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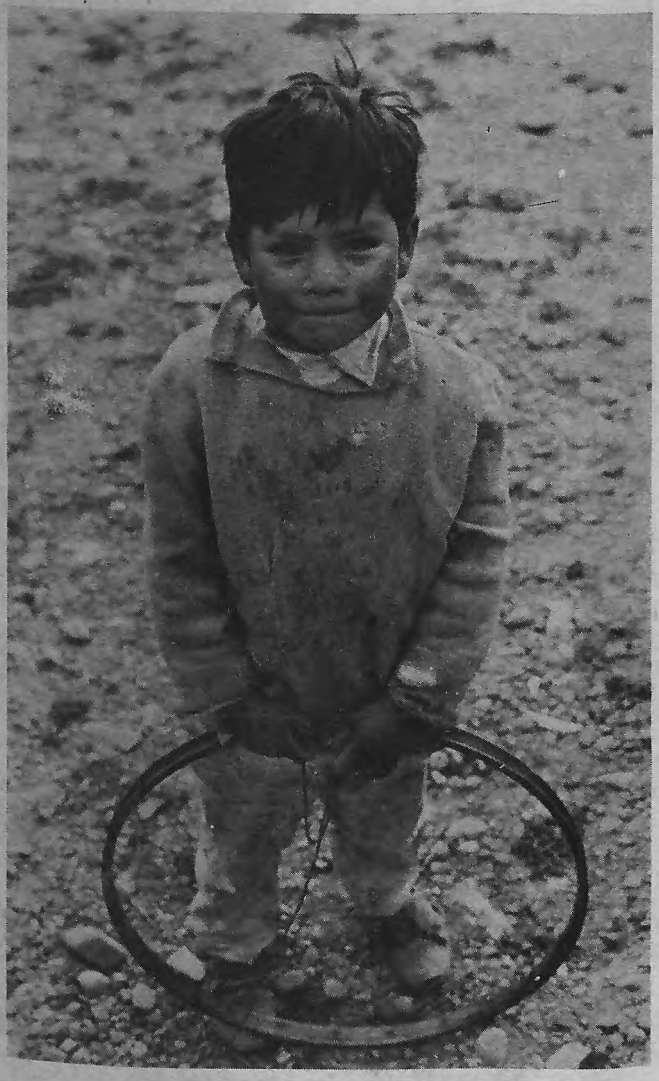

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a citizen. Maybe some Christian has thought about it theologically. I don't know, but I think it is important. I don't want to make you uncomfortable because of my annoyance. It would bother me that someone should start giving answers on world problems in the name of liberation theology. I am not the head of a religious world movement that is concerned about every problem in the world. I have an opinion, a small one, as an ordinary citizen.

Theology as such has an area. Even if I had not written about liberation theology, I would be a Catholic priest, Peruvian, who thinks that Marxism is interesting. I hope you understand what I am trying to say, for otherwise it may turn into a sort of world prophecy – and among various other theologies, liberation theology would be one more. And this would make me unhappy. My position is rather simple: we are citizens of the world, Latin Americans involved in liberation. Some are Christians, those who are involved and reflect on their faith. That is theology, and that is what it offers, no more.

Important, but modest in the great panorama of the world process – just a small thing. □

Ecology, Justice and Theology: Beyond the Preliminary Skirmishes

Out of today's environmental issues a theological dispute has arisen — one that could bode serious ill for the life and mission of the church if it gives rise to polarization.

H. PAUL SANTMIRE

✦ ONLY in its infancy – or perhaps its latency period – the ecology movement has come under attack on every side. The Daughters of the American Revolution condemn its "communist tendencies." Utilities and other corporate interests, in a parade of TV advertisements defending atomic power plants and off-shore oil wells, suggest that environmentalists are sincere but misguided "reformers." Workers in such fields as the aerospace industry, championed most vocally by Senator Henry Jackson, are profoundly disturbed by what the senator refers to as "ecological extremists." At the other end of the political spectrum, activists and political organizers charge that the movement is a white middle-class cop-out. Meanwhile, within the ranks of the ecology movement itself, the fervor that sparked the first Earth Day and the publication of the *Environmental Handbook* in 1970 seems to have died down.

Out of these environmental issues a theological dispute has arisen – one that could bode serious ill for the life and mission of the church if it gives rise to a full-fledged polarization. The debate between those who maintain an interest in "ecological theology" and the more firmly established exponents of "political theology" must be resolved without delay. At a time when spiritual discouragement, pietistic fervor, narcissistic monetary preoccupation, and quietistic political withdrawal are increasingly in evidence within the churches, we can ill afford a frenetic dispute between two theological movements dedicated, overall, to radical re-formation of both church and society.

I

The preliminary questions have focused on the issue of survival versus justice.

Ecological theologians have, as a rule, taken seriously the predictions of crisis advanced by responsible scientists. They have also been influenced by the much-contested argument of Lynn White, Jr., and others that the classical Western theological tradition has proved ecologically problematic. Writing with a sense of urgency, they have sought to develop new theological approaches to nature, emphasizing, in varying degrees, the politics of justice.

Political theologians, on the other hand, have tended either to ignore ecological problems altogether or to regard them as expressions of unresolved political or economic problems. They have been suspicious of much of the literature associated with the ecology movement, seeing it as an expression of First World ideology, as yet another way of keeping oppressed peoples in their places. Political theologians have often implied and sometimes directly stated that theologians with ecological interests must be politically naïve or insensitive. Guilt by associa-

Dr. Santmire is chaplain and lecturer in religion and biblical studies at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts.

tion has been a frequently invoked form of polemics — and an effective one, since the ecology movement has been a bizarre congeries of political reactionaries, romantic conservationists, political cop-outs, solitary poets, anarchic life-stylers, as well as genuine political radicals, serious-minded reformers, and level-headed natural scientists.

To move the discussion beyond these preliminary skirmishes, let me offer the following basis for a working consensus.

First, it should be acknowledged that there is a strong tendency within the ecology movement to give "survival," understood in conservative, even elitist terms, pre-eminence in our national policies. The increasing popularity of the "lifeboat ethic," championed by Garrett Hardin and others, is only the latest expression of a trend. This tendency must be fought at every turn in the name of social justice. Generally social justice must be given priority over survival in our theological hierarchy of values (here the way of the cross can be paradigmatic). Survival should then come next in importance, since obviously there can be no social justice without survival of the human species.

Second, it should be noted that exponents of ecological theology are not necessarily bound to accept the traditional, conservative, organic, hierarchical model for society. This model has been pointedly identified by Richard Neuhaus:

> Ecology deals not with the interaction of human power, but with man's relation to the nature of which he is a part. It is at heart apolitical, although its concerns may lead to political engagement. The ecological archetype sees man in his unity, forced to solidarity in the face of a common threat. The ecologists call us to the struggle for survival. The revolutionaries scorn survival in the struggle for a new order [*In Defense of People: Ecology and the Seduction of Radicalism* (Macmillan, 1971), p. 70].

It is quite possible for an ecological theologian to argue self-consciously on the basis of a political "root metaphor," rather than an organic metaphor. Also, the question must be raised whether all revised uses of the organic model (e.g., by John Cobb or Kenneth Cauthen) are by definition reactionary, or so geared to evolution that they have no room for or interest in revolution. Simply because the organic metaphor has had politically undesirable ramifications in the past should not disqualify it forever as an object for theological reflection and argumentation. Each theology must be judged on its own merits.

Third, in contrast to the hasty judgments about the extent of the ecological crisis expressed by some of the more politically oriented theologians, it must be agreed that there is an environmental crisis of profound dimensions facing the planet today. The life-support system of our species is threatened, and it is the poor who first bear the weight of the crisis (e.g., poisonous air for the slum-dwellers of New York city, famine for the impoverished of Bangladesh). So it is not a question of either ecology or justice, but both/and. The environmental crisis is a hard fact that we all must acknowledge, however disdainful we may be of ecological doom-sayers or countercultural faddists, however politically radical we may consider ourselves.

II

Preliminary debates and misunderstandings aside, then, a number of fundamental theological and ethical issues related to the ecological crisis require sustained critical reflection by both ecological and political theologians.

First is the historical and sociocritical task. It has been widely assumed by those concerned with the ecological crisis that Western theology, except for certain isolated figures like St. Francis, is ecologically bankrupt. Yet there seems to be good evidence (a) that such an assumption is historically inaccurate, that our own Western theological tradition, particularly in its premodern expressions, has been replete with rich ecological dimensions, which we ignore to our own impoverishment; (b) that Western theology is only one factor among many that helped to set the stage for the contemporary ecological crisis; and (c) that those who assume that the Western theological tradition is to blame for our present environmental situation are discounting the culpability of the structures of modern scientific-technological industrialism (capitalist or Marxist), and the stake of the affluent classes which benefit most from that system. The importance of research in these areas as a foundation for substantive theological reflection should not be underestimated.

Among the areas of study most urgently requiring attention is biblical theology. Virtually all of the most renowned biblical scholars of our era — the names of G. Ernest Wright and Rudolf Bultmann come to mind — either have not investigated the biblical theology of nature or have "discovered"

'I hope you realize what you're doing to the ecology!'

'I'm sorry, madam, but there just aren't any more unspoiled places.'

that the biblical approach to nature is substantially the same as the modern theological approach. Nature, then, has been presented as "the servant of history" or the "stage for history" in much modern writing about biblical theology. But there is evidence — beginning with Genesis 1, where we are told that God looked at the *whole* creation and saw that it was good — that biblical thinking is not nearly so anthropocentric as many interpreters of the Bible have supposed. But if nature is not merely a stage for history, what is it? In what sense does nature have a role in the sweep of God's history with God's creation, as it is depicted in the Bible? The time is overdue for biblical scholars to examine the Old and New Testaments anew, raising ecological as well as political questions.

The *second* and perhaps most fundamental area requiring joint attention by ecological and political theologians is the problem of properly conceptualizing and expressing the relationship between nature and history. The ecological theologian sometimes falls prey to the traditional romantic danger of submerging the distinctively human dimension of the created order in nature, thereby undercutting the biblical norm of social justice. On the other hand, political theologians are sometimes prone to the opposite danger, so historicizing their conceptualization of reality that nature comes to be treated, as it generally was in 19th century continental Protestant thought and on into the 20th century, as a *mere stage* for history. But this kind of theology plays into the hands of the exploiters of the biosphere, especially the dominant classes in the affluent West. In the modern West, the acting on the stage of nature has become so destructive (for the sake of "progress," "a constantly increasing gross national product," "development," "exploitation of new resources") that it threatens to destroy the stage itself. The carrying capacities of our ecological platform are finite. That platform is a delicate living matrix out of which the human species evolved and on which it is still dependent for life. Too much emphasis on history, therefore, pushes us in the direction of ecological collapse. But if theologians are to develop theologies with a tangible and comprehensive ecological dimension, how should they conceptualize and express the realities of nature and history and their interrelationship?

III

Third is the whole problem of finding a fundamental imagery or root-metaphor that can embody both ecological and political concerns. Whitehead once observed that there is a hidden imaginative background behind even the most refined and abstract of philosophical systems. His observation is even more valid for theology, given the theologian's self-conscious use of mythological and narrative materials. What imagery, then, can best do justice to both our ecological and our political interests?

The traditional "City of God" imagery can be politically helpful, but it tends to mold theological thought in an insular-anthropocentric fashion, virtually excluding any meaningful substantive interpretation of nature. The various metaphors from nature, on the other hand — organism, process, body, ground of being — tend to rule out full explication of the historical dimension as it is attested by the biblical writers. Still another alternative, the biblical and classical theological image "the Kingdom of God," seems to be a possibility for creative theological development, both politically and ecologically, but it brings problems of its own. In our time a kingly image seems contrived, perhaps unintelligible. It is also problematic when viewed from a feminist perspective. Some would argue that it is the key metaphor of patriarchy. In contrast the image "spaceship earth," recently given currency by a number of ecological thinkers, is intelligible in terms of contemporary experience and seems to be free of sexist implications, but it brings with it the liabilities of its technological and authoritarian implications. Is our world best thought of as a machine?

Fourth, in regard to the nature-history question and to the problem of finding the best root-metaphor, is the debate between those who would uphold the concept that nature has intrinsic value before God, and those who would eschew that idea as either unintelligible or wrong-headed. Does nature have its own integrity, worth and goodness, as humanity does? Or is the human species the only one in the cosmos that has rights, the only creature that has intrinsic worth, goodness and integrity in the eyes of God? If we opt for the view that nature

has intrinsic worth, how do we protect the biblical emphasis on human rights? (For example, a wilderness area may have to be flooded in order to provide electric power for a slum.) If, on the other hand, we opt for the view that nature has *no* intrinsic value before God, apart from its relationship with humanity, how is the relationship between humanity and nature to be defined? How is nature to be anything but the slave of the human master? How, then, are we to avoid all the ecological problems inherent in the exploitative, domineering anthropocentrism of modern Western culture?

IV

Fifth, perhaps the most difficult theological question of all is the issue of our understanding of God as it relates to sexual dualism. This issue has been sharpened in recent years by such liberation theologians as Rosemary Ruether. Among political and ecological theologians the issue has been largely bypassed or ignored.

The classical diety of Western theology has been depicted as a patriarchal ruler. This is the God who performs "mighty acts," who creates the world *ex nihilo* at the very beginning, and who remains — in the popular theological imagination, if not in explicit theological doctrine — the Wholly Other God, the transcendent God of power. Symbolically and politically, this God has functioned to oppress women. In the modern period the classical Western deity more and more took on the garb of the One who ultimately validates scientific and industrial progress, including not only much that was truly progressive, but also the industrial rape of nature and, ultimately, through a variety of corporate structures, the oppression of the poor and the dispossessed.

Originally, however, from the perspective of the Exodus story and the prophets, the "God who acts" motif entailed the liberation of the oppressed and the renewal of the earth. It seems, then, that the "Male Sky God" imagery of the West has incorporated both negative and positive aspects.

Female theological imagery also has both positive and negative connotations. Female imagery has sometimes functioned to validate a markedly positive attitude toward women (for example, the young Psyche, the image of a liberated woman, or Artemis, the free, assertive huntress). Female imagery has also functioned to create and sustain a vital and sensitive relationship to the world of nature (especially in connection with the archaic Earth

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Goddess imagery). But female theological imagery has had its darker sides. On occasion it has encouraged a turning away from the challenges of historical existence, especially the life of the city (one thinks of the *Bacchae*), and a turning toward the stable and unchanging — sometimes orgiastic and destructive — rhythms of nature. This movement has meant a turning toward political stasis and a certain ruthless acceptance of social inequities as eternally ordained by the Deity.

Male motifs can function to encourage political liberation, but they can also encourage the rape of women and of the earth, and the oppression of the poor. Female motifs can encourage positive approaches toward women and nature, but these motifs can also bring with them the tendency to undercut the struggle for social justice in the city. The question, then, in this theological era "After the Death of God the Father" (Mary Daly) is this: How as we to draw on the positive political and ecological aspects of the male and female motifs, while rejecting the negative tendencies of each? Is some kind of synthesis, or advance beyond, the ancient female-male theological dichotomy possible?

V

All these are complex areas for research and reflection. They will require a concerted effort by theologians who take both ecology and justice seriously, and who are prompted by a sense of urgency that will allow them to struggle creatively and resolutely with the deeper issues — if not in perfect harmony, at least with a sense of solidarity.

"We seek to overcome the deadly Leviathan of the Pentagon of Power," Rosemary Ruether has written, "transforming its power into manna to feed the hungry of the earth. The revolution of the feminine revolts against the denatured Babel of concrete and steel that stifles the living soil" (*Liberation Theology* [Paulist, 1972], pp. 125 f.). Is not this, in brief, the challenge before all of us today, whether our interests are primarily ecological or political, whether we are Jews or Greeks, males or females, First World or Third World? □

Ecology and the Fall

We need a common consciousness of our radical guilt for having ravaged the land.

PETER HEINEGG

Those leaves
They gathered, broad as Amazonian targe,
And with what skill they had together sewed,
To gird their waist — vain covering, if to hide
Their guilt and dreadful shame; O how unlike
To that first naked glory. Such of late
Columbus found the American so girt
With feathered cincture, naked else and wild
Among the trees on isles and woody shores.
— *Paradise Lost*, by John Milton.

✦ IN THIS GENERATION Americans have awakened to a traumatic sense of guilt over the damage we have done to our environment. The veil has been torn from our past, and we start in astonishment to see the awesome downhill sweep of ecological history. After decades of thoughtless waste and destruction, we have come to the belated perception of a sort of cosmic Fall. As a popular song simplistically puts it, we've paved Paradise and put in a parking lot.

Unlike the Garden of Eden, pre-Columbian or pre-industrial America is accessible not merely through myths, but through the historical imagination. We have all sorts of records, from fossils to photographs, of what the country was like before we ravaged it. As late as the 19th century, artists like Audubon or Catlin or Bierstadt could venture into the wilderness and bring back pictures of a teeming paradise. Even today a traveler to the national parks from any blighted city or countryside might get an impression of escaping from a world of physical and moral filth into one of primal innocence. These bits of Eden make our Fall seem poignantly close, almost within the reach of memory.

I

But nostalgia is playing tricks on us. The Fall did not occur in 1492 or 1620 — though the arrival of the white man certainly spelled catastrophe for the land — or in 1849 or any such date. The fact is that human presence on this continent has always been more or less disruptive, and the first migrants to cross the Bering Straits brought trouble with them. In the Pleistocene period over 100 species of large animals disappeared, probably, as Paul Martin has shown, because of wasteful hunting methods. And even though their scanty numbers and lack of technology greatly softened their impact on nature, in their modest way Amerindians too plundered the world around them (by killing eagles to make headdresses, for example).

So we can reach a state of paradisiacal purity only if we erase humanity from the picture entirely. However much human settlements may enhance nature in certain cases, they also inevitably cause it to deteriorate. Civilization has its costs. Roads smother the land they cover, books doom the trees they are made from. Not all this damage is permanent, of course, and much of it is in part desirable; yet, after all allowances have been made, an irreducible mass of evil remains. We are all sinners — in this, theology and ecology agree.

The Fall itself resulted from man's abortive endeavor to seize godhead for himself. In setting him over the plants and animals, God had already given him power and responsibility, but that was not enough. He wanted to know (i.e., be arbiter of) good and evil, to treat the earth as if he were its only Lord. This attempt to deny creaturehood has been the root of ecological havoc. Man the strip-miner, like man the "developer" and man the chemical farmer, makes money the criterion for whatever he does to the earth, because he thinks of himself as above and beyond it.

Dr. Heinegg is assistant professor of comparative literature at Queens College, City University of New York.