issues involving the values that inform human ecological activity are hardly less significant. Without addressing them, in fact, ecological activity is bound to remain at the bandaid level, a reflection of the lack of a deeper analysis of a problem that goes far beneath the surface level of protecting scarce resources.

Gandhi's understanding of "real" economics betrays an acute awareness of this kind of pervasive effect of such a seemingly circumscribed human activity. Though he did not use the term "ecology", all his recommendations about sustaining and enhancing the life of the individual and of the nation were ecologically sensitive ones in this broad understanding that Klostermaier describes. Gandhi's continual experiments with dietetics, sanitation, agriculture, communal living, nature cures and even religious pluralism, to name a few, were all aimed at an integrated philosophy of living in which *ahiṁsā* and *satyā* were continually upheld. The economic sphere was not only *not* to be exempted from such an integrated philosophy, it was/is in fact pivotal to the integrative process.

E.F. Schumacher's 1973 book Small Is Beautiful which "advocated ... a modified form of Gandhian economy/ecology" (Klostermaier "Possible Contributions..." 42) was subtitled "a study of economics as if people mattered." This popular text on alternative economics was critical of the "materialistic craze" that characterizes both American wealth and Western economic goals in general:

> An attitude to life which seeks fulfilment in the single-minded pursuit of wealth -- in short, materialism -- does not fit into this world, because it contains within itself no limiting principle, while the environment in which it is placed is strictly limited. (23)

Schumacher goes on to highlight Gandhi's understanding that "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not for every man's greed" (26) and he is therefore critical of:

> ...a predatory attitude which rejoices in the fact that 'what were luxuries for our fathers have become necessities for us'. The cultivation and the expansion of needs is the antithesis of wisdom. It also is the antithesis of freedom and peace. Every increase of needs tends to increase one's dependence on outside forces over which one cannot have control, and therefore increases existential fear. Only by a reduction of needs can one promote a genuine reduction

> in those tensions which are the ultimate causes of strife and war. (26-7)

The stakes, then, are amazingly high -- no room here for the naivety of thinking that views conspicuous consumption as an innocent pastime of the affluent. As we continue to unwrap Gandhi's economic thought, it will become clear that its complex and multi-faceted ramifications extend to almost every area of human concern. Gandhi's pursuit of a solution to India's economic ills simply did not lie along the popular path of aspiring towards western materialism. On the contrary, it lay somewhere in the opposite direction.

Homespun Solutions and Soft Technologies

Like most imperial powers, Britain sought an increase in home wealth from its presumably benevolent governance of India's hundreds of millions of people. India became another colonial hinterland, providing raw materials to be processed into manufactured goods in British factories, and then resold to the colonies at a profit. Whereas for centuries handwoven Indian cloth had been highly-prized by both home and foreign markets, the British demand for cotton for its home mills, combined with the deliberate cultivation in India of tastes for expensive British cloth, brought the demise of this traditional Indian activity. Realizing the potential widespread economic stability involved in

reintroducing the spinning wheel into every Indian home, Gandhi became passionate in his insistence that all Indians wear only this homespun khādī cloth. Throwing himself heart and soul into this project, he carried piles of homespun khādī from town to town to sell, and he initiated ceremonial bonfires for the destruction of all imported clothing. He also began a major fund-raising campaign largely for the purpose of buying and distributing spinning wheels. George Woodcock explains the general effect of Gandhi's passionate focus on spinning:

> Many of Gandhi's proposals, which to outsiders seem absurd and faddish, and which contributed to the alien view of him as a special kind of inspired clown, were completely sensible in the setting of the India he was attempting to elevate into self-respect and freedom. To revive the craft of spinning, which Indian peasants had ceased practising before the last years of the nineteenth century, was much more than an act of antiquarian sentiment. It was a very effective way to draw attention to a whole group of conditions that needed changing: the virtual extinction of Indian village crafts; the fact that because there were no crafts the peasants were unemployed four months every year; the final appaling fact that their cash income was so minute that even a few rupees earned spinning yarn in the idle season would increase it notably.(8-9)

Gandhi came to feel that "the khādī spirit" which was India's main hope, could only flourish through the widespread use of the spinning wheel. Because Gandhi was so adamant in his insistence on the importance of hand spinning, he was understood by some as being against all machinery. But, as he explained:

> The spinning-wheel itself is a machine ... What I object to, is the *craze* for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on "saving labour" till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation.... Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might. (CW 25:250-1)

Under the patriotic banner of *swadeshi* Gandhi appealed to all Indians to buy and wear or use proudly whatever was made in India, and the more hands had been busy in the manufacture, the better. He saw that his larger struggle for *ahiṁsā* had little chance for realization unless a minimum universal level of genuine economic stability was established. Desperate people are not usually reasonable people, and are in a poor position to muster the moral

strength of character necessary to avoid violent confrontations.[25]

Swadeshi began as a purely economic struggle but like all crucial practical issues, became creatively blurred in Gandhi's thought to encompass spiritual goals as well. The national self-reliance that was the practical goal of *swadeshi* became suggestive of an individual spiritual self-reliance that embraced the strength of *ahiṁsā* in all its dealings with others, and could contribute to effective *satyagraha* against all oppressive forces.

In a 1922 letter from one of Gandhi's many prison stays (the *satyāgrahi* accepted jail terms rather than cooperate with unconscionable laws), he elaborates on the spiritual benefits that his own active participation in the use of the spinning wheel had brought:

> This spinning is growing on me. I seem daily to be coming nearer to the poorest of the poor, and to that extent to God.[26] I regard the four hours to be the

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[25] Dominique Lapierre's City of Joy (New York: Warner, 1985), for instance, includes descriptions of the sad plight of wives beaten on the streets by husbands whose desperation over not finding sufficient employment to take their families off the streets, vents itself in this tragic manner.

[26] Gandhi's conviction that God was to be experienced by an ever-closer identity with the poor echoes Francis of Assisi in Christian history, and may have influenced present-day

> most profitable part of the day. The fruit of my labour is visible before me. Not an impure thought enters my mind during the four hours. The mind wanders whilst I read the *Gītā*, the Koran, the *Rāmāyana*. But the mind is fixed whilst I am turning the wheel ... I have so identified the spinning-wheel with the economic salvation of pauper India that it has for me a fascination all its own. (CW 23:134)

To Gandhi, then, spinning became not only a means for India's economic salvation but also an inner need and a way of pursuing purity of mind and a sense of visible accomplishment. As Klostermaier points out:

> In his spinning wheel Gandhi saw the confluence of *ahiṁsā*, bread labor, and *swarāj*, independence. For him, it also symbolized God, who, as he said, can appear to a hungry person only in the form of bread. Independence was meaningless for the masses, if it did not also bring with it increased employment and income. (Survey, 2nd ed. 456)

Gandhi was adamant, as a result, that everyone in India, whether politicians, physicians, poets or peasants, whether children in schools, or upper caste women and men, should set aside a portion of each day for spinning. Many hard-working, well-educated people tried to gently ignore what

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Latin American liberation theologians who insist on "the preferential option for the poor."

they viewed as this idiosyncracy of Gandhi's and were taken aback at his persistent "nagging" on this issue. But Gandhi was determined that in this way a bond between the rich and the poor might be forged, as well as hoping that this once-a-day quiet, methodical activity might foster greater *ahimsa* on a national scale since he had emphatically experienced its calming effect.

Gandhi focused on the notion of "bread labour" from at least the turn of the century until his death. In an article on *ahiṁsā*-in-practice in the newspaper Harijan in 1940, Gandhi clarified again what he meant:

> My experiments in ahimsa have taught me that non-violence in practice means common labour with the body. A Russian philosopher, Bondaref, has called it bread labour. It means closest co-operation. The first satyagrahis of South Africa laboured for the common good and the common purse and felt free like birds. They included Hindus, Muslims (Shias and Sunnis), Christians (Protestants and Roman Catholics), Parsis, and Jews. They included the English and the Germans. By profession they were lawyers and architects, engineers, electricians, printers and traders. Practice of truth and non-violence melted religious differences, and we learnt to see beauty in each religion. ... The common labour consisted of printing, carpentry, shoe-making, gardening, house-building and

> the like. Labour was no drudgery, it was a joy. The evenings were devoted to literary pursuits. These men, women and boys were the vanguard of the satyāgraha army. ... Thirty-four years of continuous experience and experimenting in truth and non-violence have convinced me that non-violence cannot be sustained unless it is linked to conscious body-labour and finds expression in our daily contact with our neighbous. This is the constructive programme. It is not an end, it is an indispensable means and therefore is almost convertible with the end. (CW 71:131-2)

To join in a common effort in attending to life's everday needs is thus depicted by Gandhi as having a greater potential for fostering harmony in the midst of diversity than more formal efforts at reconciliation. If representatives of diverse traditions, for example, can sit down to a meal together, to which they all contributed in some way, an automatic degree of intimacy is introduced into the encounter. Pioneers in North America seemed innately to understand this concept in their barn-building "bees" and other communal work projets. New immigrants could do no better in seeking acceptance into the community than to participate in such constructive projects which actually built more than buildings. They also built the 'bridges' of community spirit that would weather the storms of dissension and strife. Even today, inviting people to meetings to

discuss racial harmony, for instance, is rarely as effective in bringing it about as is an opportunity for a mixed racial group to work 'shoulder to shoulder', feeling the mingling of causes and sweat as a baptism of their oneness as fellow humans first, and members of distinct races second.

Present ecological concern to avoid the "hard" technologies that ravage the earth and many living creatures in favour of "soft" technologies that require as their main fuel human creativity and ingenuity have proven Gandhi correct in preferring the spinning wheel to the factory, and in encouraging everyone to make some form of "bread labour" part of their daily routine.

Gandhi's summons to bread labour for all classes of people was automatically a summons to a simpler way of life, simpler in the sense that the more basic needs of life were met by one's own effort, but more complex because tasks previously performed by others now had to be learned. In South Africa, Gandhi had endured the ridicule of the court, for example, with his experiments of washing and ironing his own clothes, and cutting his own hair, rather than paying for and waiting upon the services of outsiders. These seemingly purely economic concerns became, for Gandhi, issues of *ahimsa* since as Woodcock has noted:

> If there are Gandhian dogmas, they are few and simple: to practise non-violence, which means also to simplify life until violence becomes unnecessary, and by further

implication, to approximate to physical equality while maintaining an infinite diversity of belief. (100)

This crucial link between non-violence and a voluntarily simplified life of self-sacrificial service to others made Gandhian economics a radical departure from the more common view that all human activity ought to be focused on generating capital; and that all one's capital ought to be spent on procuring happiness. On the contrary, Gandhi sought ultimate happiness or liberation, *mokṣa*, through a way of life that reflected the age-old ideal of deliberate renunciation of unnecessary material comforts, an ascetical ideal now fervently espoused by modern ecology's concern to halt human destruction of the planet.

Voluntary Simplicity as Gandhian Asceticism

As mentioned, Gandhi experimented with many different styles of diet, dress, living accommodations and even religions as part of his formation. As an introspective young man plagued with a significant measure of self-doubt[27], he was saved from the self-assured arrogance of

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[27] It seems amazing, for instance, that Gandhi was totally tongue-tied when wanting to make a small speech to his closest friends in England after inviting them for dinner to celebrate the completion of his barrister's training. Courts of law were even more intimidating and his successes there too small

seeing and doing things in only one way. Like many young men from the colonies travelling to Britain for an education (young women rarely got to go), Gandhi was challenged by a variety of cultural differences. His sensitivity and desire not to offend anyone made him a rather easy target for various forces seeking his conversion to a supposedly more civilized way of living. This way of living presumably necessitated meat-eating, adoption of Christianity and dressing and behaving like a nineteenth-century English upper-class gentleman. Ultimately Gandhi was able to hold out against these and other temptations to betray his Hindu heritage, but not without first being sorely tried.

After returning to India and experiencing some difficulty in procuring sufficient employment as a barrister, Gandhi eagerly seized an opportunity to work temporarily in South Africa for a Muslim law firm. And it is there that he 'came to himself' by becoming so absorbed in the struggles of suffering Indians that he forgot his self-doubts and just forged ahead with apparent tirelessness, audacity and persistence. Leading his fellow Indians there in non-violent resistance against a number of governmental or corporate injustices, he brought to birth the *satyāgraha* movement which was to be the foundation of all his future work as a servant and leader of India.

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to be numbered.

While engaged in a largely political *satyagraha* in South Africa, Gandhi nonetheless continued to experiment with lifestyle changes aimed at making him freer and stronger for the life of service he now sought. The general direction in which these experiments moved was that of ever greater simplification, or voluntary poverty, as Thoreau, Francis of Assisi and many others had recommended and, more importantly, as the wisdom literature of all great religions had advised. Later reminiscing about his early attempts at voluntary poverty in a speech given in England in 1931, Gandhi revealed the ascetical methods he found necessary as a protection against the temptations of power:

> ... when I found myself drawn into the political coil, I asked myself what was necessary for me in order to remain absolutely untouched by immorality, by untruth, by what is known as the political gain. ... I came definitely to the conclusion that, if I had to serve the people in whose midst my life was cast and of whose difficulties I was witness from day to day, I must discard all wealth, all possessions. ... I must confess to you that progress at first was slow. ... it was ... painful in the beginning. But, as days went by, I saw that I had to throw overboard many other things which I used to consider as mine, and a time came when it became a matter of positive joy to give up those things. And one after another then, by almost

> geometric progression, the things slipped away from me. And, as I am describing my experiences, I can say a great burden fell off my shoulders, and I felt that I could now walk with ease and do my work also in the service of my fellowmen with great comfort and still greater joy. The possession of anything then became a troublesome thing and a burden. (CW 48:51)

In this critical passage Gandhi describes the metamorphosis that occurred in his efforts towards voluntary simplicity. Having originally established this ideal as a personal moral imperative, he laboured to submit himself to its heavy yoke. Feeling at first that to give away so much of what he had worked for was a sort of amputation -- a painful severance from extended parts of himself -- eventually "a time came when it became a matter of positive joy to give up those things."

This crucial transformation into experiencing a radical reduction in our possessions as a liberation -- rather than as a deprivation -- is at the heart of Gandhi's ongoing relevance to ecological thinking. In other words, Gandhi practised an asceticism that sought an austerity of physical living in order to marshal all his energies towards the causes he espoused. Modern ecology also encourages the weaning of a materialism that threatens to 'suck the earth dry', and the courageous acceptance, instead, of a mature level of self-restraint towards the nurturing that the earth

offers -- a nurturance to be used with gratitude and respect rather than with greed and wanton prodigality. The mandate to "reduce, reuse and recycle" thus changes from an onerous duty to a joyful removing of shackles that often holds back the human potential for deeper personal freedom, joy and creativity.

The Hindu understanding that such an unburdening is essential to an appropriate spiritual maturity in the later stages of life, especially in the *saṁnyāsin* stage, confirms its liberative potential. But for Gandhi, it was neither necesary nor desirable to put off such a joyful unburdening until later life. He found it essential as a framework for the most active part of his own life. Gandhi further elaborated on his awareness of the subversive or counter-cultural nature of voluntary simplicity:

> ...there is here a daily conflict between what...we understand today as civilization, and the state which I am picturing to you as a state of bliss ... On the one hand, the basis of culture or civilization is understood to be the multiplication of all your wants...the more you possess the better culture you represent... (CW 48:52)

The idea that the more we buy, especially in our own country, the more we are doing our patriotic duty and stimulating the economy, is an especially tenacious one, showing almost no signs of abatement in the North American

consumeristic "ethos" (if a word related to ethics can be used for this purpose). However, the ecology movement has caused a renewed interest in the idea of voluntary simplicity. To reduce, reuse and recycle obviously implies buying less and living with less. A new consciousness is emerging (which advertisers are working desperately to counteract) that celebrates living-with-less as joyous and freeing rather than as a deprivation. It is a consciousness much akin to an asceticism of old that rejects material clutter in favour of space in one's heart and mind for spiritual or other 'higher' aims. To accept or seek out less in the material sphere is not a perversion or psychosis like masochism, but is rather an adamant refusal to be further burdened with trivialities that would block the road to our fulfilment as creative and intelligent human beings. This teaching is, of course, not new, as Duane Elgin indicates:

> Although the conscious simplification of life has great relevance for our times, this orientation in living is not a new social invention. ... the founders of the world's major religions have taught that we are misdirecting our lives if we make the pursuit of material wealth and social status our overriding goal. Jesus...Buddha...Confucius, Lao-tzu, Mohammed, and many more...taught the value of simplicity, clarity, unpretentiousness, and balance between the inner and

> outer aspects of our lives. In more recent times, the value of simplicity has been illustrated in the legendary self-reliance and frugality of the Puritans, in Thoreau's naturalistic vision at Walden Pond, in Emerson's spiritual and practical plea for "plain living and high thinking," and in the teachings of Gandhi, the spiritual and political leader of India's revolution of independence. Gandhi felt that true civilization consisted not in the multiplication of human wants, but in the voluntary simplification of these wants. The moderation of our wants increases our capacity to be of service to others, and in our being of loving service to others, true civilization emerges. (27-8)

This last sentence of Elgin's expresses well the motivation for a Gandhian asceticism -- not asceticism as some kind of muscle-flexing of the will -- but rather in order to be of service so that "true civilization" can emerge.

In his 1913 Hind Swarāj, Gandhi had criticized an understanding of civilization which "make[s] bodily welfare the object of life" (20), and subjects humans to the tyranny of factories and mines as expressions of industrial "progress":

> Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories or mines.

> Their condition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work, at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires. Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion, now they are enslaved by the temptations of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. (21)

Gandhi searched for what Buddha called the fifth step of the noble eightfold path, "right mode of living" on both a personal and societal level. In contrast to the rampant consumerism of modern Western society, Gandhi counselled an ongoing ascetical moderation of wants which, besides freeing up human energies to "be of service" in bringing about a more compassionate and egalitarian world, also spares earth's resources from excessive human appetites.

Gandhi also felt strongly that such moderation of wants was the key to a more permanent state of peace on earth. He believed that greed was the underlying source of strife in many conflicts that led to war, a reality seldom acknowledged in the modern attribution of wars as "religious." In 1935, with unrelenting Hindu-Muslim strife in India and the air smelling of war in many parts of the world, Gandhi sent a peace message to an American journal ("The Cosmopolitan") which stated in part:

> Not to believe in the possibility of permanent peace is to disbelieve the godliness of human nature. ... Peace is unobtainable by part performance of conditions, even

> as a chemical combination is impossible without complete fulfilment of the conditions of attainment thereof. If the recognized leaders of mankind, who have control over engines of destruction, were wholly to renounce their use, with full knowledge of its implications, permanent peace can be obtained. This is clearly impossible without the great Powers of the earth renouncing their imperialist design. This again seems impossible without great nations ceasing to believe in soul-destroying competition and the desire to multiply wants and therefore increase their material possessions. (CW 62:175)

E.F. Schumacher's text on economics contains a chapter entitled "Peace and Permanence" which draws heavily from this notion of Gandhi's that greed is the ultimate cause of war. As cited earlier, Schumacher points out that "the cultivation and the expansion of needs is the antithesis of wisdom ... freedom and peace" (26) since the necessity of protecting and defending one's possessions leads to antagonistic relationships between individuals and nations.

Gandhi, on the other hand, promoted the economic perspective of *sarvodaya*, meaning the 'uplift of all.' T.S. Devadoss quotes Gandhi [Young India 3-9-1925] on this as saying, "Under the new outlook we shall cease to think of getting what we can, but we shall decline to receive what all cannot get." (248). Devadoss further explains that:

> The chief principle of Sarvodaya economy is simplicity of life. It distinguishes between 'a high standard of life' and 'a high standard of living' and considers it even a misnomer to call the present standard of living in the West 'high'. It would be more appropriate to designate it as 'the complex way of life' [J.C. Kumarappa, Gandhian Economic Thought 23]. Simplicity of life means neither poverty nor asceticism. As one concerned with spiritual values, Gandhi would never allow luxury and pomp to encroach upon human life. He was all for the control of passions and believed that it would lead to glorious civilization. His convictions may sound like asceticism. But this did not mean that he regarded scarcity and want as leading to virtue. Craze for multiplicity of goods is destructive of contentment, peace and tranquility. It results in exploitation, *enormous waste of nature's material* and human labour, and in ever preparedness for war.'[28] [K.G. Mashruwala, Gandhi and Marx 53] (273, emphasis mine).

Devadoss cites "enormous waste of nature" as among the casualties of not following Gandhi's ideal of simplification of life; and he resists the identification of this ideal

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[28] This last end-quote mark does not have a corresponding beginning-quote mark so it is unclear where the quote begins.

with asceticism's reputation for sometimes regarding "scarcity and want as leading to virtue."

The history of asceticism in both East and West contains evidence of this negative interpretation which seems to confuse the means or methods of ascetical pursuit, e.g., "scarcity and want," with the end which is a dispassion or detachment toward the whims of the ego in favor of a freedom of the spirit from its tyrannical hold. To use Devadoss' terms, it is not that scarcity or want "lead" to virtue, but rather that a voluntary taking on of the struggle to ignore the demands they make leads to a freeing of the human psyche from their hold, and a consequent (important for ecology) sparing of whatever was to be consumed by the appetite's now-subdued reign.

Mircea Eliade's book on Yoga, Immortality and Freedom makes a number of statements about Indian asceticism that concur with Gandhian notions. Far from being an element that deprives and weakens, asceticism is seen as bestowing superhuman power:

> By virtue of renunciation, of asceticism (*tapas*), men, demons, or gods can become powerful to the point of threatening the economy of the entire universe. In the myths, legends, and tales of India, there are many episodes in which the principal character is an ascetic (man or demon) who, by virtue of the magical power he

> has gained through his renunciation, troubles even the repose of a Brahma or a Visnu. (89)

The 'magical' power of the asceticism that Gandhi lived and recommended was a harnessing of inner resources to live the life of self-purification that would lead to *ahiṁsā*. Eliade further claims that "through *tapas* the ascetic becomes clairvoyant and even incarnates the gods" (106). Gandhi in fact is often attributed with an exceptional perception of the deeper reality of a number of important issues. In a Hindu understanding of many *avatāras*, the idea of incarnating the gods does not have that idolatrous ring that a monotheistic view might fear. Gandhi certainly did not consider himself to have achieved any such incarnation but the fact that so many people sought *darśana* from him illustrates the extent to which he was perceived as having manifested divinity through his compassionate concern for all. Eliade also notes that in Hindu Yoga:

> The emphasis is laid on man's *effort* ("to yoke"), on his self-discipline, by virtue of which he can obtain concentration of spirit even before asking ... for the aid of divinity. (5)

Gandhi encouraged a 'yoking' of oneself to duty, to the effort required to bring about important changes -- first in oneself, and then in society. The "aid of divinity" would accompany any efforts for "truth" but was not to be relied upon as working on its own.

Gandhi's favorite scripture, the Bhagavad Gītā, is replete with this concept of the necessity of detachment or dispassion for the sake of serving divine ends, fulfilling dharma, without interference from the caprices of the ego:

> Therefore I [Kriṣṇa] tell you: Be humble, be harmless ... Master of ego, standing apart from the things of the senses, free from self ... Calmly encounter the painful, the pleasant; adore me only with heart undistracted ... (ch. XIII, Prabhavananda 126-7)

In an earlier chapter on the yoga of renunciation (V), which would make an excellent definition of a positive, life-affirming asceticism, Krisna points out the altruism of the yogi who practises such disintersted action:

> Their senses mastered, their every action is wed to the welfare of fellow-creatures: Such are the seers who enter Brahman and know Nirvāṇa. (72-3)

The term "wed" suggests an insight into the positive nature of a healthy asceticism/renunciation since it is because of the ascetic's fervent devotion to the "welfare of fellow-creatures" that he or she seeks out a mastery of the senses, and conversely shuns any indulgence that slavishly caters to the ego's whims.

Going back to our focus on the khadi spirit in which "we should serve ourselves with simplicity in every walk of life", we see here an elaboration of the goal of "complete renunciation of everything that is likely to harm our

fellow creatures." In fact, Devadoss provides this further perspective on the breadth of Gandhi's ethical concern:

> He [Gandhi] believed in the doctrine of *sarvabhūtahita*. In Indian ethics we notice the terms *lokahita*, pursuit of the good of humanity, and *sarvabhūtahita*, devotion to the good of all creatures. *Lokahita* parallels western humanism but *sarvabhūtahita* aims at the good of all living beings and is much more emphasized in Indian thought than *lokahita*. According to Indian tradition, *ahiṁsā* is applicable to all sentient creatures. (242-3)

The application of *ahiṁsā* to animals specifically, as well as nature in general, was clearly mandated by Gandhi's khadi spirit in renouncing all harm to fellow creatures. A closer examination of the place of *ahiṁsā* within traditional Hindu ethics, later in this work, will further reveal the pivotal role of voluntary simplicity in Gandhi's khādī spirit, and its direct application to modern ecological concerns.

Conclusion

A deliberate attempt to reduce human wants, therefore, is much more than just an aesthetic appeasement of an aversion to clutter. It is more than an ascetical methodology for clearing a space in which to be more creative or effective. It is more than a global survival mechanism for an economics of sustainable development.

Besides all this and more, voluntary simplicity is an opportunity to volunteer to work for peace so that a conscription to war can be avoided.

Among those candidates for such a lifestyle who might be particularly encouraged to consider these benefits are the 22 million Americans of Los Angeles County (and all who envy them and wish to emulate their lifestyles), who are reputed to be consuming today the same amount of resources as India's population of almost one billion. In other words, the average person in Los Angeles is using forty-five times as much of the earth's resources as each Indian! To consume more than one's share of resources needed for sustenance is necessarily (even if not intentionally) an act of violence against those who must go without as a result. When environmental writers point out the more moderate general disproportion that about 6% of the world's population uses 40% of the world's resources, the largely Christian affluent West is clearly implicated in this frenzy of indifference to others.

Gandhi did not blame Christianity per se for the West's lack of regard for Eastern values and goals, since he knew that Jesus' teachings, especially in the Sermon on the Mount and in his own ultimate example of self-sacrifice on the cross, were invitations to compassionate and faithful living. Gandhi took to heart the central tenets of several great religions besides his own beloved Hinduism, as a

pioneer promoter of interreligious dialogue focused on addressing the injustices of his age. At the same time, he was not naive about some of the unfortunate baggage that seems to accumulate as a religion evolves through human history. At the age of 76, he made this sad, but ultimately hopeful commentary:

> ... I once sat down to write a thesis on India as a protagonist of non-violence. But as I proceeded with my writing, I could not go on. I had to stop. There are two aspects of Hinduism. There is, on the one hand, the historical Hinduism with its untouchability, superstitious worship of stocks and stones, animal sacrifice and so on. On the other, we have the Hinduism of the *Gītā*, the *Upanishads* and Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* which is the acme of ahiṁsā and oneness of all creation, pure worship of one immanent, formless imperishable God. Ahiṁsā which to me is the chief glory of Hinduism has been sought to be explained by our people as being meant for the sannyasis only. I do not share that view. I have held that it is *the* way of life and India has to show it to the world. (CW 86:134)

It is probably safe to assume that all world religions, especially their most established branches, contain these two aspects. There is the orignal urge to purify life, to live more deeply and conscientiously; and the yearning towards the divine that faces any necessary sacrifice with

courage and dignity. Then comes the inevitable domestication process, the all too human tendency to quantify and to establish securities where there are none. It has always been the case that "the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Mt 7:14).

Gandhi chose not to spend time squabbling over authority claims made by various religious thinkers. Instead he chose to listen to the invitation of the Father and Mother of the universe, Creator of all and Highest to be known (Gītā 9:17) to "Be a warrior and kill desire, the powerful enemy of the soul" (3:43). To kill desire, to reduce wants, out of compassion for the earth and all its inhabitants feels, at first, like a deprivation, but Gandhi proved that it is the road to ultimate joy.

> What seems at first a cup of sorrow is found in the end immortal wine. That pleasure is pure: it is the joy which arises from a clear vision of the Spirit. (BG 18:37)

To further understand the ethico-religious basis of Gandhi's thought, we will now look at the Hindu understanding of *sādhana*, or the means to the realization of life, in which the asceticism of voluntary simplicity plays no small role.

CHAPTER SIX:

GANDHIAN VIRTUES, DUTIES AND SADHANA: SEEKING WHOLENESS

Introduction

The human quest for integrity and peace underlies the religious quest for an other-centered self-realization, culminating in liberation or salvation (or *mokṣa or nirvāṇa*) either in this life or the next. Although definitions of these terms vary, they amount to some sort of all-pervading wholeness in which the individual soul or Ātman is absorbed in a blissful union with the divine. Most of them also agree with the karmic view that one's activities here on earth contribute to this pursuit of salvation in either a positive or negative way. Different schools of thought within religions, however, vary as to the degree to which human action can contribute to the divine movement of grace that far surpasses paltry human efforts to earn God's favour. The entrenchment of lively controversies has often led to extreme positions, either totally denigrating the potential of human behaviour towards the pursuit of salvation, or focusing exclusively on every human act or omission as adding to or subtracting from the sum total of one's entry fee to heaven.

Rabindranth Tagore's Nobel-prize-winning Gītāñjali expresses the paradox in this way: "And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy

power gives me strength to act" (4). In terms of the ecological relevance of this age-old theological conundrum, human efforts towards cherishing and safeguarding the environment can only be infused with a vision of the sacred (as Carl Sagan, et.al., recommended) if the potential is seen for such actions to reveal the divine whose power and strength are demonstrated through every life-force on earth.

The history of Christian thought has often revealed the typical black/white, either/or mentality that has made the West generally less tolerant of different expressions of religious truths than the East. The relationship of faith and works, for example, has caused no end of bitter conflict, beginning with Augustine's intolerance of Pelagius, and the extensive writings in which the "doctor of grace" insisted that human action could not possibly influence God's judgment. Rather the grace of salvation is freely given to those "predestined" to be saved. This endeavour to avoid human arrogance in our understanding of the role of action in the life of faith led, at its worse, to a portrayal of a totally arbitrary God who ignores human efforts either towards good or evil (making futile all human strivings towards the good), and simply sticks to the original predestined verdict for each person -- either "saved" or "damned." The immense abuses in subsequent church life are not too surprising in retrospect since those who felt fairly secure about being among the "saved" were

always on hand to denounce the efforts of those who "arrogantly" insisted that ethical behaviour was an essential manifestation of the life of faith (e.g., the Anabaptists). Thus Christian activism, including that today for the environment, has been challenged to prove its relevance to salvational concern.

In the East, however, particularly in Hinduism, such shifts of emphasis are more easily accommodated as different paths, *mārga*, of faith. As Klostermaier explains, the three main Hindu paths to liberation are *karmamārga*, the path of works; *jñānamārga*, the path of knowledge; and *bhaktimārga*, the path of loving devotion (Survey 1989, 145) and these are not mutually exclusive:

> The idea of "religion" as a "path" is found in other cultures, too, but the idea of a plurality of equivalent paths is fairly unique to Hinduism. True, there is also rivalry between adherents of different Hindu paths and some suggest that only one of them is the true path, the others being lower or incomplete, but the general understanding is that of equally valid options.

Choices about which *mārga* to follow often fluctuate according to different stages or moods in a single life. Worship (*bhaktimārga*) is an aspect of most faith expressions, for instance, and the necessity of conforming one's behaviour to one's beliefs (*karmamārga*) is a logical

corollary of holding strong beliefs. Otherwise hypocrisy becomes an issue. And finally, the path of knowledge (*jñānamārga*) focuses on the intellectual and philosophical aspects of Hinduism.

In observing the means, the *sādhana* to realization of life that Gandhi used as his rules for living, a creative synthesis of all three paths is suggested, although the *karmamārga* path of manifesting one's beliefs through one's actions seems most predominant. We shall see that the *yamas* or preparatory yogic restraints of Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras* reflect Gandhi's main ideals in terms of virtues cultivated and duties observed, along with the Gita's focus on disinterested action. And these *yamas also* bear an obvious potential for addressing the ecological crisis.

Furthermore his unique emphasis on the duty of *charkha*, or daily spinning, brought him into significant conflict with many who would otherwise have been his devoted supporters. Tagore, for instance, praised and aided Gandhi's work in many ways (even dubbing him "Mahatma"), but balked at this seemingly trivial "duty" of daily spinning, upon which Gandhi was so insistent. The Hindu concept of duty as dharmic path to a self-realization in which the wholeness or integrity of life is revealed -- meant that no real duty was trivial. Determining which are genuine duties, however, depends on a number of factors, and needs to keep evolving as new issues arise.

The *Yamas* as Gandhian Guideposts to Duty and Ecology

One of Gandhi's better known caustic remarks quips that Western civilization is a great idea, which ought to be tried. In the same apparently auspicious-for-Indian-writers year of 1913 as Tagore's Gītāñjali, Gandhi published his Hind Swaraj. Ostensibly a political manual for Indian independence, its theme of "home-rule" lends itself well, as mentioned earlier, to the extrapolation of this notion to the more personal realm of "self-rule," and questions of duty and morality play prominent roles for Gandhi:

> Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are controvertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our minds and passions. So doing, we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent for civilization is "good conduct." (48-9)

The "path of duty" is of immense importance to Hindu thought. Duty carried out as dharma, as response to a divine invitation to follow the path leading to *moksa*, becomes the means to self-realization, the sadhana that one dare not evade if hoping to reach ultimate bliss. Thus duty as a way to bliss is experienced as joy. The Western concept of duty as a more or less onerous but unavoidable task often lacks this joyful element. As we continue to

explore the human "duty" to care about and celebrate the environment, our most challenging and urgent task is to portray this duty as a *dharmic* path to blissful self-realization, rather than as something one balks at doing but ought to do for the sake of some future or obscure good.

In traditional Hinduism there are many levels of duty subsumed under the basic ones of *varṇāśramadharmas* and *sādhāraṇadharmas*, explained by S.K. Maitra as follows:

> The social Ethics of the Hindus is represented in a scheme of *varṇāśramadharmas*, i.e., duties relative to one's *varna* or social class and one's *āśrama* or specific stage in spiritual discipline. The duties of *varṇā* and *āśrama* together constitute the code of relative duties, the duties of station in life, the duties obligatory on the individual in consequence of social status, temperament, specific powers and capacities. They are to be distinguished from the *sādhāraṇadharmas*, the *common* duties of man, the duties that are obligatory on all men equally, irrespective of their individual capacity, social status, nationality or creed. (1)

Since the *varṇāśramadharmas* are largely caste and stage-of-life specific, the focus here will be on the more generic *sādhāraṇadharmas*, the duties and their attendant virtues that are to be the ideals of every person of every class. Maitra reports that:

> The virtues, according to Patanjali are the *yamas*, the restraints that purify the mind of evil passions and thus clear the ground for Yoga. These virtues are: Ahiṁsā ... Satyā ... Asteya ... Brahmacarya ... Aparigraha ... (211ff.)

These *yamas* are the foundation of Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra which Gandhi late in life called "the acme of ahimsa and oneness of all creation" listing it along with the Gita and the Upanishads as among the greatest sources of Hinduism's potential role as "protagonist" of non-violence (CW 86:134).

Maitra's description of each of these five *yamas* fits in so well with Gandhian ideals that one is tempted to see in them a five-point plan for Gandhian *sādhana*. The three that Gandhi repeatedly articulated as central to his life, *ahiṁsā, satyā* and *brahmacarya* are decidedly related to the other two, *asteya* and *aparigraha* which serve well to round out the first three. The first one, *ahiṁsā*, is probably the most obviously useful one for modern ecological concern. Literally meaning non-injury to living beings, it also implies, Maitra points out, "self-restraint and sacrifice in so far as some of the acts of cruelty are prompted by greediness or inordinate hankering" (211). Returning to Klostermaier's explanation:

> The *Yoga Sutras* find that the cause of all sin lies in *lobha, moha* and *krodha*, greed, delusion, and anger, whereas the practice of the virtues produces many side

> effects that are helpful either for the *yogi's* own realization or for that of his fellows. Thus, when *ahiṁsā*, nonviolence, is firmly established, others, too, will give up their enmity and violence in the presence of the *yogi*... (Survey, 1989 363)

Clearly Gandhi hoped to produce such an effect in other Indians, especially as regarded the nature of their resistance to the British occupation of India. In the same way, the adoption of Gandhian *ahiṁsā* towards the environment can set a courageous example of the joyful fulfilment that comes from applying self-restraint towards the greedy overconsumption of earth's resources and other living beings. In order to influence others to give up their (perhaps inadvertent) enmity and violence towards nature, the ecological yogi has to manifest the wholeness and integrity that comes from fidelity to *ahiṁsā*.

Thus we see that nonviolence is impossible without keeping a careful watch on the human tendency to greed, a truth that modern ecology is increasingly coming to appreciate. The "self-restraint and sacrifice" that Maitra understands as implied in *ahiṁsā* turn out to be necessary behaviours for a new ecologically conscientious avoidance of violence to the environment. Greed is a rupture of wholeness since it is a partitioning off of an element of reality as "mine" without regard for the interconnections that are thus torn from their natural moorings. The North

American native people, for instance, did not imagine it possible, before Europeans came to their shores, to own parts of nature such as trees, land, rivers and wild animals. When the white man built possessive fences around such entities, and waved away their protests with both guns and title deeds, the natives were appalled and shrank back in horror at the prospect of such unbridled greed.

Gandhi struggled valiantly all his life to adopt an attitude of ahiṁsā towards all animals too. After some youthful rebelliousness caused him to try meat-eating, he became personally committed to the Hindu tradition of vegetarianism, both because he wished to observe the principle of the non-killing of animals and because of many health benefits. He also decided against an earlier ambition to become a medical doctor partly because of the abhorrent practice of vivisection in medical research.[29]

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[29] Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, p.46. Gandhi's larger objection to modern medicine's general tendency to try to repair the effects of overindulgence and unhealthy living, rather than adamantly dissuading such practices, can also be related to *ahimsa*. Gandhi's overall personal dietetic self-restraint was partly a protecting of his own body from the physical injury of overindulgence. In a society like our own, with a fair number of obese people including children, for instance, apparently vying with each other to see how many "quarter-pounders" they can manage to eat -- such an attitude that

Rabindranath Tagore further contributes to our understanding of the ethical ramifications of Hindu vegetarianism:

> ... in India a whole people who were once meat-eaters gave up taking animal food to cultivate the sentiment of universal sympathy for life, an event unique in the history of mankind. (Sādhana 9)

In spite of such noble Hindu sentiments, Gandhi realized the difficulty of adopting a consistent attitude of *ahiṁsā* towards animals:

> Ahiṁsā is the highest ideal. It is meant for the brave, never for the cowardly. ... In life it is impossible to eschew violence completely. ... What is one man's food can be another's poison. Meat-eating is a sin for me. Yet, for another person, who has always lived on meat and never seen anything wrong in it, to give it up simply, in order to copy me, will be a sin. If I wish to be an agriculturist and stay in a jungle, I will have to use the minimum unavoidable violence in order to protect my fields. I will have to kill monkeys, birds and insects, which eat up my crops. ... To allow crops to be eaten up by animals in the name of ahiṁsā while there is a famine in the land, is certainly a sin. Evil and good are relative terms. What is good under certain conditions can become an

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cautions against doing violence to the body by overeating (and to animals by overeating meat) needs to be reconsidered.

> evil or a sin under a different set of conditions. (CW 84:231)

This relativity of good and evil comes up again and again both in Gandhi's thought (the reason, perhaps, why he is sometimes seen as inconsistent) and in Hindu ethics in general. The West has usually been less able to deal with such subtleties and is always concerned to legislate against the possible abuses of any situation in which good and evil are not crisply differentiated (e.g.euthanasia[30]).

But turning now to the Hindu (according to Patanjali) understanding of *satya*, we see a further example of going beyond the surface level of good and evil:

> *Satyā* - Veracity ... even the most faithful, unambiguous and precise utterance would fall short of veracity in the true sense if it were not directed

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[30] In the West, for instance, we have the anomalous situation in which if one's dog or cat is suffering from a painful terminal illness, it is mercifully 'put to sleep'. One's parent, spouse or child in the same condition is made, on the other hand, to endure every last bit of agony and indignity that the course of the disease and a universal medicare system has to offer (sometimes including CPR!). This might be an example of what Gandhi questioned as "civilized" in the West -- a black and white attitude that says life is good and death is bad, no matter what the extenuating circumstances.

> towards the good of the creatures. Thus even the most truthful speech which hurts or injures creatures is to be reckoned amongst the forms of unrighteousness, not as the virtue of truthfulness. In this sense it is a sin to recount even another's real faults when such recounting will serve no good purpose. (Maitra 212-13)

Thus a truth that disrupts the wholeness of seeking another's good, is a form of "unrighteousness." Many "truths" vie for the public's attention in the ecological crisis. While environmentalists struggle to protect the life of forests or animals, for example, business people who stand to profit from the continued "harvesting" of such "products" point out the truth that jobs and economic security are threatened unless they can proceed. This is just as true as the fact that the end of a war puts soldiers out of work, or the closing of brothels and casinos takes away the livelihood of those employed within. These are examples of truths that do not serve righteousness and need to be largely overridden in the quest for human wholeness. Gandhi's powerful movement of nonviolent resistance was called *satyāgraha*, literally 'holding on to the truth.' Adherents, *satyāgrahi*, were asked to hold out against various injustices by simply refusing to comply (i.e., noncooperation) with requirements or systems that perpetrated destruction in the guise of good business, good government, good family relations or other whitewashed ends.

But this refusal had to exclude any violence towards the agent(s) of injustice, including unnecessary and alienating criticisms which jeopardized rather than promoted understanding. As Klostermaier explains, "[w]hen *satya*, the love of truth, is perfected, it enables a person to perform great deeds" (Survey 1989 363-4). And it was one of Gandhi's ongoing struggles to emphasize the greatness of courage, especially the courage of restraint, required by a *satyāgrahi*, against all those who translated the concept of nonviolence as *passive* resistance. To Gandhi it was far from passive. It was an active and courageous application of 'soul-force' or 'truth-force' pitted against the forces of evil. [31]

Of the five Hindu *sādhāraṇadharmas* that we are examining here in light of Gandhi's values and ideals, *satya* is one he was especially concerned to clear of excessive ambiguities. This was partly due to his experience as a lawyer in which he saw how much harm can come when truth is manipulated for various ends. 'Truth is God' Gandhi came to feel quite early in his public career. In other words, the wholeness of what is real needs to be encompassed in any picture of the divine. The traditional

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[31] See also Judith M. Brown's discussion of this distinction, including the influence of the American H.D. Thoreau, in her Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp.55-6.

Hindu view of Brahman as Ultimate Reality addresses this same concern to see in God the All of life. An abstract divinity, needing to be revealed by the convoluted reasonings of theologians may have its place as an aspect of *jñānamārga*, but if the divine is not experienced as manifest in everyday human life, the truth of its presence and the wholeness of creation as divine self-expression are obscured rather than revealed. The primary duty of humans in almost every religious system is to come to know the divine in an intimate way, and to be both comforted and challenged by its presence and nearness. The grasping and interiorizing of this truth reduces other lesser human dependencies -- 'things' lose their attraction.

The next of Patañjali's *yamas*, *asteya*, a principal observed in Gandhian ashrams, reveals a rich potential of hermeneutical application to ecological ethics. Maitra explains the traditional understanding of this virtue:

> *Asteya* - Abstention from theft ... consists not merely in the abstention from the outward act of theft but also in inward uprightness or freedom from unlawful greed (*asṛharūpam*). ... According to another interpretation, however every idea of ownership is rooted in error. Hence all appropriation is misappropriation and *asteya* is freedom from *steya*, i.e. from the sense of ownership or appropriation altogether. In this sense it is *asṛharūpa*, i.e., the

nature of *aspṛa*, unworldliness, or absolute indifference to the material advantages of life. (213)[32]

C.F. Andrews, Anglican clergyman and close friend of both Gandhi and Tagore, called Gandhi "the St. Francis of our own days."[33] The ideas that all appropriation is misappropriation, and that abstention from theft includes freedom from greed, are certainly both Gandhian and Franciscan as well as being of obvious relevance to ecological concern. These are in fact quite revolutionary notions that turn on their heads the basic assumptions of Western capitalism and the free market system. But as Bryan Teixeira observes, "Gandhi -- like St. Francis of Assisi -- has been romanticized into a saccharine folk hero,"(4) and such revolutionary aspects of their thought have been

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[32] In Gandhi's famous response to Tagore's criticism, he writes, "...I am eating what does not belong to me. I am living on the spoliation of my countrymen. Trace the course of every pice that finds its way into your pocket, and you will realize the truth of what I write." [from "The Great Sentinel" in Young India 13-10-1921, quoted in CW 21:289.]

[33] C.F. Andrews, My Life Story, quoted by Kshitis Roy in "Gandhi and Tagore: A Study in Contrast and Convergence" in The Gandhi Birth Centenary, a supplement to The Times of India, Oct.2, 1969, p.I.

downplayed. *Asteya* as *aspṛa*, as unworldliness or absolute indifference to the material advantages of life, has been viewed as an ideal in Christian monasticism and in Hindu thought. In Tagore's explication of Hindu *sadhana*, he states:

> In Gita we are advised to work disinterestedly, abandoning all lust for the result. ... The man who aims at his own aggrandisement underrates everything else. ... in order to be fully conscious of the reality of all, one has to free himself from the bonds of personal desires. This discipline we have to go through to prepare ourselves for our social duties - for sharing the burdens of our fellow-beings. Every endeavour to attain a larger life requires of man "to gain by giving away, and not to be greedy." (Sādhana 19-20)

Citing also Jesus' teaching that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter heaven, Tagore emphasizes here that materialism is antithetical to spirituality:

> ... whatever we treasure for ourselves separates us from others; our possessions are our limitations. He who is bent upon accumulating riches is unable, with his ego continually bulging, to pass through the gates of comprehension of the spiritual world, which is the

> world of perfect harmony; he is shut up within the narrow walls of his limited acquisitions. (Sādhana 16)

With an imagery worthy of the Nobel poet that he was, Gandhi's friend, Tagore, depicts the dangers of egoism in vivid tones. The ego obtrudes in the human quest for harmony or wholeness with the rest of nature as well. Our interconnectedness with everything in the universe eludes our psychic understanding if the ego sees itself as the center point around which all else revolves.

Gandhi's own quest to become free from egoism and greed led him not only to reduce his material needs in terms of food, clothing and possessions, but also to *brahmacarya*, the fourth of Patañjali's five *yamas*. The West has probably been most critical of this Gandhian virtue which he adopted at the age of thirty-seven after fathering four sons. To the sexually-permissive West of the late twentieth century, there is no freedom without sexual freedom; and otherwise enthusiastic disciples of Gandhian thought often part company with him on this point.[34] But Gandhi endorsed the

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[34] E.g., Teixeira's Gandhian Futurology devotes ch. 5 to the related problem of patriarchy in Gandhi. However Teixeira is fair in acknowledging that:

> Despite being a revolutionary, he [Gandhi] was still a product of his own era. He also had his own psychological limitations. Yet he did make the struggle for women's rights central to *swaraj*. And this set his

traditional Hindu view that sexual abstinence was necessary for him in order to focus his energies on the larger tasks before him. Furthermore, Gandhi disagreed that sexual activity was necessary to sustain love:

> Man is superior to the brute inasmuch as he is capable of self-restraint and sacrifice ... Where marriage is a sacrament, the union is not the union of bodies but ... of souls ... The man who knows no restraint has no hope of self-realization. I confess it may be difficult to prove the necessity of restraint to an atheist or a materialist. But he who knows the perishable nature of flesh from the imperishable nature of spirit instinctively knows that self-realization is impossible without self-discipline and self-restraint. (CW 30:364-5)

It is perhaps ultimately the role of psychologists to judge Gandhi on this issue; but just as members of the Salvation Army, for instance, refrain from consuming alcoholic beverages out of a sense of solidarity with those addicted and so much damaged by alcohol, could Gandhi's 1906 decision to renounce sexual activity not also be viewed as a sympathetic response to women, since he saw how Indian male sexuality perpetrated violence against women? Biographies of Gandhi are full of testimonies to the effect that women

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followers on the path to contemporary feminist analysis and the challenging of patriarchy. (p.35)

trusted and respected Gandhi deeply. No doubt they felt more at ease with a powerful male leader who had decided that he, for one, would no longer consent to seeing them as objects of lust. The renunciation of an activity so highly valued in the worldly sphere perhaps also lent a certain enigma and sanctity to Gandhi's reputation. The pursuit of sexual acceptance and gratification is also a key factor in the excessive materialism of the West that has engendered the ecological crisis.

Patañjali's fifth *yama, aparigraha*, serves to echo and to consolidate the earlier *yamas*. Its notion that material prosperity is often tainted by cruelty is amply endorsed by the complicity of aggressive industrialism in ecological destruction. Maitra explains:

> *Aparigraha* [is] Unworldliness, Renunciation, i.e., the attitude of indifference to material prosperity through the perception of its being tainted by cruelty (*hiṁsā*) and the other faults. Thus the earning, hoarding and spending of riches all involve deceit (*asatya*), cruelty (*hiṁsā*) and other faults. ...*asteya* ... differs from the indifference signified by *aparigraha* in being grounded in the sense of ownership as represented in the impulses of *dambha* (pride), *asakti* (attachment, etc., while *aparigraha* arises from the consciousness of all material prosperity being tainted by the faults of deceit, cruelty, etc. (Maitra 214)

Gandhi did not say that all material prosperity is tainted, but that is basically what he lived, by example, for most of his adult life. It is *aparigraha* as a firmly established and pervasive element of traditional Hindu *sādhana* that probably also accounts for the respect accorded to Francis of Assisi (since 1979 the patron saint of ecology in the Catholic church) in some Hindu circles. And yet we must refrain from a too facile application of *aparigraha* to Gandhi since, although he reduced his own material needs to the barest minimum, he was passionately concerned about the millions in India who did not have such a choice to make. He was indeed devoted to the material emancipation of the desperately poor in India. In this sense Gandhi may have been among the first "liberation theologians" in twentieth-century India, as well as one of its first ecologists, who realized that to squander or destroy an inordinate share of earth's resources was like trampling on one's injured mother. He clearly viewed all physical gifts, like spiritual ones, as meant for the nurturance of all.

A deeply religious person, Gandhi recognized and practised the Hindu *sadhanas* that lead to *moksa*. As mentioned earlier, the pursuit of *moksa* was the underlying factor in all his other endeavours (Autobiograhy 14). But for him, outward religious rituals were largely replaced by the *charkha* (spinning wheel). The *charkha*, he believed, spelled not only India's economic salvation, especially the

sheer survival of India's poorest, it was also a means, a *sādhana*, by which the affluent could develop and nurture an empathetic affinity with the poor. Besides all this, Gandhi believed, as mentioned, that the activity of spinning had a great calming effect that helped counteract the arising of violent tendencies, as well as contributing to the emancipation of women, since this traditionally women's task was now so important. As Gandhi clearly stated in 1921: "...the Karma Yoga of our age is the spinning wheel." (CW 22:437)

Charkha as Sacrament: Soft Technology vs. Industrial Efficiency

No doubt a compilation of all Gandhi's references to the benefits of spinning, from the 93 volume Collected Works, would amount to a dozen or two volumes on its own. It is perhaps the image of Gandhi as a toothless and emaciated old man in a loin cloth, sitting cross-legged on the ground and spinning, that has most moved the world either to admiration, exasperation or ridicule. Though not an image of power, the British bore witness to the immensity of Gandhi's power, which ultimately substituted for that of the powerful army India did not possess, to oust them from colonial control of the country. For many affluent or powerful people all over the world, this image has provoked

ridicule -- how could this "half-naked fakir" (Churchill) be taken seriously by anyone, they wondered; and the British perhaps lost their own cherished image as world conquerors, especially because they lost to the likes of Gandhi.

Gandhi can be admired for many reasons, but the fact that he accomplished so much using so little seems particularly amazing. It is not surprising that his tactics were sometimes misunderstood even by his closest coworkers or supporters. Tagore, for instance, issued powerful public critiques against what he viewed as the excesses of Gandhi's "primitivism." Agreeing with Gandhi about the greatness of the Hindu tradition in general, Tagore insisted that this greatness could only be enhanced (and dire poverty be alleviated into the bargain) by adopting aggressive Western technological and industrial methods.[35]

Admiring Gandhi's compassion for the poor, and the degree of his self-sacrifice in the larger cause of *Hind Swaraj*, Tagore was especially exasperated at Gandhi's insistence that EVERYONE must spin yarn every day in order to save the country and ultimately themselves. Tagore had sympathy for Gandhi's understanding of the need to cultivate

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[35] See especially ch. VI of Tagore's Sādhana entitled "Realisation in Action" in which Tagore seems to switch suddenly from explicating the ascetical at-oneness with nature of the Indian tradition to glorifying technology's role as a further enhancement of God's work.

a preference for Indian homespun cloth among the affluent; but he was incredulous that Gandhi expected even poets and intellectuals to spin. Tagore protested against the "slave mentality" that gave "blind acceptance" to Gandhi's extreme demands regarding spinning. (CW 21:287)

"I do indeed ask the Poet and the page to spin the wheel as a sacrament" (CW 21:288) Gandhi stated clearly in 1921 in response to Tagore's critique making the duty of *charkha* not only a patriotic one but a religious one as well. A sacrament is usually a ritualized activity supposedly conducive to making God's grace visible or present. In what "visible" form, Gandhi pondered, should God appear to India's poor?

> To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can dare to appear is work and the promise of food as wages. God created man to work for his food, and said that those who ate without work were thieves. Eighty per cent of India are compulsory thieves half the year. Is it any wonder if India has become one vast prison? Hunger is the argument that is driving India to the spinning-wheel. The call of the spinning-wheel is the noblest of all. Because it is the call of love. And love is swaraj. ... The spinning-wheel is the reviving draught for the millions of our dying countrymen and countrywomen. ... A plea

> for the spinning-wheel is a plea for recognizing the dignity of labour. (CW 21:289)

The ability to work for one's bread was, in Gandhi's view, a basic human right and an honour. All those who could afford a spinning wheel, and who were influential role models for the population of India, like Tagore, must especially show the worth and dignity of this activity by spinning themselves. "It was our love of foreign cloth that ousted the wheel from its position of dignity ..." Gandhi explained, "[t]herefore I consider it a sin to wear foreign cloth" (CW 21:290). What does a seemingly purely economic action like the purchasing of foreign-produced clothing have to do with the ethical area of sin? "I must confess that I do not draw a sharp distinction or any distinction between economics and ethics," Gandhi wrote, going on to explain his understanding of the relationship between economics and ethics:

> Economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or nation are immoral and therefore sinful. ... It is sinful to eat American wheat and let my neighbour the grain dealer starve for want of custom. Similarly it is sinful for me to wear the latest finery of Regent Street, when I know that if I had but worn the things woven by the neighbouring spinners and weavers, that would have clothed me, and fed and clothed them. On the knowledge of my sin bursting upon

> me, I must consign the foreign garments to the flames and thus purify myself, and thenceforth rest content with the rough khādī made by my neighbours. In knowing that my neighbours may not, having given up the occupation, take kindly to the spinning-wheel, I must take it up myself and thus make it popular. (CW 21:290)

Thus in responding to Tagore's criticism, Gandhi reiterates his ongoing emphasis on the need to break with "material civilization and its attendant greed and exploitation of the weak" (CW 21:290). The widespread use of the spinning wheel and the khadi which it produced was an adoption of a soft technology that refrained from unnecessary destruction of resources, including the resource of human labour. The textile mills of the British cloth industry may have been more efficient in terms of productivity, but the soft technology of the *charka* put more people to work and used only what was available locally.

For Gandhi, soft technologies that provided work for the hungry, were the key to India's economic revival. At the same time, such work allowed people to fulfill the spiritual mandate to do one's duty, as articulated in the Gītā. Writing on "the Charkha in the *Gītā*", Gandhi quotes chapter 3, verses 8-16 from Edwin Arnold's version of the "Song Celestial" which read (v.8) "Work is more excellent than idleness; the body's life proceeds not lacking work." Most of chapter three deals with the role of action in the

life of faith and therefore relates to our earlier concern regarding the relationship of faith and works. The Gita's overall command to act disinterestedly, or more specifically to do one's duty without being anxious about the results, does not at all reduce the necessity of acting ethically.

Perhaps this Gītā theme of acting without counting on gaining certain benefits (financial rewards, merits for heaven, etc.) as a result would be effective in addressing age-old controversies over faith and works, as well as addressing the environmental sceptics who want to see immediately the benefits of environmental self-restraint. Works or duties are not the way to gain heaven or *moksa* but they are nonetheless necessary for the integrated life of a religious person. To articulate, however eloquently, one's allegiance to God while leading a selfish or materialistic existence is simply dishonest. It is on the strength of this point that Gandhi insisted that even the poet should spin. "Even as the unwise work selfishly in the bondage of selfish works, let the wise man work unselfishly for the good of all the world" (v.25) says another translation (Mascaro), indicating that to work "for the good of all the world" is to be freed of the bondage of selfish work. Tagore may not have felt any natural inclination towards spinning, but because he was such a well-loved public figure, his cheerful acceptance of the duty of spinning

might inspire others to emulate him in placing duty before whim:

> The illumined soul must not create confusion in the minds of the ignorant by refraining from work. ... Shake off this fever of ignorance. Stop hoping for worldly rewards. Fix your mind on the Ātman. Be free from the sense of ego. Dedicate all your actions to me. Then go forward and fight.[36]

Having won the Nobel prize for literature eight years prior, it was almost impossible for Tagore to write creatively without gaining "worldly rewards" or recognition. Therefore, taking on the humble peasant task of spinning would provide a sphere of activity which would not bring great honours, but instead provide the opportunity to work disinterestedly, as the Gītā advises, without hope of reward.

Spinning was neither part of *varṇāśramadharma* or a *sādhāraṇadharma* but its universal adoption by the Indian population of the time had great economic, democratic and spiritual potential. Therefore an "illumined soul" like Tagore was being asked to put aside his personal aversion to

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[36] Bhagavad Gītā tr. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1987), p.53. This translation has unfortunately omitted the verse numbers, but this quotation seems to correspond to ch.3, verses 26, 29 & 30.

tedious manual labour so as not to "create confusion in the minds of the ignorant" by appearing to be disdainful of such a widely beneficial activity. For Gandhi, the *khādī* "spirit" was essential to the unification of Indian minds and hearts in the effort toward true *swadeshi*:[37]

> Every time that we take our khāddar garment early in the morning to wear for going out we should remember that we are doing so ... for the sake of saving the millions of India. If we have the khādī spirit in us we should serve ourselves with simplicity in every walk of life. Khādī spirit means illimitable patience. For those who know anything about the production of khāddar, know how patiently those spinners and weavers have to toil. Even so must we have patience, while spinning the thread of swaraj. ... Khādī spirit means fellow-feeling with every living being on earth. It means the complete renunciation of everything that is likely to harm our fellow creatures. And if we are to cultivate that spirit amongst the millions of our countrymen, what a land this India of ours would be! (CW 34:520)

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[37] Literally "belonging to or made in one's own country" (Tendulkar glossary, vol.8, p.316), Gandhi expanded the use of this word to include an emotional/mental/spiritual "belonging" by cultivating a preference for all that was Indian.

Since Gandhi believed that spinning and weaving homespun cloth were essential to India's healthy independence and survival, he naturally wished to see every student in every school spend a part of each day spinning. For Tagore, making education interesting and open to the arts and sciences was far more important than time wasted on simple village crafts.

Their disagreement about the universal duty of daily spinning had wide-ranging ramifications which centered around Gandhi's notion of the centrality of the "khādī spirit". Ultimately, for Gandhi, spinning and the exclusive wearing of Indian homespun was a sacrament of solidarity with India's poor. In Tagore's Sādhana, however, it is clear that he too understood and deeply respected the traditional Hindu caution against the excessive focus on the individual as opposed to the good of all. Gandhi's hope, as we have seen, was that the universal (Indian) use of the *charkha* would lead to a broadly-felt sense of empathy and oneness with all one's fellow creatures. This is akin to what Tagore has called "cosmic consciousness:"

> According to the Upanishads, the key to cosmic consciousness, to God-consciousness is in the consciousness of the soul. ... We must know with absolute certainty that essentially we are spirit. ... the man who has gone through the ceremony of the discipline of self-restraint and high thinking ... who

> has come out simple in wants, pure in heart, and ready to take up all the responsibilities of life in a disinterested largeness of spirit ... is considered ... to have come into living relation with his surroundings; to have become at one with the All. (Sādhana 30-1)

To be "at one with the All" also has clear ecological implications. It is a "cosmic consciousness" that engenders the fellow-feeling that was the goal of Gandhi's khadi spirit. And the self-restraint that leads to a life of simple wants, accepting of responsibilities and largeness of spirit was certainly a guiding principle of Gandhi's style of living. One of the greatest rewards of studying Gandhi's life and thought is the solid integrity one encounters in all his lifestyle experiments as he searched for truth. Comparisons of Gandhi and Tagore often refer to Gandhi as a man of action, and Tagore as a man of thought. But, as Tagore himself explains, "[t]he more vital his [a person's] thoughts the more have his words to be explained in the context of his life" (Sādhana 71). This is the way to a wholeness of human experience that integrates the inner with the outer life.

Human actions and attitudes are ultimately manifestations of beliefs, values and priorities. Freedom, for example, is a universally-sought, though often elusive, condition. But as Tagore explains in Sādhana, and Gandhi

explains through his continual choosing to diminish his personal needs in order to serve others, the nature of the truest kind of freedom is far from obvious:

> At first sight it seems that man counts that as freedom by which he gets unbounded opportunities for self-gratification and self-aggrandisement. But surely this is not borne out in history. Our revelatory men have always been those who have lived the life of self-sacrifice. The higher nature in man always seeks for something which transcends itself ... This is man's *dharma*, man's religion, and man's self is the vessel which is to carry this sacrifice to the altar. (75-6)

The Gandhian duty to spin and to wear only *khādī* for the India of the early twentieth century, was a duty to return to a way of living that was more harmonious with one's fellow humans, and ultimately with all of nature as well. This duty was not a hindrance to freedom but rather an expression of freedom's higher aims, freeing the human conscience of the burden of accomodating evil in order to satisfy the whims of the ego. In choosing the soft technology of the spinning wheel, Gandhi asked India to choose in favour of the vast millions of its citizens who needed a means to enhance their meagre livelihoods.

Gandhi sought to free India from being victimized by the industrial efficiency of the West. Such efficiency depended on a docile hinterland that sacrificed the security

of its own people to provide raw materials for Western factories; and it is the pursuit of such hinterlands that largely fueled the imperialistic thrust of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Now that political imperialism is much less fashionable than it was (though it is far from extinct), attention can be focused on the ecological imperialism that continues to ravage creation in hopes of making human life ever more mindlessly luxurious. As early as 1913, Tagore noted:

> We are frantically busy making use of the forces of the universe to gain more and more power; we feed and clothe ourselves from its stores, we scramble for its riches, and it becomes for us a field of fierce competition. But were we born for this, to extend our priority rights over this world and make of it a marketable commodity? When our whole mind is bent only upon making use of this world it loses for us its true value. We make it cheap by our sordid desires ... we only try to feed upon it and miss its truth. (Sādhana 108)

Tagore largely favoured the industrialization of India along Western lines. And yet this prophetic-for-ecology passage recognizes the illegitimacy of extending our priority rights over this world and making it into a marketable commodity. Although Tagore and Gandhi eventually parted ways to a certain extent, at this early stage, the eloquent words of

the poet articulate that core of Hindu values which Gandhi also passionately espoused. As a supporter of the move towards Indian industrialization, however, Tagore articulated the more popular approach that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru embraced for independent India. Nonetheless, his words remain as a vibrant testimony to the heritage of Hindu values that refuses to cheapen the world by making it a mere resource to satisfy the sordid desires of consumerisitic humanity.

Ethics, Industrial Society and Compassion

Gandhi's major contribution to the world at large included an astute reappraisal of the underlying ethical stance of modern industrial society; especially in the areas of compassionate treatment of fellow-humans (including women), humane treatment of all creatures, and a responsible and respectful treatment of the earth and its resources. This translates, in terms of today's world problems, into a broad ecological concern for the earth and all its inhabitants such as is reflected in the Vedic prayer that all may be happy. In Gandhi's case, such concerns always had a religious aspect that either contributed to or subtracted from the personal pursuit of *mokṣa*.

Because of the overtly political nature of much of Gandhi's activities, the discussion of his thought

necessarily takes on an East-West polarity. In other words, because he spent about three decades (1915-1947) speaking and writing on India's behalf against the forces of British occupation, he often adopted the position of praising India's (and Hinduism's) traditional ways as not only adequate for self-government, but in fact superior to the mass industrialization that the West touted as the panacea for all the world's ills. Whereas the British, as typical representatives of Western industrialization, saw themselves in a somewhat salvific role for India, at least economically, Gandhi felt that a return to that core of Hindu thought that abhorred greed and materialism was the key to India's potential for a stable independence.

In an important sense, then, Gandhi's thought and work was a hermeneutics of modern Hinduism in dialogue with the Western ethics of mass industrialization. His many ideas about "simple living and high thinking" are being rediscovered for their ecological potential, as well as their economic and other benefits. There has been a three step development in this dialogue, from the Western assumption that industrialization is good for all -- to the more recent recognition of the huge destructive potential of widespread industrialization -- to the present Western interest in learning from the Eastern aversion to greed and materialism, a wiser way to live.

Looking at Gandhi's specific role in this dialogue process, we must first consider his role as an exponent and reformer of the modern Hinduism that might ultimately lend guidance to the rescuing of the West from industrial destruction. In the first decades after Gandhi's death in 1948, any adulation of him as "saint" and savior of modern India was quickly tempered by the rapid pace of India's industrialization instigated by Gandhi's long-time disciple, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Because India is such a huge country where many trends can coexist side-by-side, it was possible for Nehru and many others to sincerely admire Gandhi's ideas while at the same time recognizing certain aspects of their short-sightedness. The industrialization and improved agricultural methods India adopted starting in the 1950's did eradicate starvation, but now the real cost of such industrialization is becoming apparent. And Gandhi's fears are proving remarkably prophetic.

In other words, India's own behavior after Gandhi's death, her apparent rejection of his methods and goals, suggested that his role as exponent and reformer of modern Hinduism had ended. However, the massive output of literature on Gandhi since then suggests the opposite. Gandhi, like Jesus, Francis of Assisi and other heroes of compassion, is so easily stereotyped, whitewashed and made into a hagiographical plaster statue. Although this is often done out of respect and admiration, the effect is a

sad one that usually works to counteract to some extent the most vital aspects of the hero's life.[38]

On the socio-political level, the reforms for which Gandhi worked resembled those of a number of modern Hindu reformers, starting with the Brahmo Samāj of the early nineteenth century: caste privileges, addressing frightful economic inequities, the treatment of women, child marriages, handling foreign influences cautiously, and so on. However, because of the rather explosive political climate of Gandhi's time, the frame of reference for most of his endeavors was the Indian political desire for independence from British rule. As a British-trained lawyer who had fought some human rights battles effectively in South Africa, the India of his time looked to him first for political leadership, and were perhaps not expecting the spiritual depths with which Gandhi responded to all questions and crises.

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[38] For example, to refuse to admit the political effect (even if not intended) of Gandhi's fasts is to make him a person of diminished perceptions. Most others could detect this effect. Also, to avoid facing up to the greatly increased human suffering implied in Gandhi's attitude towards Hitler is to refuse to acknowledge his limited human scope of understanding, an error to which he himself seldom succumbed.

Ultimately it is these spiritual depths and their practical ramifications which hold the clue to Gandhi's continued relevance. Truth and non-violence, Gandhi's most cherished causes, need to be reinterpreted for our times. A new hermeneutics needs to be applied to their too familiar meanings, one that engages some pressing issues of the end of the millenium, like ecology, alternative economics and the status of women. Thomas Merton may have contributed to such hermeneutics when he wrote:

> The first job of a *satyāgrahi* is to bring the real situation to light even if he has to suffer and die in order that injustice be unmasked and appear for what it really is. (10)

The average North American, for instance, believes it is true that he or she is being non-violent towards the environment. The average Indian male who does not physically beat his wife, but also does not allow her to become educated, believes it is true he is being non-violent towards his wife. The average consumer everywhere believes it is true that buying and selling do not involve violence. It is perhaps the least overtly violent of societies that is in greatest danger of being lulled into a blinding complacency about the implications of their everyday actions. But the job of the Gandhian *satyāgrahi*, as Merton suggests, is to bring out the Heideggerian truth (*alethia* as opposed to *orthotes*) of a situation: to "unconceal" or to

reveal things as they really are, not to be satisfied with the mere apparent "correctness" of things as truth.

Gandhi's pursuit of truth led him to the unanticipated role of bringing the real situation of modern Hinduism to light, and to suffering and ultimately dying in order to unmask the injustices he saw there. Gandhi would concur with Radhakrishnan's understanding that for Hinduism, behavior is more important than belief. This fits in well with the new understanding of the path of works that Klostermaier attributes to Gandhi and certain other Hindu reformers (Survey 1989 173). Gandhi can be seen, then as a twentieth-century *karmayogi*. Even Gandhi's program of economic *swadeshi* reveals this updated karmayogic belief that every human action has consequences for which we are responsible since all of life is interconnected.

As we also saw in discussing Gandhi's attitude towards duty and work, he learned his emphasis on *karmayoga* from his favorite Hindu scripture, the Bhagavadgītā. For Gandhi, the development of all personal virtues and religious realization (*sādhana*), as well as the growth of real civilization, came about through the practice of one's extended and deeply-understood duty. And as in Kṛṣṇa's advice to Arjuna, Gandhi pleaded with the rich of India to set aside personal preferences, even one's own rationality in order to do their duty towards the poor, that is, to live in such a way that there was room in Indian society for the

contributions and advancements of even the "lowliest" members. Thus, as previously discussed, Gandhi favored the soft technology of the spinning wheel, as answer to India's economic woes, to the hard and ultimately destructive technologies of Western industrialization.

For Gandhi, the far more ethical *khādī* "spirit" was essential to the unification of Indian minds and hearts in the effort toward true *swadeshi*. Compassion for the neediest, and renunciation of all things that harm others, were at the heart of his understanding of that core of Hinduism that deserved to be the guiding principle of India's future. The idea of this khādī spirit continues to have a great potential as a worldwide ecological symbol as well. "If we have the khadi spirit in us we should serve ourselves with simplicity in every walk of life." With this kind of provocative message, Gandhi tried to reawaken in his fellow Hindus that core of classical Hinduism that abhors the superficial and the greedy, and celebrates instead an uncluttered spiritual depth and compassion for all.

Conclusion

Gandhi's ongoing contribution to the world at large could also be discussed in the interrelated areas of nutrition, sanitation, economics, employment, education, role of women, religious tolerance, prayer, communal living,

non-violent resistance, political ideologies, merchandising, scriptural exegesis, art, sexual ethics, childhood, appropriate technologies, exercise, parenting, community health, cooperative agriculture, village renewal, world peace, creativity, self-actualization and others. Needless to say, these issues have not all been dealt with here, and yet all of them are reflected in the khādī spirit concern to renounce anything that might bring harm to others in a variety of ways. In some of these areas, like that of Hindu-Muslim religious tolerance and communal living, Gandhi experienced heartbreaking failure, and the situation has improved little or perhaps even further deteriorated. In areas such as village renewal, Gandhi's faithful disciple, Vinoba Bhave, applied Gandhian ideals but ultimately failed to achieve a lasting economic stability. The pursuit of Gandhian ideals rarely has fairy tale endings. As perhaps the greatest spirit of a century as complex as the twentieth, Gandhi offered challenges that require courage, insight and a satyāgrahian tenacity. The West wondered how India could upgrade itself to compare with the accomplishments of Western industrialization. A half century later, the West is left wondering how to find its way back to a more ethical and compassionate (or at least empathetic) mode of existence that values living things and the earth itself more than the manufactured trinkets of industrial materialism.

In applying Gandhi's thought specifically to modern ecological concern, his notion of the khādī spirit is perhaps the Occam's Razor that expresses as concisely as possible the otherwise daunting duty to live in a way that, as much as is humanly possible, avoids injuring other living beings and the ecosystems on which they depend. It was also the unique *sādhana* that he offered as the virtue to be practiced which recognizes the wholeness of all life as an integral web -- an Indra's net of reflected interconnectedness.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

GANDHI'S KHADI SPIRIT AND ECOFEMINIST CONCERNS

Introduction

Gandhi has readily been recognized as a feminist within the context of his times. He continually mentioned the uplift of women as essential to a renewed and independent India. He vehemently opposed child marriages, dowries or "bride price," and the prohibition against widow remarriage which left young girls or women, forcibly married to an older man, destitute and solitary for the rest of their lives, or living as harassed slaves in the homes of their in-laws. He encouraged women to stand up for their rights as fully human persons, and he demanded that men, especially those with political power, rescind the behaviour, attitudes and laws that kept women oppressed. As T.S. Devadoss explains:

> No man in India has done more than Gandhi in recent times for the elevation of women and the occupation by them of their rightful place in domestic and public life. A passionate lover of humanity, an implacable foe of injustice in whatever form or sphere, it is small wonder that Gandhi early espoused the woman's cause. Throughout his long life of service, he preached forcefully against the wrongs done to women in the name of law, tradition and even religion. (233)

However, to connect Gandhi's name with the recent phenomenon known as ecofeminism may seem not only anachronistic but also of dubious relevance to the question of khadi spirit and ecology. Since our discussion so far has been largely gender-neutral, a focus on Gandhi's "feminist" thought will help elucidate the unique redefinition of responsible humanity that is implied in his notion of khādī spirit. A basic overall concern of this thesis, to move away from anthropocentrism and towards a biocentrism that regards all living things as precious, is also addressed through this focus.

Gandhi as Feminist

Definitions of ecofeminism vary. They range from the benign but significant perspective that women's greater natural empathy with all life forms (partly due to their more direct participation in nature's cycles and processes) invites an intimate incorporation of ecological and feminist principles -- to the more confrontational stance that observes strong parallels between the history of patriarchy's exploitation of women and its exploitation of nature. This latter view observes the many instances, both historical and contemporary, in which men have used their political, financial and other forms of power to exploit both women and nature as "resources" to serve their own

ends, especially their pursuit of convenience and pleasure. Such a view sees *androcentrism* (male-centeredness) as the real root of the ecological crisis rather than *anthropocentrism* (human-centeredness) (Zimmerman 277).

Like Reinhold Niebhur's overriding caution to be vigilant about the pervasive human tendency to hubris, even in just causes, Gandhi's focus on the khādī spirit is easily criticized from a modern feminist perspective that recognizes womens' need for self-advocacy rather than self-effacement at this critical juncture in worldwide gender relations. Although Gandhi was a blatant feminist considering the mores of his time and culture, he was decidedly working, not to change women's roles as nurturers and peacemakers, but rather to arouse greater public homage for such traditional feminine virtues. His was a feminism that celebrated the long-admired presumably feminine qualities that engendered renunciation of personal aspirations in favour of service to others. What was most revolutionary in Gandhi's approach to women was not his praise for the affinity between traditional feminine roles and his program of *ahiṁsā* and *satyāgraha*; but rather the fact that he encouraged men also to cultivate such goals.

Before attempting a hermeneutical reassessment for our own times of Gandhi's views on women, it is necessary to observe them within the original context of the India of his time. In Young India in July of 1921, Gandhi declared:

> Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity, the female sex, not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two, for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge. A woman's intuition has often proved truer than man's arrogant assumption of superior knowledge. There is method in putting Sītā before Rāmā and Radha before Krishṇa. ... Swaraj means ability to regard every inhabitant of India as our own brother and sister. (Tendulkar 2:51)[39]

We see in this early statement of Gandhi's the kind of feminism that may have influenced later thinkers, even in the West, like Ashley Montagu's work in his book called The Natural Superiority of Women. In the very next sentence Tendulkar notes that "[h]is concern for the neglected creatures embraced even the animal world" and he goes on to

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[39] The precise wording of this quote may be somewhat of a paraphrase on the part of Tendulkar since it does not seem to appear in the Collected Works in this format. However, the sentiments are authentically Gandhian (as can be verified by a wide range of his statements about or to women); and Tendulkar's presentation of them here highlights the often overlooked, but decidedly present, anti-patriarchal side of Gandhi.

speak of Gandhi's many efforts towards the protection of cows in particular. Although many modern feminists would be insulted at this presumed connection between the protection of women and of animals from "man's" brutality, it is indicative nonetheless of Gandhi's inherent biocentrism. Nor was his exalted view of women immune from the awareness of the Indian woman's complicity in the rejection of homespun khadi in favour of foreign fineries of dress. Gandhi continually appealed to middle-class and wealthier women to forego such tastes and to deliberately cultivate, instead, the ancient Indian art of the spinning and weaving of the world's finest cloth:

> Having given much, more is now required of you. ... Boycott [of British cloth] is impossible *unless you will surrender the whole of your foreign clothing*. So long as the taste persists, so long is complete renunciation impossible. And boycott means complete renunciation. We must be prepared to be satisfied with such cloth as India can produce, even as we are thankfully content with such children as God gives us. I have not known a mother throwing away her baby even though it may appear ugly to an outsider. So should it be with the patriotic women of India about Indian manufactures. ... During the transition stage you can only get coarse khadi in abundance. You may add all the art to it that your taste allows or requires. And

> if you will be satisfied with coarse khādī for a few months, India need not despair of seeing a revival of the fine rich and coloured garments of old which were once the envy and the despair of the world. (CW 20:495-6)

The familiar portrayal of Gandhi clad only in his simple khādī loincloth often suggests an excessively austere ascetic. In the foregoing passage, however, we see that he understood and even encouraged the need for the aesthetic, even in so commonplace a sphere as women's clothing. 'Add all the art that your taste allows or requires' is hardly the statement of a misanthropic pleasure-hater.

"The destiny of India" Gandhi went on to say at one of many women's meetings he addressed, "is far safer in your hands than in the hands of a Government that has so exploited India's resources that she has lost faith in herself" (CW 20:497). He looked to women to refrain from the incautious neglect of the precious things that could be grown and manufactured locally, a principle that modern ecologists also espouse.

"I have mentally become a woman" Gandhi said in 1927, "in order to steal into her heart" (CW 35:289). At this point he was addressing himself to the issue of woman's self-image as a plaything of man, to be decorated with jewels and bangles in order to excite man's gaze and passion. Having himself taken the vow of brahmacarya over

twenty years earlier in 1906, he saw this as demeaning to women and encouraged them to break free from this imposition of men's values on women. Besides all this, so much money was tied up in women's jewelry that could instead be used to alleviate the suffering of fellow Indians, especially children. In many places, he convinced women to donate their jewelry for the sake of helping the destitute:

> The children are starving today and it is on their behalf that I have come with the begging bowl, and if you do not disown kinship with them, but take some pride in it, then you must give me not only your money but your jewelry as sisters in so many other places have done. My hungry eyes rest upon the ornaments of sisters, whenever I see them heavily bedecked. There is an ulterior motive too in asking for the ornaments, viz., to wean women from the craze for ornaments and jewelry. And if I may take the liberty that I do with other sisters, may I ask you what it is that makes woman deck herself more than man? I am told by feminine friends that she does so for pleasing man. Well... if you want to play your part in the world's affairs, you must refuse to deck yourself for pleasing man. If I was born a woman, I would rise in rebellion against any pretension on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything. (CW 35:288-9)

This pregnant passage contains both problems and insights. India was at that time (and largely remains) the kind of traditional society in which the majority of women are disallowed by both law and custom to own property in the form of land. Although many Indian women are in fact known for their jewelry (often wearing all that they own), it must be remembered that in many cases, this represents the woman's only saleable property, and acts as a meagre sort of insurance policy in case the woman ends up on her own and in desperate need of financial help. In some cases, then, the possession of a few items of valuable jewelry represents an escape hatch held in reserve by women who might otherwise have absolutely no means of survival apart from their husbands. With this in mind, Gandhi's ploy of arousing women's guilt over starving children in order to get them to donate their jewelry seems rather unscrupulous. When Indian men donated money, they were rarely handing over the bulk of their worldly possessions. A woman's gift of her jewelry was often just this -- a huge sacrifice made in the heat of compassion for starving children. In this case, Gandhi could be accused of exploiting women's natural tenderness and compassion, especially for children in need, without regard for the undue risk of minimal personal security.

The khadi spirit, we observed, meant fellow-feeling with all other living beings and a complete renunciation of all that might cause them harm. Well and good, but when a

huge sector of the population, a group already oppressed and marginalized by the predominant power structures, is asked to risk their own survival for this khadi spirit, we must look below the surface and question the philanthropy involved.

And yet, when Gandhi speaks of his "ulterior motive" in asking woman to hand over their ornaments, he takes on a progressive-sounding feminist stance. Refuse to decorate yourselves for mens' pleasure, he advises women. Do not portray yourself as a plaything of man, he daringly asserts. Even today, in late twentieth-century North America, many women and men are angered by such a stance. Unfortunately, self-image within Western individualism is so wrapped up with one's sexual identity that few, especially among the young, dare to ignore the rule (understandably promulgated by the advertisers) to always strive for maximum sexual attractiveness in looks and behaviour. Such a rule is the basis for so much buying and selling as people strive to overcome insecurities in this realm with purchased products that supposedly enhance one's positive sexual image. As Michael Zimmerman points out:

> Arguably, perhaps the most profound aspect of our alienation from "nature" is being alienated from our bodies. In "advanced" societies, women and men alike display highly problematic attitudes towards their bodies, but women in particular suffer from distorted

> body images. Defining themselves largely in terms of the patriarchal gaze, many women diet constantly, desperately attempting to force their bodies to conform to the ideal of thinness. ... Even in "normal" women, constant concern about looking good helps to generate the rampant consumerism of "developed" societies. (281-2)

Zimmerman here displays the courage to call a spade a spade. The kind of destructive consumerism that has generated the ecological crisis cannot be blamed solely on a largely male focus on technological prowess. Not only are millions of dollars spent every day in the West to enhance women's looks in particular, but sexually attractive women are often used to sell everything from automobiles to bank investments. Much of Western consumerism is either directly or indirectly involved with this concern. The extent to which the collective identity of the Western women in particular, is still inextricably bound with men's approval, is easily discerned in such behaviour. A karmic awareness of the consequences of every action in a vastly interconnected universe suggests, however, that the money and resources spent on enhancing Western woman's beauty, needs to be reconsidered. If, in the process, she becomes less 'a plaything of man', neither Gandhi nor modern feminism would see this as a loss.

Gandhi was among those modern Indian reformers who also tried to eradicate the popular Hindu practice of child marriages, a practice which often meant that very young girls were in essence "sold" at whatever dowry price their parents could afford to give the groom who, it was implied, needed to be reimbursed for taking on the burden of his new wife's upkeep. In 1927 Gandhi wrote sadly that:

> Do not call it dharma or a thing supported by shastras that you can marry a little girl fondling on the knee ... And yet, I have known many ... friends, learned lawyers and doctors, educated and enlightened men [to] marry girls before they were thirteen. ... I tell you, there is no sadder evil in our society than this. Our youth must resolve that they would not marry girls before they are fifteen. (CW 34:233)

Tendulkar further adds to his version of this quote: "I do not regard a girl married, who is given away in marriage by her parents without her consent and for pecuniary or other advantages" (2:273-4). Unfortunately this problem persists and displays an immense resilience to change. As Devadoss wrote in 1974:

> Many educated parents still perform child marriages. ... Many 'dispose of' their daughters in order to relieve themselves of the burden of keeping an unmarried girl at home ... How is it that so many boys or girls who have even passed through colleges and have

> secured high academic qualifications and distinctions are found unable or unwilling to resist the manifestly evil custom of dowry ...? Why should educated girls be found to commit suicide because they are not suited? Of what value is their education, if it does not enable them to dare to defy a custom which is wholly indefensible ...? (238)

Devadoss further recommends that today's young woman ought to adamantly refuse to marry a man who directly or indirectly demands money in order to marry her. Writing a quarter century after Gandhi's passing, his advice sounds revolutionary enough in a traditional Hindu setting. How much more so must Gandhi have sounded addressing a college (Karachi) group in 1929:

> Promise me that *deti-leti* [dowry system] shall be wiped off. Swear that you will cherish the freedom of your women, as much as your own, that you will die to restore them to their full status and dignity. ... Then I will understand that you are ready for the freedom of your country. If I had a girl under my charge, I would rather keep her a maiden all her life than give her in marriage to one who demanded even a pie as a condition for marrying her. Remember these four things: use your mother tongue, wear only homespun cloth, free your womenfolk from social disabilities, and do something to help the poor. (CW 39:416)

In this strong statement, Gandhi makes it clear that the emancipation of Indian women from such demeaning practices as the dowry system was far from being a peripheral issue. Rather it was essential to the self-rule or swaraj for which India longed. To say that India was not ready for freedom until after Indian women were freed from a variety of social constraints is to be unequivocally opposed to the endemic patriarchy that had developed within Hinduism.

And yet the image of Gandhi as excessively patriarchical persists. In 1983, the Illustrated Weekly of India featured an article by the "well-known Pakistani radical" Tariq Ali in which Gandhi's attitude towards women is viewed not as 'ahead of his time' but the opposite -- as "reactionary":

> [T]here was one important area where Gandhi's personal instincts were utterly reactionary ... women. Gandhi was strongly opposed to contraception and abortion. He regarded sex as a necessary evil which had to be experienced in order to reproduce. He stated that contraception resulted in 'imbecility and nervous prostration', that 'any union is a crime when the desire for progeny is absent' and that sexual attraction, 'even between husband and wife, is unnatural'. ... Gandhi's attitude betrays a deep hostility to women. They are seen exclusively as mothers. Presumably their pleasures ... lay in

> mastering the process of reproduction and serving men. (13)

Ali's critique is representative of an increasingly popular form of Gandhi-bashing. There are a number of levels on which its treatment of Gandhi is unfair. Gandhi was not opposed to contraception per se, but only to artificial means thereof which he feared would encourage unbridled self-indulgence which he further feared would weaken moral fibre. Had he been alive to see what the widespread use of "the pill" has engendered in sexual mores in the West, it is unlikely that he would consider himself proven wrong. However he decidedly agreed that India needed to curb its birth rate, even in 1920 when it was much less threatening than now:

> We [Indians] have more than an ordinary share of disease, famines and pauperism -- even starvation among millions. ... Is it right for us who know the situation to bring forth children ... ? We only multiply slaves and weaklings if we continue the process of procreation whilst we feel and remain helpless [politically], diseased and famine-stricken. ... I must not conceal from the reader the sorrow I feel when I hear of births in this land. ... for years I have contemplated ... the prospect of suspending procreation by voluntary self-denial. ... I have not a shadow of doubt that married people if they wish well to the country ... would

> practise perfect self-restraint and cease to procreate for the time being. (CW 18:346-7)

In fact, "mastering" the process of reproduction was high on Gandhi's list of priorities for his country, as it is indeed for feminist concerns today. No single reality has kept women more enslaved or subjugated than not having control over when pregnancies would occur, and how many children they were willing to somehow nurture, clothe and educate. Ali accuses Gandhi of betraying "a deep hostility to women" whereas some of Gandhi's ideas about women remain far ahead of what Indian and some other societies today would accept. The following advice to women whose husbands refuse to "exercise restraint to keep births in check" is hardly conducive to the image of woman as servant of man:

> This is a question of a woman's true dharma. ... Even if the husband falls the wife must not. It is pure lechery to stand in the way of a woman when she desires to abstain. If he forces himself on her, it is her duty to make him desist even by slapping him. She should close her door to the lustful husband. She must refuse to be the wife of a sinful husband. We must inculcate such courage in women. (CW 62:233)

In the light of this 1936 statemnt, how can Tariq Ali write almost fifty years later (when such notions are much less radical-sounding) that Gandhi saw women "exclusively as mothers"? On the contrary, he wanted them to be mothers

less, and strong, independent persons more. The extent to which Gandhi was ahead of his time and culture in this issue is revealed by this 1921 statement:

> I passionately desire the utmost freedom for our women. I detest child-marriages. I shudder to see a child widow, and shiver with rage when a husband just widowed with brutal indifference contracts another marriage. I deplore the criminal indifference of parents who keep their daughters utterly ignorant and illiterate and bring them up only for the purpose of marrying them off to some young man of means. Notwithstanding all this grief and rage, I realize the difficulty of the problem. Women must have votes and an equal legal status. (CW 20:410)

Thus we see that Gandhi was not only a passionate feminist, for his time, but a practical one as well who knew the necessity of putting some 'teeth' into the emancipation of women by giving them the vote and equal legal status. Women in Canada had only been 'given' (a problematic verb suggesting it was a gift of men's tolerance) the vote, after legally proving their staus as persons, within the previous few years.

And yet many books on Gandhi contain photographs such as the one of his wife Kasturba devotedly washing his feet, as well as information about his problems and failures with his own children, especially regarding their education. He

was no doubt an idealist in many ways in spite of his continual practical experiments in so many aspects of life. It may be, in fact, that his penchant for experimentation was precisely the flaw that caused difficulties such as those with his children's education. As family patriarch he decided not to provide them with the costly and extensive education that he had enjoyed. Instead he would educate them himself, a potentially worthy prospect for someone with a lot of time on their hands. Gandhi however directed his attention to a superhuman quantity of issues as it was, and did not do an adequate job in this area.

Though ahead of his time, Gandhi was not anachronistically anti-patriarchical. Nirad Chaudhuri validly points out that Gandhi was motivated by a principle of "organic" development, an almost Socratic-sounding concept in which the truth of a "new" way of thinking must be called forth from people rather than imposed on them[40]:

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[40] The fact that Gandhi had a rather manipulative personality could be brought out here. His 'days of silence' and other forms of self-mortification were probably undertaken with the end in view of combatting such a tendency. In fact, one wonders how much of his supposed patriarchy was more the *modus operandi* of his authoritative and commanding personality-type, something to which individual women are also subject though less opportunity usually exists for its expression. At any rate, it is a tendency that he consciously

> If anything distinguished the political, social and economic thinking of Mahatma Gandhi, it was his insistence on the inwardness of human endeavour. He taught that everything must come from people and nothing must be imposed on them; the traditions, institutions and techniques of a nation should be respected and preserved, and allowed only to grow, novelties should be slowly grafted on, and integrated with, the existing life of the people. His extreme distrust of modern technology and industrialism was only an uncompromising expression of these convictions. But the present regime has totally rejected his principle of "organic" development. (59)

In the area of emancipation of women, Gandhi barely managed to restrain his zeal in order to make room for this as an "organic" development rather than as an urgent justice issue.

Woman as Incarnation of *Ahiṁsā*

The popular contemporary Indian novelist, Mulk Raj Anand, has written a novel called Gaurī (1981, firt published 1960 as The Old Woman and the Cow) in which the

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resisted with varying degrees of success. Erik Erikson's Gandhi's Truth does not shy away from the 'egomania' side of Gandhi. (See especially p.380.)

protagonist struggles with these same persistent issues of dowry and woman's subjugation to man and related issues. This novel is worth pausing over in our discussion of khādī spirit and feminism, since the woman Gauri can be viewed as taking a Gandhian approach to her struggle for women's rights.

In this story of a traditional Hindu marriage, the young bride and groom are from neighbouring villages and typically do not lay eyes on each other until the wedding service begins. The groom is an orphan who was raised by his uncle and aunt, and he has had to put a heavy mortgage on his meagre plot of land in order to pay for the wedding. He and his family hope that the bride's dowry will repay most of this mortgage, but it turns out to be very small. So their married life begins with the weight of this resentment between them, he at the inadequacy of the dowry and therefore the strain of the debt he has incurred, and she at the awareness of this resentment and of feeling like a burden as a result. However they are both fairly good-natured and attractive young people and a strong affection begins to grow between these two married strangers. As the story unfolds, however, Gaurī becomes the victim of the village women's gossip and her husband begins to beat her when he hears (totally unfounded) suspicions cast her way.

When Gauri becomes pregnant, the young husband is so terrified of the prospect of this added responsibility in

his almost desperate financial state that he beats her and throws her out claiming to believe the village gossip that the child might not be his. She walks back to her widowed mother's village in hopes that her husband's temper will cool after a few days and he will come to fetch her, a scenario repeatedly enacted in India's rural settings. But before that can happen, her uncle who controls the family finances is enraged at the prospect of supporting her, and convinces her mother that keeping Gaurī will mean having to sell the cow on which the mother depends for her own livelihood. The evil uncle contracts a deal with a wealthy, elderly man in the nearest town who wishes to buy this beautiful young woman as his mistress and nurse for his ailing years. Gauri resists with all her might but is forcibly removed from her mother's house by her uncle and the purchaser. She refuses to eat and becomes ill immediately and is removed to the local hospital before the elderly man is able to begin the relationship he intended.

Once in the hospital she is rescued from this illegal but commonplace occurence by a compassionate senior doctor who then puts her to work as a sort of nurse's aide while she waits for her husband to locate and retrieve her. However other complications occur when a younger doctor becomes infatuated with her and tries to rape her after drinking heavily. When her mother and a kindly Muslim neighbour (the few Muslims in this novel are all like this -

- poor, deeply religious and extremely generous) come to seek Gauri out since the husband had come to their village for her, the senior Dr. Mahindra comments on the corruption and desperation that has brought Gauri to this situation:

> I am not blaming you, old woman [for selling your daughter]. ... those Banias who buy and sell have brought falsity into the life of the village. In the old days, there was often scarcity. But, as no one owned the land. [sic.] The five elders could give fertile land to whoever complained that his land was fallow. And all the grazing land was in common. And there was milk and butter and whey ... Now, every peasant owns his land can sell it. And as he is often in debt to the Seth, he sells out and becomes a labourer in the town factory. And cash has become more valuable than the earth. So there is wretchedness everywhere ... and ... folks ... are selling their daughters! ... And this happens in our own raj. All those white caps. Gone is Gandhi's Dharma? ... Our Dharma is feeding the Brahmins and paying interest to the Banias. And ill-treating the untouchables. And Vinoba can convert a good man here and a good man there. And some tigers may learn to eat vegetables. But can you tell me how many sons of ministers have given away their land to the poor at the bidding of Vinoba? ... And how many have become shareholders of

> the Ram Raj, who have dividends for once following Gandhi and going to jail? ... All life in our country today, everything in it, has been poisoned by money, property and land. ... And for one good man ... there are a million self-seekers. (224-6)

The good doctor protests that the white caps denoting allegiance to "Gandhi's dharma" had not only become meaningless a couple of decades after his death, but worse than that, association with Gandhi had been used by power-hungry people to attain positions which they used to exploit the poor -- the exact opposite of the dharma that Gandhi lived out. In spite of the dedicated work of true Gandhians like Vinoba Bhave who struggled valiantly to implement Gandhian ideals in a program of massive land redistribution, notes the doctor, Gandhi's ideals were being trampled underfoot by millions of self-seekers.

Having lived under the influence of such a doctor, the faithful and courageous Gauri, who has endured heroic hardships in her struggle to avoid the attentions of other men, is no sooner returned to her young husband when village tongues again begin to wag at the sight of her by-now obvious pregnancy. Though the husband knows she was pregnant before he evicted her, he gives in to the pressure of having to save his honour and again beats Gauri. But now, Gauri is emboldened to leave behind this wretched life and starts walking back to the distant hospital where she

knows that the Gandhian Dr. Mahindra will let her work for her and her child's upkeep.

In the face of recurring *hiṁsā* from every quarter, she had avoided even the *hiṁsā* of feeling angry towards her husband or mother. Instead she held firmly (*satyāgraha*) to the truth of the dharma of her duty as a wife and daughter. She resisted with all her might the various evils that threatened especially her sexual purity as a faithful wife. But finally, when all such efforts proved to be meaningless to her husband, she boldly bent her steps in the direction of the life of *ahiṁsā* she had experienced in Dr. Mahindra's hospital.

Perhaps it is only a coincidence that Gaurī's name resembles Gandhi's so closely, but Gaurī typifies the kind of Indian woman that Gandhi saw as an ideal. Her long-suffering patience with her husband's stupid gullibility to the idle gossip of mostly elderly village women (who perhaps saw nothing wrong in provoking his jealousy since they too had endured such trials), and to the ready violence to which he resorted as a result -- finally reached a legitimate breaking point. And holding firmly to the truth of her integrity as a person necessitated an ultimate resistance to his violent ways. Gauri, in the end, was not so much running away from his blows as she was running courageously toward the beckoning light of the life of *ahiṁsā* that she now knew was possible. As Gandhi proclaimed in 1939:

> Only the toad under the harrow knows where it pinches him. Therefore, ultimately, woman will have to determine with authority what she needs. My own opinion is that, just as fundamentally man and woman are one, their problem must be one in essence. The soul in both is the same. ... Each is a complement of the other. The one cannot live without the other's active life. But somehow or other man has dominated woman for ages past and, therefore, woman has developed an inferiority complex. She has believed in the truth of man's interested teaching that she is inferior to him. But the seers among men have recognized her equal status. (CW 71:207)

The khadi spirit which Gandhi called for did not at all imply that one was to become a doormat on which others may wipe the grime of day-to-day living. Gaurī's husband was under great stress since he had mortgaged his land and the monsoon was late, but this simply did not give him the right to abuse his faithful and loving wife (though he did not see it as abuse), and to believe the tales of others against her when she had never lied to him.

However a change in attitude towards women does not occur overnight or through legislation (though the latter should certainly be put in place even if enforcement is extremely difficult). So Gauri typifies the Indian peasant woman of the last few decades who first explores every

avenue of patience and long-suffering before she considers escaping from a life of violence. As Gandhi saw it in 1939:

> [W]oman is the incarnation of ahiṁsā. Ahiṁsā means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She knows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? But she forgets them in the joy of creation. Who again suffers daily, so that her babe may wax from day to day? Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar. She can become the leader in satyagraha ... There is as much reason for man to wish that he was born a woman as for woman to do otherwise. (CW 71:208-9)

It would be wrong to insinuate that Gandhi recommended that Indian wives leave their husbands at the first hint of a beating. Rather he saw in the reality that woman endured so much, the evidence of her superiority. However, it would also be wrong to conclude from this that he approved of the

Hindu husband's right to beat his wife[41], since he tirelessly advocated non-violence to everyone and never missed an opportunity to praise woman's greater capacity for *ahimsa*, and man's need to follow her example more closely.

Since the khadi-spirit meant fellow-feeling with every human being on earth, and beyond them to all fellow creatures, Gandhi's ongoing focus on women's gifts and women's rights went beyond potentially empty words of praise. He included the "service" or, as it is often quoted, the "uplift" of women as a major point in his 1940 continually evolving "constructive programme":

> I have included service of women in the constructive programme, for though satyāgraha has automatically brought India's women out from their darkness as nothing else could have in such an incredibly short space of time, Congressmen have not felt the call to see that women become equal partners in the fight for swaraj. ... Woman has been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which she had no hand. In a plan of life based on non-violence, woman has as much right to shape her own destiny, as man has to shape his. ... Men have not realized this truth in its fulness in their behaviour

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[41] He himself raised his hand to his wife once in South Africa and then was haunted for the rest of his life by the recognition of his own capacity for violence.

> towards women. They have considered themselves to be lords and masters of women instead of considering them as friends and co-workers. ... Women are in the position somewhat of the slave of old who did not know that he could or ever had to be free. And when freedom came, for the moment he was helpless. Women have been taught to regard themselves as slaves of men. It is up to Congressmen to see that they enable them to realize their full status and play their part as equals of men. (CW 75:155)

Here Gandhi recognizes the obstacle to woman's freedom and equality as a result of a long historical conditioning resembling a slave mentality. When the cage door is opened, the bird who has lived in it all its life does not immediately fly out. For one thing, there was a certain security about the more-or-less enslaved condition. One knew one's place and one did not have to fret over too many complex decisions or responsibilities. Even today in the West, in women's movements like the one for ordination of women in the Catholic church, it is noted that women's voices are often among the strongest in opposition to such a development. On the one hand, liberation of any group from oppression is rarely effective when it is a top-down process in which laws of equality are passed without any real groundswell of demand for them. On the other hand, the prophetic voices at the grassroots level demanding the

alleviation of oppression are always in a minority and often need the help of those in power to bring about significant and longterm change. Gandhi was trying to work on both ends of the women's problem -- encouraging women at the grassroots level to seek change, and admonishing politicians who were letting such outwardly powerless women struggle on their own, instead of lending help in some substantial form.

After the death of Gandhi's own wife, Kasturba, in 1944, an important and still thriving memorial fund was set up in her name devoted to the welfare and education of women and girls from rural areas. The fund was not only <u>for</u> women but it was to be overseen and distributed <u>by</u> women (Tendulkar 6:288), and local male authorities were warned not to take over this job as soon as a small error occurred. Since the men had for so long "kept the women enslaved in domestic drudgery" it was to be expected that their proficieny at such a task would only emerge slowly as they grew accustomed to such responsibilities. Perhaps one of the most touching testimonies of Gandhi's great regard for women is found in a formal statement after Kasturba's death contained in a letter to Lord Wavell on March 9, 1944:

> ... I send you ... my thanks for your kind condolences on the death of my wife. Though for her sake I have welcomed her death as bringing freedom from a living agony, I feel the loss more than I thought I should. We were a couple outside the ordinary. It was in 1906

that after mutual consent[42] and after unconscious trials, we definitely adopted self-restraint as a rule of life. To my great joy this knit us together as never before. We ceased to be two different entities. Without my wishing it, she chose to lose herself in me. The result was she became truly my *better* half. She was a woman always of very strong will which, in our early days, I used to mistake for obstinacy. But that

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[42] This declaration of "mutual consent" for their 1906 decision to live out the rest of their married lives as celibates (Gandhi's famous vow of *brahmacarya*) should put to rest the ongoing suspicion that this was a totally solitary decision on his part, imposed on his wife. In fact, it is easy to quote Gandhi earlier on this issue speaking only of "I" when explaining and discussing this vow. Various psychological factors which are beyond our scope here were no doubt at play, but without going too deeply into such unknown waters it seems safe to surmise that Gandhi perhaps interiorized the pros and cons of such a decision for himself first before broaching the subject with his wife, especially the crucial question of whether he'd have the strength of will to carry it out. Like many *but not all* men, he had probably noticed that he was the major initiator of sexual encounters in his marriage, so it seemed natural to reach a certain level of having settled the matter for himself before presenting it for his wife's consideration.

> strong will enabled her to become quite unwittingly my teacher in the art and pactice of non-violent non-co-operation. (CW 77:244)

Modern psychological interpretations of Gandhi's vow of *brahmacarya* have often focused on the guilt that Gandhi felt while still in his teens (he was married at age thirteen), at having left the bedside of his dying father to be at his young wife's side in their conjugal bed. A knock on their door shortly afterward brought the news that the imminent death had occurred, and Gandhi in fact always regretted having left his father's side to respond to his own needs for love and comfort at such a trying time. Such regret, however, is a natural feeling[43], and the attribution of a subsequent sexual psychosis is not necessarily justified.

Just as those who can skip meals easily do not have much sympathy for obese persons who are continually eating, in the same way, the positive experience of *brahmacarya* that

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[43] Corroborated for this author by her own experience of having walked down the hospital corridor from her father's deathbed to nap briefly in the family room (after having spent the previous four nights at his side), just twenty minutes before his death. Many religions have attributed considerable significance to being present at the moment of the death of a loved one. A natural human curiosity to experience this phenomenon is also probably involved in the desire to be present at this time.

Gandhi and his wife lived out in the last four decades of their lives together may have contributed to his opposition to the use of contraceptives for birth control. Gandhi agreed that birth control was necessary and good, even in the India of his day whose population was a quarter or a third of what it is now. But he insisted that self-restraint was the only morally correct method; and although he admitted that it was not an easy one, he attributed its difficulty to a more widespread laxity in self-discipline in general, a situation he deplored:

> There is nothing in our society today which would conduce to self-control. Our very upbringing is against it. The primary concern of parents is to marry their children anyhow so that they may breed like rabbits. ... The marriage ceremony is one long-drawn-out agony of feasting and frivolity. The householder's life is ... a prolongation of self-indulgence. Holidays and social enjoyments are so arranged, as to allow one the greatest latitude for sensual living. ... The most modern literature almost teaches that indulgence in ["animal passion"] is a duty, and total abstinence a sin. Is it any wonder if the control of the sexual appetite has become difficult, if not impossible? (CW 62:278)

If Gandhi thought that India in 1938 was a hotbed of self-indulgence of all the sensual appetites, one can only

shudder at the prospect of his opinion of North America in the 1990's! It is probably true that Gandhi's views on birth-control were short-sighted and unrealistic; and they they may even be said to have hindered rather than enhanced the twentieth-century Indian woman's emancipation from domestic tyranny, not to mention the damage done in terms of India's explosive population rise.

However, his focus on self-restraint fits in with the "renunciation of everything that is likely to harm our fellow creatures" that is characteristic of the khādī spirit. Notions like renunciation and self-restraint, which are elements of asceticism, have certainly not gained in popularity worldwide since Gandhi's time. If the current ecological crisis has resurrected them to some extent, it has been done largely in the spirit of an unfortunate necessity rather than a celebrative rediscovery of a purer and more joyful way to live. Creative and compassionate human minds, however, have always wrestled with the crises of the ages in which they lived, not so much to provide a short answer version of how certain problems can be solved, but to probe deeper into the mystery of how our identity as humans is challenged by these issues. Such a probing invariably turns up certain older truths for a hermeneutic reappraisal. Ecofeminism as a celebration of life's interconnectedness sounds like the opposite of a traditionally-understood "life-negating" asceticism.

However, the creative minds mentioned above have already begun the work of reassessing their presumed antagonism.

Ecofeminism and Asceticism

One such mind is that of Lina Gupta, a Hindu ecofeminist whose reflections on "Gaṅgā: Purity, Pollution, and Hinduism" end up focusing on the need to reinterpret the ancient Hindu virtues of asceticism and endurance as a response to some pressing ecological and feminist challenges of our own age. Gupta does not refer to Gandhi in this article, and Gandhi, of course, never referred to ecofeminists, but their thinking dovetails in ways that present evocative insights on these modern challenges.

Gupta, who was born in India but moved to the U.S., accepted the task of reflecting on the importance of the Ganges river for Hindus without anticipating the immense difficulty she would encounter with such a seemingly straightforward task. The water of the Ganges is considered sacred and highly purifying, especially in dangerous or auspicious situations, and yet it is today one of the most polluted rivers in the world. Like Gandhi, Gupta sees in Hinduism itself this same paradoxical condition of purity and pollution; and in their separate explorations of this enigma, the issues of ecology, feminism, and khadi spirit are addressed.

Gupta explains that for many Hindus including herself the river is regarded as a goddess called "Gaṅgā" (99), and this ancient ascription of divinity makes its serious pollution especially amazing:

> The Gaṅgā, the holiest river in India, presents a baffling picture not only to a Westerner but also to some modern Hindus. Ganga, like other rivers on earth, bears the effluvia, the rejects, of human communities. Yet unlike the other rivers, Gaṅgā commands reverence and loyalty poured out by millions of Hindus in their daily rituals. How could the same river, considered to be the goddess of purity and source of all purification, be polluted by her own devotees? What kind of mindset operates behind such ambiguities? (100)

Since Gupta believes that Gaṅgā is present in all natural bodies of water (102), it is interesting to note the influence of the sea that T.S. Devadoss earlier noted for Gandhi's formation:

> Being born in a coastal city [Porbandar] within the sound of the sea, a certain mysticism had perhaps entered Gandhi's composition -- a mysticism which, in later life, linked with a vivid practical sense to make the most formidable of all combinations. (65)

Much poetry and scripture across a broad East/West and ancient/modern continuum attests to this power of living bodies of water to evoke the mystical in human beings. Just

as Henry David Thoreau found his liberation on the shores of Walden Pond, so have countless other pilgrims sought for the essence of life near such shores. Retreat centers and ashrams are often built near rivers or lakes, as are universities, hospitals and churches (in which people seek wisdom and the understanding of the meaning of suffering and of life) whenever expenses permit. And travel agents, especially in affluent Northern climates, become quite prosperous transporting people to places near unfrozen water in the dead of winter. Thus it would be foolish and unthinking for any supposedly more sophisticated Westerner to presume to ridicule the Hindu notion of Ganga as sacred.

When Lina Gupta, as a modern Hindu feminist, begins to explore the mind-set that operates behind the external pollution of the sacred Gaṅgā, she speculates that it begins with internal pollution, "the pollution of thinking that we are utterly separate from the rest of existence" (101). And although she joins other feminists in blaming patriarchy for such a polluted way of thinking, she nonetheless notes that:

> I, too, often fail to realize my deep connectedness with all that is. All of us, women and men alike, suffer from the illusion of complete separateness. All of us suffer from patriarchy. Still, I believe that Hinduism, though containing its own patriarchal aspects, offers as well some resources for assisting us to move beyond patriarchy. (101)

Gupta's approach is refreshing in its refusal to simply blame men and everything male for the ills that assail the world, and in her willingness to have another look at traditions that other feminists have been too quick to reject outright. In seeking to explore "the truth to which Gaṅgā points, namely our deep interconnections", it would indeed seem foolish to refute the need to address with some measure of healing the interconnections between men and women, after so long a sojourn of hostilities. Such an approach certainly bespeaks Gandhi's khādī spirit which calls for fellow-feeling with every other human being on earth. Unlike many feminists who berate the ideal of motherhood as a model for women, Gupta describes Ganga as a mother "who is gentle and tender, forever giving, nurturing, and listening" (101).

Gupta's essay begins with an extensive description of the difficulty she encountered in her writing on Gaṅgā, and she notes that this difficulty was unlike that which she had experienced with an earlier task of writing about Kālī:

> They both project power of different nature. Kālī is aggressive, and one can see why it is necessary for her to be so: She is competitive, she is analytic, she is a woman, the first-generation feminist breaking down the barrier by sheer criticism and power. *Ultimately you swing to the other side.* You have got to come to Ganga. She is feminine, she is beautiful, she is all-

> woman and not ashamed of who she is. She is the second-generation feminist, reconsidering her decisions, her options, and making a new plan for the future. She is trying to start a dialogue. Kālī is the West, the woman in a man's garb, the intellect, the structure, the discipline, the aggression, the logic. Ganga is the East, the woman, the intuition, the essence, the flow, the subtlety, the feeling. We have to come in between them or maybe merge them. (102-3, emphasis mine)

This distinction between the first and second generation feminists has much potential for engendering a new level of *ahiṁsā* in worldwide female/male relations. It is indicative of that khadi spirit of seeking out fellow-feeling with all other humans. It is long overdue. As Gupta says, it is understandable that the first-generation feminists, like Kālī were aggressive, breaking down barriers by sheer criticism and force. But the next generation, while gratefully paying homage to the 'war heroes' whose sacrifices brought them a much more egalitarian world, need to adopt tactics for peaceful and productive living. They need to start dialogues.

"Ultimately you swing to the other side." With this decisive statement, Gupta, as a legitimate spokesperson of late twentieth-century ecofeminism, adopts a Gandhian khadi spirit perspective on the problem of patriarchal pollution

versus the purity of realizing our interconnectedness with all living things, including, of course, Gaṅgā. This realization of interconnectedness is, in Gupta's understanding, at the heart of Hindu self-realization:

> One's primary obligation and goal in a human birth is to realize one's own self. If one understands one's own self as something separated from everything else in the world, one remains in bondage. To realize one's own self, *ātman* in the true sense of the term, is to realize the total identity of *ātman* and *brahman*. As long as one has even a seed of alienation or separation in one's mind, liberation or *mokṣa* will remain merely a goal and never a reality. This is the summary of Hinduism. (104)

But alienation or separation are not easily eradicated in a human mindset which incorporates dualisms in its perspective on woman and on nature. Both are revered as forces of life as well as feared for their mysterious and fearful powers from which "men" must guard their vulnerability, and over which a maximum of control needs to be exercised. *Prakṛti* which is usually translated as nature, has often been taken as feminine, according to Gupta, and includes:

> ... the object, nature, matter, and the unconscious. This has been distinguished from Puruṣa, which has been understood as the masculine, the subject, the structure, the mind, the consciousness. ... One's life

> depends on the gift of nature, yet nature's precariousness and unpredictability make her unreliable. Being unconscious, Prakrti is in need of the presence of Purusa, the spirit. (106)

Ganga as river and goddess is both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. If she were feminine nature alone, she would need human intervention to save her from human exploitation. But since she is also spirit, and since the divine is considered to be "self-purifying" (109), the pollution of the Ganges has been largely disregarded as unavoidable and insignificant. Gupta quotes a text from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa in which the goddess Ganga fears descending to earth because of the pollution she will endure:

> In her conversation with King Bhagirath, who is to bring her down to earth, her concern is evident. As if she knew her fate long before she descended, she voices her feeling: "I am not willing to go to earth. Men will wash off their sins in me. Where (and how) can I absolve myself of that sin? Some remedy on this should also be considered, oh, king" (Bhāgavata Purāṇa IX:5). (109)

Gupta enjoins her fellow Hindus to overcome the dualistic notion of Gaṅgā as two separate entities of goddess and river, expecting the purity of the first to overcome the pollution of the second. She asks us to move to a more relational understanding of purity as not only a divine

gift, but as requiring a reciprocity on the part of humanity (110).[44] If Gaṅgā's purity is seen as relational, it depends, in part, on human beings behaving respectfully towards her:

> Purity, in this nonpatriarchal sense, refers to a sense of balance and harmony based on the principles of interdependence and interconnection. She descends to earth for the sake of humanity; she retains her purity as long as there is reciprocity on the part of humanity. Given the pollution from which she now suffers, it is our turn now to ascend, restore, and bring balance to her. (110)

There are already strong resources in place within Hinduism to deal with such a challenge. Dharma, above all, offers Hindus a prescriptive route for a systematic reappraisal of humanity's treatment of nature. As Gupta

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[44] In Christian history similar conflicts of perception have occurred, especially between Augustine and Pelagius, and Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus. In general, the Augustinian view has prevailed which bespeaks a profound dualism between flesh/world and spirit; and which also sees an uncrossable chasm between the purity of God's freely (but selectively) given grace and the futility and pollution of human attempts at "earning" God's favour. Also similarly, many Christians do not view issues like pollution as being of any relevance to the spiritual life.

points out, dharma is variously translated as law, moral duty, right action or conformity with the truth of things, and ultimately resolves itself, through its initial interpretation as cosmic law, as nonviolence, or *ahiṁsā*. Going on, she again cites Bhāgavata Purāṇa quoting that "there is no supreme dharma other than abstinence from violence to living beings caused by thought, word and deed" (vol.9, Part III, VII:15:8). Without mentioning Gandhi, she claims that the principle of nonviolence "seems to be the most important constituent of all rules for living, of all dharmas" (110). But then Gandhi readily admitted that his teachings were nothing new, that truth and nonviolence were as old as the hills.

From an ecofeminist perspective, then, this dharma of non-violence is to be applied to the whole of nature, especially considering the Gītā perspective of the universe as God's body (XI:7). Gupta surmises from this that nature is divine expression in its varieties of forms (113), and that taking this reality seriously should bring about the change in attitude that will address the mindset that thoughtlessly pollutes mother Gaṅgā and all her relations throughout the natural world. She calls for a reaffirmation of traditional Hindu scriptural virtues including "gratitude, reverence, and humility, and reinvention and reinterpretation of the virtues that are not being used in recent times, such as asceticism and endurance" (115). Out

of gratitude for nature's nurture, and out of respect for nature's inherent worth, we are made humble in front of this spectacle of divine manifestation, and we courageously take on the ascetical practices that relieve our exploitation of earth's gifts, and look forward to the endurance of our sacred interconnectedness with all that lives. As Gupta explains:

> If only we understand the true implication of *mokṣa*, we will begin to realize that true liberation is not possible without proper respect and reverence towards all facets of Nature, all other parts of the planet, organic or inorganic. *Mokṣa*, or liberation, better interpreted as self-realization, involves realization of one's own self as identified and connected with all forms of existence as the manifestations of the same Reality, or the divine. (115)

In terms of concrete action to work towards such liberation, Gupta's final focus is on the two ancient Hindu virtues of asceticism and endurance translated as learning to live with less so that nature might not be overused and misused, "enduring certain discomforts for the sake of our earthly community" (115). How better to define the "complete renunciation of everything that is likely to harm our fellow creatures " which is the heart of Gandhi's khādī spirit?

The asceticism of renouncing the habits and dependencies that bring harm to fellow creatures and the

earth that is our common home is the soul, or spiritual element, of an ecological perspective that seeks to embrace the broader human experience of a world that encompasses both matter and spirit.

Conclusion

Modern feminism rarely celebrates and often resists the image of woman as superior because of her ability to endure suffering and to encourage nonviolent ways of life. Gandhi's celebration of woman as incarnation of *ahiṁsā* might even be construed as condoning a certain 'slave mentality' which merely deflates woman's legitimate quest for justice and equality. On the other hand, the "second generation" feminists, as Lina Gupta describes them, are beginning to sense the affinity between the traditional virtues associated with femaleness and an ecologically-sensitive lifestyle that refrains from riding roughshod over earth and its great variety of inhabitants. Although the majority of Indian women have been conscripted to a life of austerity they did not choose, Gandhi did not suggest a rejection of such a life of renunciation. Instead he saw and celebrated the noble character that such endurance of adversity created, and recommended that men strive to emulate women's ability to rise above suffering and bring nurture, empathy and joy to life.

To voluntarily pursue less self-gratification, especially in the material realm -- to endure certain discomforts for the sake of our earthly community, as Gupta puts it -- is to accept asceticism as central to a new ecologically-sound way to live. Asceticism as sacrifice in the best sense of foregoing something valued for the sake of something having a more pressing claim (Webster's New World Dict., 2nd ed.) -- has always commanded the respect of those who sought life's beauty beneath the surface of the obvious. Gandhi's khādī spirit, especially in its feminist expression, embraces such asceticism as the soul of an integrated approach to living that recognizes the interconnected wholeness of earth's community.

PART THREE: *OIKOUMENIKOS*: ECOLOGY IN INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

> When is a man in mere understanding? I answer, "When a man sees one thing separated from another." And when is a man above mere understanding? That I can tell you: "When a man sees All in all, then a man stands beyond mere understanding."
>
> - Meister Eckhart[45]

Introduction

To see the All, or Ultimate Reality, in the all of different religious traditions has remained an elusive task for a humanity increasingly threatened by an ongoing focus on that which separates or divides. The time for moving beyond the "mere understanding" of such an on-the-surface perspective, to the deeper wisdom of seeing the "All in the all" has grown increasingly urgent as humanity's powers of destruction have grown increasingly frightening. In spite of all the good that Gandhi achieved, in spite of the ongoing potential of his simple-living-high-thinking ideal, he met his "Waterloo" in the violent Hindu-Muslim conflicts that rage largely unabated to this day. Long before the bullet of the assassin pierced Gandhi's heart on January 30, 1948, his spirit had already been broken by the failure of

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[45] Quoted in Aldous Huxley's The Perennial Philosophy, p.57.

his attempts to foster harmony between these two groups. In a sense, then, the resolution of feelings of antagonism between religions is the unfinished challenge that Gandhi left behind.

Perhaps the new banner under which humanity can gather its divergent expressions of the divine and human encounter is that of ecological concern. Many great minds have struggled to bring different religions to an awareness of their core of commonality, with varying degrees of success and failure. An underlying reserve -- questioning why one should take the time to get to know other religions -- has often hindered the process. Now, however, ecology responds to this 'why' with its urgent appeal to join together all efforts to inspire a respect for the earth as God's creation, divine self-expression, Ultimate Reality or the community of interconnected lifeforms. As Dostoyevsky's beloved Father Zossima admonished:

> Love all God's creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light! Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. And once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly more and more every day. And you will at last come to love the whole world with an abiding, universal love. (375)

Dostoyevsky's unbroken link between the love of creation and the universalizing of one's love for the whole world (presumably including its different cultural and religious expressions), is suggestive of ecology's positive role in the important area of interreligious dialogue. As Eckhart's wisdom also suggests, to see the All in all -- to see God in all creatures and in all religions -- is to go beyond mere understanding, to the realm of a broadly-based ecumenical (Greek: *oikoumenikos)* perspective that embraces the unity of life within the legitimate diversity of its various expressions.

Gandhi believed and lived the reality that all religions contain truth, and truth to him was God. His broad ecumenical vision included not just an arm's-length polite regard for 'other' religions, but rather a 'hands-on' approach in which he actually studied, prayed and practiced the scriptures and tenets of other faiths. And yet he neither left Hinduism behind, nor encouraged others to join its folds. On the contrary, he discouraged 'conversions' from one faith to another, usually suggesting that the person work, instead, to learn to love more deeply their own faith tradition, in spite of its flaws -- or better still -- challenged by its flaws.

Gandhi's passionate concern, therefore, to engender harmony among different religions did not mean he wished they all "might be one". John's theological (i.e.,

interpretive) gospel notwithstanding, Jesus himself often made it clear that his particular incarnation of divinity was quite culture-specific. And other cultures have, of course, had their own *avatāras* who revealed the presence and concern of the divine within the interdependent world of vibrant creation. Gandhi's quest was for interreligious respect and a universal self-sacrificng altruism, rather than for a 'melting pot' unity that obliterates all the gifts of uniqueness and diversity.

Since his death, revolutionary advances in communication and transportation have greatly increased humanity's abilities to experience and appreciate the expressions of the human experience, including those on the religious plane. A broadly-based *oikoumenikos* approach has never been more accessible and -- given the destructive potential that accompanied humanity's recent leap in technological power -- more urgent. Could ecology serve as foundational, then, to a cosmic religion that incorporates an interreligious effort to save the gift of creation from its most intelligent and dangerous offspring?

CHAPTER EIGHT: ECOLOGY AS COSMIC RELIGION

> Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: ... Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? ... Have you commanded the morning since your days began? ... Have you entered the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? (Job 38:1,4,12,16 NRSV)

The ancient Hebrew writer of the Book of Job had likely not heard of ecology, and yet this enigmatic response to Job's plea for personal justice has provocative ecological possibilities. Like many people of faith, then and now, Job was grateful to God for the many blessings of his life. Being a person of genuine piety, Job viewed his wife, children, health, land and livestock not as things he had earned and deserved but as gifts from the hand of the Almighty. In such a view, there is a hard-to-avoid implied corollary that an abundance of material blessings suggests an abundance of divine favour. In somewhat of a 'Catch-22' situation, the pious person has to walk the tightrope between the two extreme poles of, on the one hand, not being thankful to God for life's gifts, and on the other, presuming that such gifts are an indication of a secure state of personal blessedness.

Although the depiction of God in the Book of Job, as carelessly tossing Job's fate into the devil's hands for a

test, is a rather far-fetched one, this issue of whether human love for God depends on human perceptions of how much God gives, is clearly an important one that many psychological theologians have probed. In other words, Job and his friends examine the question of how does God's presence in the world affect humans? What kind of response should humans have to fortunes and misfortunes that seem to come from God? How does human behaviour affect God's perspective of our individual state of salvation? And so on. Many psychological-theological questions are addressed in poor Job's desperate efforts to keep on loving God in spite of all the calamities that befall him.

And many theologians have been frustrated by the seeming irrelevance of God's response to Job's anguished plea for insight into his plight, at least, if not for mercy and healing. Was God somehow watching a different channel? Goaded by his friends, Job asks God why so much has befallen him, even though he had been so pious and faithful. And God responds with what can now be interpreted as an ecological diatribe that might be roughly paraphrased in this way:

> How dare you bother me with your paltry complaints about the loss of your children and livestock and the ravaging diseases with which you are afflicted? Can you not look around at the earth's grandeur and see how busy I have always been? The immensity and complexity of the universe are phenomenal expressions of my own

> creativity, and yet you expect me to spend time justifying to you the fickle fate that every person faces? Yes, I heard your prayers of thanksgiving, and you were right in uttering them. But if your love for me depended on these things you thanked me for, then it was not very deep. A deeper love would see the cosmic view of my sphere of activity, and realize the relative insignificance of the ego's pursuit of what it perceives to be divine justice.

If such a paraphrase is roughly valid, then God has responded to the human query for justice with an invitation (or a demand?) for a broadening of consciousness to include especially the natural world in all its rich splendour. Job seeks from God an explanation of his own personal destiny, and God responds with ecology. "Why am I being punished?" "The universe is stupendous, look around."

To move from the personal to the universal in this seemingly abstract way is an increasingly recognized aspect of an ecology of mind that makes a somewhat unchartable leap from absorbing self-interest to a liberating form of cosmic consciousness. As Klostermaier wrote, "we ... become increasingly aware that the ecological crisis ... is also a crisis of the mind, of the psyche, of the soul" (1991 45). The need to identify with a broader understanding of the human, and ultimately of life itself, impels us to seek an expansion of consciousness, a liberation from the narrow

confines of a parochial view. One of this century's most profound and spiritual psychologists, Carl Jung, observed a similar phenomenon in the healing of psychic distress:

> All the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble... They can never be solved but only outgrown. This "outgrowing" proved on further investigation to require a new level of consciousness. Some higher or wider interest appeared on the patient's horizon, and through this broadening of his or her outlook the insoluble problem lost its urgency. It was not solved logically in its own terms but faded when confronted with a new and stronger life urge.[46]

It is as if the problem could not simply be disposed of (due to its toxicity?), but could somehow be recycled from an old, burdensome thing into something new and useful. Could the new thing or new awareness have come about without these recycled parts? Perhaps, but its structure, being made of more arbitrary materials, would likely prove flimsier and easily blow over when the gale of a new emotional concern strikes its hastily slapped-together walls of superficiality. Seeking a broader, deeper or cosmic consciousness, then, is not just a modern duty for those who are ecologically- or pluralistically-minded. As with Job,

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[46] From Jung: Psychological Reflections, A New Anthology of His Writings, ed. Jolande Jacobi (N.Y.:1978) p.304. Quoted in Matthew Fox Original Blessing p.25.

and with Jung's observation, a cosmic consciousness liberates humans from the clutches of a too narrow perspective. Adversity builds character, claims much of the world's wisdom. It apparently is also capable (if accepted with the grace of a *satyāgrahi*) of providing x-ray vision to see beneath the surface of life's vagaries and trials.

As mentioned earlier, Klostermaier has noted that recognizing the sacredness of nature is often the key to an expansion of consciousness and a "cosmic religion":

> One of the quite frequently occurring 'mystical experiences' is the sudden realization of the 'sacredness of nature' -- of the immanence of God in all things. ... this kind of experience leads to the realization of a 'cosmic religion', an awarenes of the togetherness of man, nature and the ultimate, an insight into, and acceptance of, the 'goodness' of all things. (1973, 141)

This awareness of the togetherness of humanity, nature and the ultimate, and the insight into the basic goodness of all things precludes the common notion that other religions are "pagan," and impels the adoption of a cosmic religion that embraces the essential human experience of the sacred.

The willingness to entertain the prospect of a cosmic religion is resisted by those forces that feel secure about one expression of religion as the only legitimate one. For example, in 1993, the Winnipeg Free Press reported that Pope

John Paul II had warned American bishops "about Roman Catholics practising nature worship and pagan rituals after coming under the influence of radical feminism." He was especially concerned about Catholic nuns "performing these rituals, which frequently pay homage to the goddess earth":

> In its [radical feminism's] extreme form, it is the Christian faith itself which is in danger of being undermined ... Sometimes forms of nature worship and the celebration of myths and symbols take the place of the worship of the God revealed in Jesus Christ. (03-07-93)[47]

Such attitudes exist among the leaders and adherents of a variety of religions. The amount of blood shed throughout

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[47] Gender and ordination issues are another question, but as this and many similar reports make clear, this pope will neither entertain the possibility of women's ordination, nor the legitimacy of their seeking alternative liturgical rites than those dominated by a male-only clergy. It is interesting to speculate about the "tables-turning" possibility of a radical shift in scenario from women being excluded from the celebration of the traditional liturgy, to men feeling largely on the periphery of a female-interpreted cosmic expression of the Christian religion. If such a possibility is even approached, ecology as cosmic religion will again have strengthened and liberated a human group previously confined in a stifling identity.

history by those who were sure that the other person's or group's religion was "wrong" is well-documented and often thrown in the face of people still serious about religions, by those with a secular disdain for the wars and other conflicts that religions supposedly "cause".

A cosmic religion, then, is desirable -- perhaps even urgently needed -- and yet strong forces continue to shun its potential flourishing. The growing urgency of the ecological crisis, however, may preclude the continued postponement of its advent on a worldwide scale. Hundreds of ecumenical (in a more than Christian sense), interreligious, ecological conferences, which increasingly note the sacredness of nature, had already taken place before the pope's warning about 'feminist-inspired nature worship' in 1993. One of the most important for ecology occurred, in fact, in 1986 in Assisi, about a hundred miles north of the Vatican from which the pope issues his various social commentaries, decrees and dogmas. It occurred in a place which is widely known as the home of the well-known saint whom John Paul II wisely declared to be the patron of ecology in 1979.

The Assisi Declarations

The 1986 Assisi Declarations are representative of a growing number of formal statements made by influential

religious leaders about the common religious concern to celebrate the sacredness of nature; and to oppose the forces that either overlook this concern as unimportant, or worst still, oppose it as "pagan". These Assisi documents emerged from a twenty-fifth anniversary gathering of the World Wildlife Fund, one of a growing number of groups concerned not only about initiating measures to protect the environment's physical health, but also to seek the philosophical, moral and spiritual support of the human psyche and soul. Realizing that mere physical adjustments to human destructive habits are a bandaid approach without the moral and intellectual convictions to support them, groups like the WWF happily initiate dialogues with religious organizations in hopes of influencing a worlwide *metanoia* -- a conversion to the attitude of reverence and regard for nature and the earth as a whole.

The 1986 document from the Basilica di San Francesco contains "messages on man and nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism." A grouping like this is indicative of ecology's potent role for interreligious dialogue. The religions here are simply listed in (English) alphabetical order, and a sampling of each of their statements should suffice to get accross the flavor of this and similar endeavors:

<u>Buddhism:</u> (by Venerable Lungrig Namgyal Rinpoche, Abbot, Gyuto Tantric University):

> Buddhism is a religion of love, understanding and compassion, and committed towards the ideal of non-violence. ... The simple underlying reason why beings other than humans need to be taken into account is that ... they too are sensitive to happiness and suffering. ... since human beings as well as other non-human sentient beings depend upon the environment as the ultimate source of life and wellbeing, let us share the conviction that the conservation of the environment, the restoration of the imbalance caused by our negligence in the past, be implemented with courage and determination. (5-6)

Christianity: (by Father Lanfranco Serrini, Minister General OFMConv):

> God ... created nothing unnecessarily and has omitted nothing that is necessary. Thus, even in the mutual opposition of the various elements of the universe, there exists a divinely willed harmony because creatures have received their mode of existence by the will of their Creator, whose purpose is that through their interdependence they should bring to perfection the beauty of the universe. It is the very nature of things considered in itself, without regard to man's convenience or inconvenience, that gives glory to the Creator. (11)

Hinduism: (by His Excellency Dr. Karan Singh, President, Hindu Virat Samaj):

> [T]he Hindu viewpoint on nature ... is permeated by a reverence for life, and an awareness that the great forces of nature -- the earth, the sky, the air, the water and fire -- as well as various orders of life including plants and trees, forests and animals, are all bouund to each other within the great rhythms of nature. The divine is not exterior to creation, but expresses itself through natural phenomena. ... This earth, so touchingly looked upon in the Hindu view as the Universal Mother, has nurtured mankind up from the slime of the primeval ocean for billions of years. Let us declare our determination to halt the present slide towards destruction ... (17-19)

Islam: (by His Excellency Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef, Secretary General, Muslim World League):

> The central concept of Islam is *tawheed* or the Unity of God. Allah is Unity; and His Unity is also reflected in the unity of mankind, and the unity of man and nature. His trustees are responsible for maintaining the unity of His creation, the integrity of Earth, its flora and fauna, its wildlife and natural environment. Unity cannot be had by discord, by setting one need against another or letting one end predominate over another; it is maintained by balance and harmony.

> Therefore Muslims say that Islam is the middle path and we will be answerable for how we have walked this path, how we have maintained balance and harmony in the whole of creation around us. (23-4)

Judaism: (by Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, Vice-President, World Jewish Congress):

> Whoever is merciful to all creatures is a descendent of our ancestor Abraham (Bezoh32b). ... The Talmud even tells us (Shabbat151b) that heaven rewards the person who has concern and compassion for the rest of creation ... When God created the world, so the Bible tells us, He made order out of primal chaos. The sun, the moon, and the stars, plants, animals, and ultimately man, were each created with a rightful and necessary place in the universe. They were not to encroach on each other. ... The encounter of God and man in nature is thus conceived in Judaism as a seamless web with man as the leader and custodian of the natural world. (29-30)

Thus the new generation of *oikoumenikos* dialogue, on a broader worldwide scale than mere Christian ecumenism, has ecological concern at its core. Did such cosmically focused interreligious dialogue have no predecessor from which it emerged? Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was among the strongest synthesizing voices of the twentieth-century which demonstrated that the majority of the world's religions have

much more in common than their outward observances, rituals, and doctrines might suggest.

Heritage of World-Consciousness

As in our focus on the Assisi Declarations on ecology and nature, we again here choose a representative figure from among a number of potential candidates for this role of predecessor of cosmic or world consciousness. In his 1940 book called Eastern Religions and Western Thought Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) stated that the supreme task of his generation was "to give a soul to the growing world-consciousness" so that future generations might realize their responsibility to be citizens of the world (viii), an appellation that many have applied to Gandhi. By Radhakrishnan's time, science and technology seemed to have achieved a certain unity among all peoples by interconnecting a great diversity of human activity (2). However such diversity is likely to be experienced as difference rather than unity when no common spiritual perspective is sought. In this book Radhakrishnan compares the most enduring aspects of eastern and western religious thought and spirituality in order to seek out that common dimension that might bind the differences among nations into a new human solidarity. Early in the book, he identifies mysticism as the key to this quest:

> ... it seems to me that in the mystic traditions of the different religions we have a remarkable unity of spirit. Whatever religions they may profess, the mystics are spiritual kinsmen. While the different religions in their historical forms bind us to limited groups and militate against the development of loyalty to the world community, the mystics have always stood for the fellowship of humanity. They transcend the tyranny of names and the rivalry of creeds as well as the conflict of races and the strife of nations. As the religion of the spirit, mysticism avoids the two extremes of dogmatic affirmation and dogmatic denial. All signs indicate that it is likely to be the religion of the future. (viii-ix)

If mysticism is likely to be the religion of the spirit for the future, then nature mysticism, in particular, has clear potential for responding to ecology's quest for a vision of the sacred. And the asceticism usually implicated in the mystic's quest for a purity of vision is also, as previously argued, highly conducive to a more-with-less approach to life.

Developing the specifics of this religion of the spirit, Radhakrishnan identifies "abhaya and ahiṁsā[48],

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[48] Radhakrishnan seems to have offered some rather unusual appositive definitions for these two Hindu terms. In Klostermaier's glossary (Survey 1989), *abhaya* means

awareness and sympathy, freedom and love" as "the marks of genuine religion" (46). Human freedom must ever strive for a sympathetic and loving awareness of its immense opportunities and responsibilities:

> Life is a supreme good and offers the possibility of happiness to every one. No generation has ever had so much opportunity. Yet the blessings of the earth have turned into curses on account of the maladies which afflict us, envy and hatred, pride and lust, stupidity and selfishness. Man, as he exists to-day, is not capable of survival. He must change or perish. Man, as he is, is not the last word in creation. If he does not ... adapt himself and his institutions to the new world, he will yield his place to a species more sensitive and less gross in its nature. (46-7)

This statement has amazing ecological overtones for its time. Radhakrishnan's basic intent here is to distinguish between a spiritually healthy detachment from avaricious

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"fearlessness; in iconology, *abhaya mudrā* is the hand pose of deity, inspiring confidence and trust" (507). Perhaps awareness and freedom are being viewed here as byproducts of such fearlessness, confidence and trust -- the human potential awakened when the threat of fear is removed? As to *ahimsa* being called sympathy and love, non-injury comes much more naturally when these are the underlying sentiments.

materialism, and a much less wholesome aversion to the world and its welfare:

> When the Hindu thinkers ask us to free ourselves from māyā, they are asking us to shake off our bondage to the unreal values which are dominating us. They do not ask us to treat life as an illusion or be indifferent to the world's welfare. ... It is the function of religion to reaffirm the intuitive loyalty to life and solidarity of human nature ... The resurrection is not the rise of the dead from their tombs but the passage from the death of self-absorption to the life of unselfish love, the transition from the darkness of selfish individualism to the light of universal spirit. (47)

This important contrast between selfish individualism and the universal spirit pervades Radhakrishnan's critique of all religions. And it is a contrast that has figured prominently in our observations of greed versus altruism. Gandhi, too, we observed, continually strove after the universal spirit as opposed to the selfish individualism which he particularly observed in Western materialistic culture and its Eastern emulation. In Hinduism, the striving of each Ātman to become immersed and dissolved into Brahman sounds like a single-minded pursuit of the universal spirit, but it has often ignored the sufferings of others or problems of the world as irrelevant. In Christianity, the

individualist approach to personal salvation has also often overlooked the universal spirit that demands compassion towards all God's creatures, perhaps even as a prerequisite to individual salvation.

In general, Radhakrishnan's remedy for avoiding the pitfalls of selfish individualism is to focus on behavior over belief, thus continually seeking to live in such a way that one's faith is manifested[49]:

> Again, religion as a way of life is the seeking of the eternal. It is more behaviour than belief. ... There are many who feel that outward conformity is all that is expected ... We are said to be religious if we go through the round of ceremonies ... Countries which stand at the head of civilization do not hesitate to slaughter thousands ... Lady Macbeth remarked of the murder of Duncan, 'A little water clears us of this deed.' A sprinkling of holy water and the muttering of a formula will put to flight all the agonies and cruelties of this world. (60-1)

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[49] Both Menno Simons and Erasmus of Rotterdam, perhaps the two greatest reformers of Christianity, also stressed the need to manifest faith by the way that one lived, and to avoid relying on the performance of rituals for attaining salvation. In fact this message has been an ongoing element of the prophetic tradition.

Radhakrishnan does not see the battles between political ideologies as the central ones for the twentieth century, but rather those "between empires of material values ... and the sovereignty of spiritual ideals" (114). He argues that no historical religion can claim to be absolutely true (330); and he invokes the Hindu conviction about divine immanence as meaning that all people are "god's chosen" (331). But he is not afraid to point out Hinduism's faults since its breadth covers so wide a range of behaviors and beliefs. Because Hinduism is "the most elastic of all religions:"

> It is admirable and abhorrent, saintly and savage, beautifully wise and dangerously silly, generous beyond measure and mean beyond example. It is strange how long primitive superstitions last, if we do not handle them roughly. (338)

Such a statement could readily apply to other religious traditions, especially the older and more geographically dispersed ones which have had a longer opportunity to accumulate and accomodate a wide range of extremes, foibles and downright tragic flaws.

Islam, on the other hand, Radhakrishnan assesses as militant and inelastic, as the creation of a single mind expressed in a single sentence: "There is one God and Mohammed is his prophet" (339). Although other statements about Islam in Radhakrishnan's work are gentler and more

tolerant and understanding, it is important to note that he does not hesitate to be outspoken in his critique of a number of religions with the aim of calling all to humility and fraternity:

> We must recognize humbly the partial and defective character of our isolated traditions and seek their source in the generic tradition from which they all have sprung. (347)

To *humbly* recognize the partial and defective character of our isolated traditions remains a daunting and apparently threatening task in an increasingly secular age in which religious traditions often feel sufficiently embattled just trying to prove their validity to a hedonistic society which rejects the implications of their altruistic ideals.

The cultivating of this "generic tradition" of the Religion of the Spirit begins by addressing the personal alienation or disunity felt by many individuals in such a society, offering instead the reciprocal empathy inherent in a more altruistic frame of reference. Although many spokespersons of religious traditions would hesitate to acknowledge a "generic tradition" from which all religions have sprung, the reality is that the earliest records of human belief, culture and symbolism all point to some kind of pantheism or panentheism which later survives mainly in the form of nature mysticism. And nature mysticism, as discussed in part one, is a consciousness of the cosmic

interconnection between humanity, God and nature. Interreligious dialogue aims for this kind of cosmic consciousness among religions by recognizing a plurality of valid religious traditions and expressions, all of which have in common an ideal of other-centered concern.

In Recovery of Faith, Radhakrishnan cautioned "We do not want a new religion, but we need a new and enlarged understanding of the old religions" (199), thus articulating the legitimate aim of a wholesome pluralism, and echoing Gandhi's approach.[50] Examining a number of the modern world's alternatives to religion (e.g., humanism, nationalism, communism and authoritarianism), he questions, among other things, the claim that a scientific view of reality disallows belief in God: "Science does not ...

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[50] This is in decided contrast to Theodore Roszak's favored concept of a "new Deism" which he writes "harbors no lingering loyalty to Judeo-Christian theology [or any others apparently]" (1992 180). Instead this 'system' discovers evidence for "Mind at Large ... solidly grounded in good science." Although Roszak's "exploration of ecopsychology" (subtitle of book) contains many provocative insights, it seems regrettable that it succumbs to this ongoing American (Californian?) tendency to cut oneself off from all historical moorings and 'start fresh' rather than make the effort to trace the roots of the new and discover its links with the old.

prove or disprove the reality of God any more than it proves or disproves the beauty of the sunset or the greatness of Hamlet" (77). In religion's engagement of ecological concern, scientific data about the state of the earth needs to be taken seriously. Religion dare not don the white gloves of presumed untaintedness and say 'what has this to do with us?' Everything that pertains to life pertains also to that branch of human endeavour that seeks contact and blessing from the author of life. Far from being 'beneath' the concerns of religion, science can be religion's reference library -- a place to get the background facts so that religion's actions in the world might be informed ones, that reflect its willingness to grapple seriously with far-ranging human concerns.

Going on to address the other familiar excuse for modern atheism, that there cannot be a God in a world containing so much evil and imperfection, Radhakrishnan states:

> We cannot say that only a world of ease and comfort is consistent with providential government. ... The very transitoriness of life imparts value, dignity and charm to it. If the purpose of this life is the emergence of moral and spiritual values, then it cannot be free from pain and difficulties. "Do you not see," wrote Keats in a letter, "how necessary a world of pain and trouble is to school an intelligence and make it a soul." (87)

The ecological crisis would likely qualify as just such a growth-provoking difficulty -- it is certainly one that casts a spotlight on the transitoriness of life. Hopefully humanity will be schooled, to use Keats' term, towards a higher intelligence by its challenge, and guided towards "making", or at least being open to, a cosmic soul of interconnected concern.

Calling, then, for a change of consciousness which opens itself to the much-witnessed reality of the divine, Radhakrishnan again turns to mysticism as the answer to the need to deepen the religious journey of the modern person. Such an experience can be found:

> ...not only in the realms of metaphysics and religion, but also in art and communion with nature. In great love, in creative art, in philosophic endeavour, in moments of intense joy and acute suffering, in the presence of truth, beauty and goodness, we are lifted out of detailed contact with the world of change and succession into an experience of unity and permanence ... [and into] moments of insight ... (105-6)

Radhakrishnan includes 'communion with nature' in those elements of being human that can lead to the deeper religious journey. Such an experience is equated with Moksa, Nirvana and the Kingdom of God (106) and allows access to one's deepest powers: "New qualities of mind and character are called forth out of ordinary men and women,

qualities which manifest the divine in them" (109). He calls those who open themselves to such experiences "seers," members of a single family, whose lives are marked "by boundless openness, authentic life, fidelity to truth and love for all creation" (143). This latter quality, love for all creation, suggests again the affinity of a life-affirming mysticism with ecology's spiritual need -- to reveal the sacredness of nature.

Radhakrishnan believes that the cultivation of such experiences will engender a broad-ranging kind of sanctity such as we see in Francis of Assisi, Rāmākriṣṇa and Gandhi whom he feels bear a "striking family resemblance ... characterized by a profound insight into human nature, penetration of shams, and consuming love of God and man" (176). In what might be religious pluralism's pithiest expression, he writes: "All the paths of ascent lead to the hilltop" (197). This awareness of the universality of the human quest for the divine implies the perception of a cosmic 'image' of God:

> The seers, whatever be their religion, ask us to rise to the conception of a God above gods, who is beyond image and concept, who can be experienced but not known, who is the vitality of the human spirit and the ultimacy of all that exists. This goal represents the transcendent unity of religions which is above their empirical diversity. (188)

Precise definitions of God, he points out, lead to disputations with rival doctrines. This is not to negate the religious philosopher's cherished task of continually probing deeper into the mystery of God, but the sharp edges of jealous parochialism must be reassessed in order to avoid the dangerous fanaticism of excessive pride in one's own faith expression as the one-and-only. "Holiness, purity ... and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any [one] religion in the world" (203).

Radhakrishnan's lifelong search for a Religion of the Spirit whose underpinnings would be all that was best in the human religious quest fuelled, in his own life, a tremendous measure of creativity. In the year of his death at the age of 87, he shared some thoughts specifically on the creative life, in which asceticism's crucial role for any deep form of conscientious living was highlighted. In The Creative Life he noted that the fervour needed for creativity is fuelled, in an Eastern perspective, by an austerity that removes (burns - by means of tapas) unnecessary distractions, especially those of the appetites and passions (10-11). This primary call to discipline ourselves is "so that every act we do, we do it as a dedication to the eternal" (11). As has been earlier noted, such notions are counter-cultural to a North American market economy, but Radhakrishnan insists that:

> Nothing great is achieved without pain and sacrifice. This whole country - India - is built on austerity, on renunciation, not on what one acquires, but what one gives up. Even nations become great not by what they acquire but by what they surrender. (31)

Gandhi would have certainly agreed, especially in terms of having both individuals and nations surrender violence as a means to any end. "Every kind of quest is related to a conquest," writes Radhakrishnan referring to Gandhi whom he sees as symbolizing the spirit of India (35). The conquest of selfish ends which greed for material advancement incites is necessary to the quest of both inner unity and religious unity on a world scale, as well as admirably serving ecological ends.

Creativity is most commonly associated with art; and Radhakrishnan defines artistic creation as impregnating an important experience with one's own personal spiritual intensity in order to make it come alive (44). Art is not a peripheral and dispensable human activity[51], but rather

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[51] Roszak cites the vital role of art in curing environmental ills (1992 260):

> People will only cease cluttering the world with more junk than the planet can metabolize if they can recognize junk when they see it ... It would be a counsel of despair to conclude that the popular culture in our time cannot be schooled to respect excellence as it did in the

authentic artistic expression is needed to counteract the excess of "automatic thinking" encouraged by the mediums which are society's organs of expression, such as films, radios, televisions and newspapers:

> Intellectual integrity is imperilled and truth suffers. Independent reflection is developed by the quiet study of great books. We develop our soul by the study of great classics which reveal to us great minds. Though we belong physically to our country and age, as seekers of knowledge we belong to all countries and ages. (49)

Naturally Radhakrishnan sees the mystic's experience of the reality of the divine as essential to the creative life. The presence of the divine can be an academic theological subject, but the consciousness of the presence of the divine is the transforming factor that leads to religious and creative fulfillment.

Radhakrishnan often mentions Buddhist wisdom in his description of the Religion of the Spirit, a wisdom that, like Schumacher's "Buddhist" economics is reminiscent of Gandhian values. "Buddhist humanism," he says, "starts with the idea that human existence necessarily involves suffering. The way to put an end to it is by stopping greed" (64). And, as has been noted, the stopping of greed

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days of Sophocles and Shakespeare -- both of whom wrote for *hoi polloi*. ... [A]rt ... is the gentle discipline of the appetite.

requires a tremendous creative effort which today's ecological concerns make more urgent than ever.

Conclusion

People of goodwill from a wide range of religious traditions who take both their religions and the reality of the ecological crisis seriously, are increasingly finding that there is not only room, but need, to combine the two. The heritage of interreligious dialogue has found its greatest meeting ground among faiths in the area of mysticism. At the same time, as the Assisi Declarations confirm, the major religions have at their core a concomitant concern to treat creation with the regard due to an extension of the Ultimate Reality with which the mystics seek to unite their souls and minds.

It is, however, only realistic to note that many powerful religious leaders fear the increasingly influential cosmic consciousness engendered by an ecological concern focused on the sacred. A religion of the spirit such as Radhakrishnan encouraged, or a cosmic religion such as Klostermaier sees arising when the sacredness of nature is recognized, lead to an outgrowing of narrower allegiances and authority claims. An expanded religious consciousness, called forth by a recognition of the pluralistic and interconnected nature of the world, is likely to evolve into

a greater tolerance and respect for other expressions of the human religious quest.

Therefore many future-focused leaders of a variety of traditions have not hesitated to join the efforts towards articulating a cosmic religious concern to treat others, human and beyond, with the respect due to fellow manifesters of the reality of the divine in our midst. The truth that was Gandhi's God was a truth that recognized a plurality of faiths, a plurality of life forms, and the necessity of engendering harmony into these various interconnections. The seeking of a universal spirit in the form of a cosmic religious focus underpinned all his public and private work and prayer.

Had he lived to this day, Gandhi's concomitant focus on guarding against material excesses, his 'soft' technologies, and his keen aversion to prodigality in any form, might have caused him to uphold ecological concern as the new cosmic religion that could distract and absorb, as Jung described, the deep-rooted religious antagonisms whose resolutions eluded him. This is not to suggest a simplistic formula in which, for instance, if only Indian Hindus and Muslims would "get together" on ecological issues, they could forget their other differences. No, and yet continued failure at resolving their enmity at least confirms Jung's suggestion that something bigger than their differences needs to appear on the horizon of their concerns.

CHAPTER NINE: *VESTIGIA DEI*: SURPRISED BY THE SACRED

Introduction

In looking at nature mysticism in chapter three, we were reminded by Jürgen Moltmann about the theological doctrine of the *vestigia Dei*:

> Anyone who understands nature as God's creation sees in nature, not merely God's 'works', but also 'traces of God', ciphers and hidden tokens of his presence. (63)

Our current English use of the term 'vestigial' suggests that the phenomenon in question is now relatively scarce, or even extinct, except for this 'vestige' or reminder of its past existence. The English word derives from the Latin *vestigium* or footprint, and used as Moltmann does, suggests that the natural world bears the imprint of the divinity that brought it to birth and sustains it. But the past tense element of this concept remains problematical. It suggests that creation was a historical occurrence, long since completed, and now only of archival interest. The study of religion and ecology is, in essence, the realization that this thing called creation is not a corpse but a living reality, like Gaia (the whole Earth as a living organism), that continues to manifest the sacred to those open to its delights, surprises and mysteries.

Although ecology and interreligious dialogue are fairly new concepts, the values or ethical underpinnings that they

call forth are far from new. This became evident in our discussion as Gandhi's thought revealed much that remains vital to a conscientious and spiritual approach to modern ecological concerns, while being a model of openness and respect towards other religions. Another thinker from an overlapping era, Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-72) has left us with a portrait of the pious person which also reverberates with an astounding applicability to the issues at hand. Heschel's pious person rejects the demands of the ego, and interiorizes the reality that all things in the universe are to be treated with the reverence due to fellow elements of God's presence in the world -- a presence discerned when wonder opens us to the surprise of the sacred in creation.

Two years after this 1942 publication, Aldous Huxley published his classic work, The Perennial Philosophy, in which a huge range of mystics, philosophers, poets and theologians articulate a wisdom echoed both in Heschel's portrait of the pious person and in the life and thought of Mohandas K. Gandhi. The perennial philosophy has always expressed the wisdom of an ascetical, God-focused, other-centered life not only as a means to salvation or eternal life, but also, in the here-and-now, as the only means to a fully blossomed experience of self-realization -- an

experience of the sacred as an ongoing element of reality, not just a vestigial remnant of a holier time or place.[52]

Heschel's Pious Person

Before appearing as chapter twenty-six in his 1951 Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion (from which it is quoted here), Heschel's portrait of "The Pious Man" appeared in the Review of Religion in 1942. Heschel arrived in America in 1940 after just barely escaping the Nazi incarceration of Jews in his native Poland. His essay is a contribution to human wisdom that could so easily have been lost through humanity's ceaseless aggressions towards all that is sensed as conquerable and disposable. It comes to us, then, like some ancient and almost silenced oracle stretching backwards and forwards in its wise perception of the conscientious human response to the reality of the

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[52] In the early 1990's, at a Roman Catholic cathedral in Winnipeg, Rabbi Neal Rose ascended to the podium at an interreligious Earth Day service, carrying his shoes, to speak on the theme 'take off your shoes, this is holy ground' (Exodus 3:5). This by-now familiar message of religion's focus on ecology is a reminder that all of earth is holy ground since it is the Creator's workplace. And this yearly event is an example of ecology's fostering of interreligious dialogue.

divine in the world. Its ecological and interreligious implications will soon become clear.

Although Heschel realizes that piety had its negative interpretations, "associated with an old-fashioned, clerical, unctuous pattern of behavior" suggesting "prudishness, if not hypocrisy and fanaticism" (273), he nonetheless chooses to employ this term in order to resurrect its far greater potential for a positive picture of the practice of a living faith. Simply put, Heschel understood piety to mean "faith translated into life, spirit embodied in a personality" (279). A further elaboration indicates some important parameters:

> Piety is the direct opposite of selfishness. Living as he does in the vision of the unutterably pure, the pious man turns his back on his own human vanity, and longs to surrender the forces of egotism to the might of God. ...[T]o protect the inner wholesomeness and purity of devotion from being defiled by interference from the petty self, he strives towards self-exclusion, self-forgetfulness and an inner anonymity of service. He desires to be unconscious that it is he who is consecrating himself to the service of God. The pious man lays no claim to reward. ... He is engrossed in the beauty of that which he worships, and dedicates himself to ends the greatness of which exceeds his capacity for adoration. (279)

Heschel echoes, among others, Eckhart's notion of losing one's identity in the service of God; and he expresses agreement with a huge body of Eastern thought in particular[53] (e.g., Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, Bhagavad Gītā and Dhammapada) that insists on the suppression of the ego for the person seeking enlightenment. In saying that piety is the direct opposite of selfishness, Heschel also makes an obvious connection with the spirit of altruism examined in part one.

The pious person focuses on the essentials of faith and thus realizes that there is more than one "trend ... toward the divine" in the world of human expression:

> The pious man is alive to what is solemn in the simple, to what is sublime in the sensuous, but he is not aiming to penetrate into the sacred. Rather he is striving to be himself penetrated and actuated by the sacred, eager to yield to its force, to identify himself with every trend in the world which is toward the divine. (281)

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[53] Though of course Western thought is not devoid of this notion in its sacred writings. It has just been underplayed and lately aggressively superseded by the forces of egotism that, as discussed earlier, 'oil' (to use William Leiss' term) the motors of technology, materialism and so-called progress.

To identify with <u>every</u> "trend" in the world "which is toward the divine" is to be open to the wisdom contained in a variety of religions. Through interreligious dialogue such "trends" can be distinguished and pursued. By not aiming to "penetrate into the sacred" by the force of one's own strength or rationality, one is more open to be potentially "penetrated and actuated by the sacred" -- a development that the mystics concur cannot be programmed in advance. An ecology infused with a vision of the sacred also moves in the direction of becoming a trend toward the divine.

Heschel's portrait is reminiscent of, among others (especially Menno Simons in the Christian tradition), Radhakrishnan's focus on behavior over belief. Although Heschel identifies piety with "the realization and verification of the transcendent in human life," he also insists that it is a practical manifestation of faith in life, "an effort to put faith's ideas into effect" (281). In all the many struggles, throughout the history of most religions, to put faith into actual concrete practice, people have striven to subject their everyday use of energies and talents towards the service of the divine:

> To dwell upon those things which are stepping stones on the path to the holy ... does not necessarily mean an avoidance of the common ways of life, or involve losing sight of worldy beauty or profane values. Piety's love of the Creator does not exclude love of creation ... He

> [the pious person] is bent upon what is good in the eyes of God ... (283)

In an awareness of living under the watchful eye of God, the pious person sees "hints of God in the varied things he encounters on his daily walk" (284). Objecting to the human tendency to measure all things "according to the purpose they serve" and the economic tendency to regard every object in the universe as a commodity or tool, Heschel articulates one of the earliest biocentric statements this century suggesting that nature has its own inherent worth apart from its usefulness to humans:

> But was the universe created merely for the use of man, for the satisfaction of his animal desires? Surely it is obvious how crude and, indeed, thoughtless it is to subject other beings to the service of our interests, seeing that every existence has its own inner value, and that to utilize them without regard to their individual essence is to desecrate them and to despise their real dignity. The folly of this instrumental approach is manifest in the vengeance which inevitably follows. ... By enslaving others, he ["man"] plunges himself into serfdom ... Often, indeed, he wastes his life in serving passions which others shrewdly excite in him, fondly believing that this is his indulgence of his freedom. (285)

Such a statement is particularly prophetic considering it was written before the widespread availability of television advertising which has been so effective in 'shrewdly exciting passions' which enslave both psyches and finances. The realization that "every existence has its own inner value" causes the pious person to step back from any "instrumental approach" that treats other living things (ultimately all elements of the universe) as mere commodities to serve dubious human ends. The pious person realizes that:

> The inner value of any entity -- men or women, trees or stars, ideas or things -- is, as a matter of fact, not entirely subject to any purpose of ours. They have a value in themselves quite apart from any function which makes them useful to our purposes. (285)

Ecology as cosmic religion is clearly implied here, as is the modern notion of the inherent worth of nature. Human beings cannot go on destructively using the universe as an instrument of their convenience while blithely participating in anthropocentric (and usually androcentric) liturgies and rituals whose effect supposedly purifies them to greater or lesser degrees from any taint of the sin of being involved in worldly affairs. It is precisely their approaches and attitudes to pressing issues in the world that manifest the quality of their piety, of that inner perception of the permeation of the infinite in the world of the finite.

Heschel feels that piety "is an attitude toward all reality" and an awareness of the dignity of all elements of the universe:

> Being able to sense the relations of things to transcendent values, he will be incapable of disparaging any of them by enslaving them to his service. The secret of every being is the divine care and concern that are invested in it. (286)

The pious person, therefore, approaches "things both great and small" with solemnity and conscientiousness. Every person "who has ever looked with unclouded vision in the face of even a flower or a stone" (290) realizes how foolish it is for human beings to think that they have unlimited powers over the earth. This, then, is nature mysticism as ecology's mentor. It is not a complex theory or scientific explanation of the interdependence of all life on earth, and humanity's role in refraining from destroying vital links of that interdependence. Just look "with unclouded vision" into the face of a flower or stone (a stone has a face!), and humanity's call to step lightly on an earth that expresses the sacred in unbelievably precise and surprising ways will reveal itself.

Not surprisingly, Heschel's thoughts on responsibility in the life of piety have further implications for ecological concern:

But freedom in its turn implies responsibility, and man is responsible for the way in which he utilizes nature. It is amazing how thoughtless modern man is of his responsibility in relation to his world. He finds before him a world crammed to overflowing with wonderful materials and forces, and without hesitation or scruple he grasps at whatever is within his reach. Omnivorous in his desire, unrestrained in his efforts, tenacious in his purpose, he is gradually changing the face of the earth ... Powerhouse, factory and department store make us familiar with the exploitation of nature for our own benefit. And lured by familiarity, the invisible trap for the mind[54], we easily yield to the illusion that these things are

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[54] One wonders whether any psychological studies have probed this fascinating notion of familiarity as the invisible trap for the mind. Though the simple saying, "familiarity breeds contempt" approaches this understanding, the broader implications for a xenophobic culture insulated from the realities of a harsher existence are interesting. The coziness of never venturing forth, even in the mind, to experience another human culture or religion, for instance, breeds contempt <u>not</u> for the familiar, but for the unfamiliar and potentially enlightening. The trap of familiarity is the blind assent to destructive habits and attitudes out of an unwillingness to reassess their true meaning.

> rightfully at our disposal, and think little of the sun, the rainfall, the water courses, as sources by no means rightfully our own. (289-90)

As with some of Gandhi's astute ecological ideas developed just prior to the widespread awareness of the ecological crisis, we are again, with Heschel, taken aback at the storehouse of wisdom that lies waiting in the recent past, to provide a foundation for a cosmic religion that has ecology's concerns at its core. It seems especially admirable that at such an early date, seekers after wisdom (even Western ones!) were realizing the spiritual as well as physical damage inherent in humanity's arrogant and self-serving attitude to nature. The thought that these words of Heschel's were primarily focused towards engendering authentic piety, rather than towards 'saving the earth', is a further illustration of the genuine self-realization that follows from a submission to the yoke of a 'higher' path.

For Heschel, as for Gandhi (Francis, etc.), asceticism and sacrifice are essential elements of this path:

> The ordinary man is inclined to disregard all indications of the presence of the divine in life. In his conceit and vainglory he thinks of himself as the possessor. But this is sacrilege to the pious man, and his method of saving himself from such hallucination is by asceticism and sacrifice. He rids himself of all sense of being a possessor by giving up, for God's

> sake, things that are desired or valued, and by depriving himself, for the sake of others who need his help, of those things that are precious to him. Thus, to sacrifice is not to abandon what has been granted to us, to throw away the gifts of life. It is, on the contrary, giving back to God what we have received from Him by employing it in His service. Such giving is a form of thanksgiving. (292)

Although Heschel recognizes that asceticism can become an end in itself, he joins Gandhi, Francis and so many others in insisting on its necessity nonetheless. Just because something can be abused -- for example, sexuality, alcohol, human intelligence or scientific research -- does not mean that its use is to be forever condemned or banned. Asceticism is a methodology, a means, which, if used carefully, with a noble end in mind, is potent and indispensable for the pursuit of a variety of 'higher' aims.

The foregoing quoted passages seem rather alien to us as explications of a life of piety, whereas they seem to make perfect sense as a sort of *enchiridion* for religion and ecology. But Heschel's passionate insistence that such are the attitudes and approaches of the person of genuine piety, furthers the view that a life of ecological concern and reverence does not just add burdens to the list of religion's "ought-to-do's". Rather it is an aspect of that 'elegant frugality' which Skolimowski saw as a prerequisite

for finding the beauty in life. If the divine is not the beautiful, what is? Heschel adds his voice to the long list of those who are convinced that the infinite cannot be sought if the finite is allowed to crowd in too oppressively. A hunger for God, beauty, the infinite, ultimate reality, and so on, cannot even be felt, let alone satisfied, if other appetites are overly titillated and indulgently satiated.

Thus again we see that asceticism as an approach to the material world which holds back greed and rapaciousness is not a deprivation, but rather a liberation. A shedding of excess baggage of whatever sort, means a lightening of our load. And in this less encumbered state, the path of life becomes freer, our focus more open to joy, and the human spirit more available to be surprised by the many traces of the sacred that creation manifests.

The Immanence of God in the Imminent Crisis

All important relationships are said to be tested by a 'good' crisis. Marriages are supposedly either made or broken by such; and often, as in ecology, it takes the threat of a crisis situation to disturb the complacency of taking things for granted. Humankind has been taking nature for granted for centuries, and paradoxically enough, our earlier ancestors, whose numbers and lifestyles hardly

threatened nature's existence, were more respectful and cautious towards it than recent generations. This situation is probably less a reflection of decreased virtue than it is one of increased ability to make nature serve what Bacon called "the inconveniences of man's estate."

Talk of an imminent ecological crisis permeates our classrooms and newsrooms. And yet so many people resist this concept as grossly exaggerated. Theodore Roszak's recent study of "ecopsychology" (1992) claims that environmentalists have only themselves to blame (35) if the populace has not responded favorably to their "scare tactics and guilt trips." He suggests that it is time to draw up a psychological-impact statement about the "green scare" and he wonders "Are dread and desperation the only motivations we have to play upon? What are we connecting with in people that is generous, joyous, freely given, and perhaps heroic?" (38). Roszak also supports the notion that the threat of the ecological crisis cannot be as keenly felt by citizens of less stable or affluent nations who daily face more acute and urgent crises, and who are still waiting for a share in the material plenty on which the First World has glutted itself. Like Gandhi he sees some form of 'fellow-feeling' as the key to a more inclusive perspective:

> Is there an alternative to scare tactics and guilt trips that will lend ecological necessity both intelligence and passion? There is. It is the concern

> that arises from shared identity: two lives become one. Where that identity is experienced deeply, we call it love. More coolly and distantly felt it is called compassion. This is the link we must find between ourselves and the planet that gives us life. (39)

The threat of the imminent crisis necessitates a taking stock of what people expect, want and value in life which, Roszak points out, "connects intimately with what they understand their place in the universe to be" (40). The relations between people and their environment are an outgrowth of their worldviews and mindsets. And it is in this arena of the mind that the environmentalists must withdraw their 'whips and chains' (seeking to force people to be be more ecologically conscious), and present instead a vision of Gaia as she was meant to be, or of Plato's *anima mundi*, that "cosmic housekeeper" (139) who seeks humanity's cooperation in keeping the earth, our home, as hospitable and gracious as possible.

Annie Dillard's "mystical excursion into the natural world" described in her award-winning Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (1974) presents such a positive vision. Not that she overlooks the ugliness and cruelty that is a realistic part of the natural world -- in fact, she describes some examples of such in excruciating detail -- but she is nonetheless

overwhelmed with awe at the 'extravagant gestures' that are 'the very stuff of creation' (9).

Dillard describes herself as a stalker, stalking insects and other animals along the creek through their seasonal changes. In the process she ends up "stalking" the physical universe and God. Citing some of the insights from quantum physics, especially Heisenberg's Indeterminacy Principle, Dillard explores the hiddenness and surprise of the physical universe:

> The Principle of Indeterminacy, which saw the light in the summer of 1927, says in effect that you cannot know both a particle's velocity and its position. You can guess statistically what any batch of electrons might do, but you cannot predict the career of any one particle. They seem to be as free as dragonflies. You can perfect your instruments and your methods till the cows come home, and you will never, ever be able to measure this one basic thing. It cannot be done. The electron is a muskrat; it cannot be perfectly stalked. And nature is a fan dancer born with a fan; you can wrestle her down, throw her on the stage and grapple with her for the fan with all your might, but it will never quit her grip. She comes that way; the fan is attached. (206-7)

As a result of this new pervasive element of indeterminacy throughout the world of science, Dillard suggests

(approvingly) "that some physicists now are a bunch of wild-eyed, raving mystics" (206). Just as she has not been able to see fully the life of the animals in the creek, no matter how careful or patient she tried to be, the scientists turned the corner from what seemed like centuries of ever-increasing certainty to confront, instead, a brand-new and seemingly insurmountable world of dire uncertainty. Or is 'dire' the word? 'Delightful' might serve equally well, depending on one's perspective. To know everything about something might give a sense of triumphant conquest, but after the adrenalin of discovery stops flowing, the thoroughly known thing (or person) becomes boring. Many relationships founder on such developments, the relationship between humans and the rest of nature particularly so. The "crises" of no longer being able to rely either on our exact knowledge of the physical universe, or on the previously-felt certainty that nature's bounty would never run out -- does rather bring humanity to its knees. Whether we are on our knees in fear and trepidation, or whether out of a Heschelian sense of wonder, awe and knee-collapsing joy remains the choice of perspectives for humanity to adopt.

Speculations about the actual effect of the reality of the divine within the physical universe have varied immensely. Thomas Aquinas adopted Aristotle's notion of God as prime mover and more or less restricted the actual input of the divine to an early flicking of the primeval slime

into the motion or interaction that sent the first cells to combine in ways that eventually evolved into homo sapiens. Resembling somewhat the Big Bang theory of recent science, except that the "bang" is God-initiated rather than entirely spontaneous, the prime mover theory helpfully allowed space for science's increased knowledge about the development of life on earth. The more science explained various physical processes (e.g., the intra-uterine development of the human person), the more the Creator could be praised for the intricacies and complexities of creation's artistry and scientific thoroughness.

However, the theory remains a rather cold portrait of a Creator carelessly assigning creation to about the same security as is involved in the so-called domino effect. If something goes, or threatens to go, terrible wrong, humans are hard-pressed to solicit or blame a God who apparently retired from action after the first concocting of the primordial soup. Such a notion has a variety of problems including the simple reality that God, in this perspective, becomes quite irrelevant to present or future life in the world, while nature, on the other hand becomes an immensely powerful entity whose favour humanity had better learn to court!

Process thought in particular provides an antidote to such a perspective by depicting the divine as being in an ongoing relationship with living beings (especially, or as

far as they know, only, with humans). The varieties, supporters and opponents of process thought in various traditions throughout the world are far too vast to delineate, but the basics are this: Out of an ongoing concern for creation which is a form of divine self-expression, the Creator continues to interact with it. The God of process thought would necessarily, for example, be concerned about the ecological crisis, and be interested in seeing humans act with a similar concern, since it is a crisis that threatens to destroy what God has created.

Opponents of such a notion react with dismay at the arrogance of those who would think that the unchangeable, immovable God would get involved with either cleaning up human messes, or giving them a gentle but tangible nudge in the direction of bettering the human or the earth's condition. Why should God do so, they query? God provided humans with all that is needed for salvation. To ask for more is to continue to want to suckle when weaning has long since been put into effect -- not a behaviour likely to impress the parent watching the offspring for signs of maturity.

Basically these arguments boil down to the tension between the notion of God as immanent, and the notion of God as transcendent. The limitations of human language and understanding suggest that both simultaeously are not possible. But students of the infinite have never perceived

it to be particularly willing to fit into human definitions of the possible or probable. It is the God-as-immanent notion that seems to cause the most trouble because the problem of what to do about God in the world has always vexed the poor human imagination which, by and large, feels inadequate to cope with such a reality. Aldous Huxley suggested this sharpening of focus on the question:

> Every individual being, from the atom up to the most highly organized of living bodies and the most exalted of finite minds, may be thought of, in Rene Guenon's phrase, as a point where a ray of the primordial Godhead meets one of the differentiated, creaturely emanations of that same Godhead's creative energy. The creature, as creature, may be very far from God, in the sense that it lacks the intelligence to discover the nature of the divine Ground of its being. But the creature in its eternal sense -- as the meeting place of creatureliness and primordial Godhead -- is one of the infinite number of points where divine Reality is wholly and eternally present. (59)

Each of us "creaturely emanations" of the Godhead's creative energy are necessarily, then, whether we are aware of it or not, a point where a ray of the primordial God is wholly and eternally (including now) present. Therefore God's immanence in the world is a corollary of our creatureliness. In fact, most art theorists believe that the artist is

always present in his or her work, whether a book, painting, sculpture, piece of music or other artifact that requires a wrenching of the soul to produce. In the same way, God is eternally present in all God's creaturely emanations, though an overly romantic view that such a presence assures blessedness should be avoided.[55]

The immense psychological ramifications of the notion of God's eternal presence in every created entity cannot be evaluated here, except that, as Huxley points out:

> The doctrine that God is in the world has an important practical corollary -- the sacredness of Nature, and the sinfulness and folly of man's overweening efforts to be her master rather than her intelligently docile collaborator. Sub-human lives and even things are to be treated with respect and understanding, not brutally oppressed to serve our human ends. (76)

Huxley makes use of a variety of both Eastern and Western sources in his examination of the notion of God in the world, and arrives at the same conclusion that Lynn White Jr. would popularize twenty-three years later:

> Compared with that of the Taoists and Far Eastern Buddhists, the Christian attitude towards Nature has

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[55] For example, God is also present, then, in the well-fed dog that mauls the the child's face, in the cancer cells that grow and thrive where they do not belong, and in other insidious evils -- a difficult theological conundrum.

> been curiously insensitive and often downright domineering and violent. Taking their cue from an unfortunate remark in Genesis, Catholic moralists have regarded animals as mere things which men do right to exploit for their own ends. (77)

Catholic moralists can perhaps be defended here as being hardly alone in their attitude to animals and other non-human entities. It is the nature of a generalized anthropocentrism to view all of creation as simply a backdrop and hinterland for the needs of the human, the so-called "crown" of creation. Huxley goes on to cite with approval the Greek belief that *hubris* is always followed by *nemesis* so "that if you went too far you would get a knock on the head to remind you that the gods will not tolerate insolence from mortal men." The ecological crisis of our times can surely be interpreted as just such a knock on the head. Will human *hubris* be reined in on time before the *nemesis* of total ecological destruction occurs?

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi was so highly visible as a public figure that he was often asked to approve or condemn various practices and beliefs in hopes that his tremendous influence would aid certain causes. In this vein he was asked, in 1929, whether he approved of the practice of certain

"simple-minded women who offer worship to trees." The inquiry seemed to be seeking a condemnation from Gandhi on the unenlightened and superstitious practice of image worship. "I am both an opponent and supporter of image worship," he said, and after cautioning against genuine idolatry, he went on to proclaim:

> Even so far from seeing anything inherently evil or harmful in tree worship, I find in it a thing instinct with a deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolizes true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom, which with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and forms, declares to us as it were with a million tongues the greatness and the glory of God. Without vegetation, our planet would not be able to support life even for a moment. In such a country especially ... in which there is a scarcity of trees, tree worship assumes a profound economic significance. (CW 41:292)

As a practical idealist, Gandhi's religious insights were always grounded in their economic or social ramifications. As a result, he was willing to 'branch out' into fields and issues he had previously not considered, especially if they were relevant to that which bridged the human and the divine. He always sought to discover the immanence of God in whatever tasks were at hand, and so, in this rare passage, he gives voice to a nature mysticism that, at the same time, recognizes "the profound economic significance"

of holding nature in awe. The "million tongues" of the natural world declare God's glory, Gandhi tells us -- how, then, could religion be complete without giving ear to such a symphony of praise?

It is out of such a broad identification with all living things that Gandhi's khādī spirit grew. Both Gandhian khādī spirit and modern ecology require a universalized sense of "fellow-feeling" that is courageous enough to accept the ascetical renunciation "of everything that is likely to harm our fellow creatures." This type of "neo-asceticism" has roots in every religion's caution against the dangers of greed and materialism. Interreligious understanding has long been enhanced by the awareness of commonality in this realm. And modern interreligious dialogue is spurred to new levels of urgency by the ecological crisis which, to recall Carl Sagan's words, needs to be infused with a vision of the sacred.

The field of ecological concern, as suggested in the introduction, is one unexpectedly rich in opportunities for religion's renewal as a lively partner in the dynamics of humanity's struggle to curb its potential for irreversible destruction. Religion's traditional cautions against the excesses of greed and materialism, and the violence that are their usual accompaniment, need to be rearticulated in an ecological framework, and reconsidered so that their true message -- not deprivation, but liberation -- may be heard.

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