Saving a Healthy Earth for All God's Children: Key Roles of Clergy, Counselors, and Congregations

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I am pleased to write this paper for the festschrift honoring Professor Stanley A. Rock. Through the years he has made significant contributions to the strengthening of the teaching and practice of pastoral care and counseling. To honor him in this way is most appropriate!

Here is a personal story that highlights why the greening of pastoral theology, pastoral psychology, pastoral counseling, and congregations is so crucial in today's world. While lecturing and leading workshops in South Korea some years ago, I celebrated my birthday by climbing a beautiful mountain named Kyexyong-San with three Korean friends. In Korean culture Kyexyong is sacred. We hiked up the mountainside through the multicolored wildflowers of early June while being serenaded by a singing brook and the beautiful and, to me, unfamiliar bird songs on the warm breeze. After sack lunches at the summit, a detour off the trail during the descent enabled me to talk with the native healer (shaman), near a hidden cave on the mountainside. I enjoyed talking with him and his "clients" who had come to this sacred place seeking healing and good fortune. What they told me proved to be a fascinating learning experience concerning earth-based spirituality and indigenous healing. Later, as we neared the completion of our descent, we saw a large sign in Korean suspended over the trail. My climbing friends supplied this translation: LET US LOVE NATURE AS WE LOVE OUR CHILDREN.

My immediate thought was,"This is much-needed advice for all members of the human family, including myself!" Days later, my continuing reflection on the message of the sign brought me to a deeper awareness. In today's global environmental crisis, caring for nature lovingly actually is much more than a way of expressing our love, respect, and appreciation of God's marvelous creation. It is also one of the most vital ways to express our love and care for ourselves, our children, our families, parishioners, and clients. In fact, on our beautiful but vulnerable and threatened planet-home, there is no way for our love of people to be complete unless we also love the earth on which both the health and the survival of all living creatures depend. The best way to love the earth is to protect the health of the interdependent social and natural environments so that God's whole living creation can have an opportunity to live a healthy life—a life described in John 10:10 as "life in all its fullness."
As most concerned people know, our small, gray-green, spaceship planet is confronting an awesome threat unprecedented in its four-billion-year story of evolving life—the wonderful story of God's continuing creation. For the first time, one species—the human race—has the ability to threaten the health, perhaps even the survival, of all the species, including our own. In a recent World Watch Institute's State of the World report (published in many languages), the earth scientist who directs that esteemed institute clearly stated the challenge we confront: "Ours is the first generation faced with decisions that will determine whether the Earth our children inherit is habitable." In theological language, our generation is the first to hold literally the future of God's wonder-filled creation in its collective hands. Of thousands of human generations, ours is the first to overpopulate the planet, and the first to possess the enormous technical power to damage irreparably the biosphere—the amazing, interdependent network of living things that we are in and that is also in us.

Many competent earth scientists warn us that some of earth's self-healing, life-supporting systems may already have sustained irreversible destructive changes from humans. The biosphere, for example, has probably sustained a crippling of some of its remarkable biochemical immune system that has repaired human-inflicted damage over the millennia. This is comparable to another global health crisis—the pandemic outbreak of AIDS. The teeming millions of the twenty-first century will live increasingly in mega-cities immersed in a deadly, human-produced toxic stew that damages three essentials of life itself—air, water, and soil. It should not be surprising, therefore, that evidence from the specialty of environmental medicine suggests that pollutants may be among the previously unsuspected causes of many if not most health problems. What makes this crisis so urgent? International environmental scientists are now warning that the time for us humans to change our earth-damaging lifestyles and to reverse the population explosion, before irreversible catastrophic damage has been done, may be relatively short.

Thus, the global environmental crisis is the most dangerous health threat not only of this new century but of all centuries. Unless our human species learns to protect the physical environment so that healthy humans can live on a healthy earth, opportunities to solve the planet's countless other physical, mental, social, and political health problems will be lost. This confronts all congregations and all professionals—including theologians, pastoral psychologists, and counselors—with urgent ethical challenges that tower like a moral Mt. Everest over the lofty peaks of countless other serious problems in today's world. This global eco-justice crisis calls for "thinking outside the box" of many now-obsolete ways of thinking and acting. It calls for innovative earth-caring and justice-generating responses, especially by those in the people-caring vocations of teaching and ministry.

As never before in human history, the crisis also calls for a unifying earth ethic shared by persons in all cultures and faith groups. This ethic should be based on an earth-rooted understanding of human development and identity—an
understanding that, while common in nonindustrialized cultures, is unfortunately largely missing in high-tech, industrialized, urbanized, Western cultures. To contribute to the survival of a healthy planet, this interconnected, earthy dimension of our human identity must be recovered, understood in depth, and implemented in our personal and professional lives.

Over the last twenty years of teaching and clinical practice as a pastoral theologian and counselor, I have been experimenting with the use of an earth-based healing paradigm with clients, graduate students, and workshop participants. Gradually a new dimension has developed in my thinking and practice—an earth-rooted theory and methodology for doing spiritually centered counseling and teaching with a solid foundation of creation theology. This "ecotherapy" is "radical" in that word's root meaning: to go to the root of something. Ecotherapy goes to the earthy roots of our humanity. Many experiences, by others as well as myself, confirm that adding an ecotherapeutic-justice dimension to spiritually centered healing and growth work is a valid and valuable approach. My purpose here is to offer an overview of ecotherapy's basic concepts and methods. (A more comprehensive discussion can be found in my Ecotherapy: Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth. A discussion of how to use this model in congregations is available in Anchoring Your Well-Being: Christian Wholeness in a Fractured World. This book describes earth caring in the context of caring for the wellness of our whole selves—minds, bodies, spirits, relationships, work, play, and the earth.)

The ecotherapeutic-justice perspective is one of numerous efforts aimed at enlarging the horizons of pastoral healing and the circles of caring to make them more holistic and therefore more effective in the modern world. To do so also makes pastoral caregiving more biblical and systems-oriented than the individualistic approaches that dominated the early decades of the modern period in pastoral counseling after World War II. Contextualizing and de-privatizing caregiving by including care for the earth and for society makes pastoral caregiving prophetic caregiving. This approach is undergirded theoretically by the wisdom of the eighth-century B.C.E. Hebrew prophets and by the prophetic ministry of Jesus. Both saw the link between individual suffering and social injustice. Today the process of contextualizing must take a giant leap forward. The evolving models of human development, identity, and healing that have guided the practice of Western psychotherapies, including pastoral counseling, are no longer entirely adequate. To guide our methods, our cognitive maps must be redrawn by adding an ecological dimension of healing and growth, integrated with the social justice dimension.

The primary motif of this earth-grounded paradigm may be stated thusly: Our understanding of human identity can be truly whole only if humanity's fundamental rootedness in the earth is incorporated into our conceptuality and in the day-by-day practice of the healing and teaching arts. We pastoral theologians and counselors, together with all clergy, must enlarge our guiding paradigms to include healing persons by healing the earth, and vice versa. Doing
that will enable us to make our unique and much-needed contributions to help save a healthy earth on which all children of this and future generations can live healthy lives. Ecotherapy is an initial and imperfect contribution to this theory-generating process. Many traditional approaches to caregiving and healing have been individualistic, dualistic, and nonembodied. They are rooted in Western culture's Enlightenment, middle-class, medically oriented, and mainly male historical roots. The ecotherapy-justice paradigm is more holistic, systemic, and embodied than the earlier, now inadequate models that persist in many quarters. But, in light of the global ecojustice crisis, the self-transformation of our guiding model must occur with increased alacrity. It must become much more holistic in emphasizing the profound interdependence of the social and natural environments, as well as our God-given responsibility to be good stewards by caring for the whole earth's well-being.

We must literally bring our theories of human identity down to earth by bringing them down from the cognitive stratosphere of Enlightenment philosophy and psychology. If we fail to do this, our field increasingly will be an unrooted healing art to be enjoyed only by the world's privileged, affluent minority. It will have little connection with either the real social or natural worlds. In these interacting worlds, dysfunctional social, economic, ethical, political, and religious systems reinforce dysfunctional ecological systems to cause runaway proliferation and brokenness in both humans and their earth. Dedicated clergy, pastoral counselors, and health professionals will become increasingly elitist, and therefore increasingly frustrated with failed efforts to sustain long-term individual healing and growth in sick social and natural environments.

An Earth-Rooted, Systemic Theory of Development and Identity

Theories of human personality development and human identity must now be deepened dramatically. Western personality development and psychotherapeutic theories, beginning with Freud, were generated mainly by men in cities whose understanding was constricted by their urbanized-industrialized, Enlightenment mentality. Their theories, therefore, have yawning chasms between humans and the earth, between humans and other animals, and between our minds and our bodies. (Our bodies are our most obvious, though often denied, reminders of our basic earthiness.) In many pastoral theologies, a parallel chasm has persisted between natural and divine sources of sacred truths. Theories of human development and healing, including their religious and moral components, must now be grounded and greened by recognizing the earthy roots of all aspects of our lives—bodies, minds (conscious and unconscious), spirits, relationships, and social institutions. In theological terms, my mentor Paul Tillich's "ground of being" must be reinterpreted literally to include the recognition of the rootedness of our whole humanity and cultures in the earth.

Ecotherapy includes an individual ecopsychology, but in addition it has an earth-rooted understanding of all dimensions of our humanity and society.
Ecotherapy should not be understood as an attempt to retreat naively "back to nature" as an escape from urban life or an antitechnology protest. Neither of these is feasible nor desirable for most people in the world of the dawning twenty-first century. We must not demonize technology that obviously can be used for great good as well as great evil. Instead, we must use technology in creative ways that will make it, as well as our lifestyles and cities, healthier for humans and other living creatures. We must learn to humanize our cities by using our marvelous technologies in health-fostering rather than in health-diminishing ways.

Most theories of human development have virtually ignored the foundational way humans in forming their personal identities internalize early life relations with both the natural world and significant adults. Our identities are shaped at a deep, preverbal, body-mind-spirit level by our formative experiences in nature and by our parents' and culture's attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about the relationship of humans with nature. Furthermore, the quality of our ongoing relationship with nature is a significant factor in sustaining a firmly grounded identity, versus feeling "up in the air" in our sense of self. Social systemic theories must be complemented with the recognition that our identities are shaped, not only by the wider institutional and cultural environments of our childhood, but also by our bonding with or alienation from the natural environments in which we were raised. The developmental understanding that our self images are formed around our body images also must be extended by recognizing that body alienation, alienation from other people, alienation from intimate bonding with the earth, and alienation from the divine Creator are all aspects of the same disconnectedness.

Learning exercise: This theoretical discussion may be brought alive if you pause now and picture in your mind the home where you grew up as a little child. See it vividly in your memory-informed imagination. [The symbol means stop reading while you close your eyes and do what has been suggested.] Now, be the little girl or boy you were then. Walk around outside and then inside that home, re-experiencing the people and the plants, the animals and other natural surroundings. Become aware of how your combined relationship with nature and with significant people influenced the ambiance of the childhood in which your identity was shaped. Be aware of how intimate or distant your relationship with the natural world was then. If you can recall particularly frightening or enjoyable experiences in nature, take a few minutes to re-live these now, being aware of any old feelings that may still cling to those memories. Now, think about your present relationship with nature. Is it influenced in any way by your early imprinting in the natural world? Are the ways you think, feel, and function as a pastor, pastoral counselor, or church lay person influenced by your early experiences in nature? Now, if this was a meaningful exercise, you may want to write down notes about what you have learned, or, better still, tell these learnings to another person.
The Ecological Circle—Ecotherapy's Three Objectives

Both ecotherapy and ecoeducation (the application of ecological principles to teaching) have three major, interdependent objectives. Counselors and congregations should encourage people to move actively toward these, for the well-being of themselves, their families, and their communities. The first objective is to enable ourselves and our clients, students, or parishioners to open themselves more frequently and intentionally, and to experience the healing and wholeness derived from being nurtured by nature. This may mean spending more time and/or experiencing more awareness in their favorite outdoor places, in gardening, or in tending their favorite pet or houseplant. Being nurtured by nature often brings remarkable stress reduction, reframing of perspectives, and softening of the cutting agony of severe grief. For many people, becoming more open to nature involves healing the causes of ecoalienation including childhood traumas that make nature to be threatening and frightening in later life. Remedial healing of ecoalienation and the enhancement of ecobonding are often facilitated by encouraging people to open themselves to the positive reinforcement of being nurtured by nature in gradually increased increments.

The second objective is to increase awareness of the self-transcending, spiritual experiences that many people find when they relate intimately with the natural world. Assisting people to get out of themselves by escaping from narcissistic self-obsessing is a major goal of holistic counseling and other healing. Being spiritually open when one is in natural settings is an effective way to move toward this goal. This proposal goes beyond Abraham Maslow's conviction that what he called "peak experiences" are beneficial to mental health. Such spiritual experiences of self-transcendence in nature are beneficial to all aspects of human wellness. Religious people often spontaneously describe their peak experiences of intimacy with nature in religious terms such as "feeling high in nature" and "feeling uplifted in the power and beauty of the natural world." Whether the descriptions use religious or secular language seems to be irrelevant to determining the therapeutic and growth-enabling impact of peak experiences. Unfortunately, many people seek their "highs" by using drugs or activities obsessive in ways that easily become addictive.

The third object of ecotherapy and ecoeducation is to enable people to channel the enlivening energy they derive from being nurtured by nature and self-transcendence there into active involvement in nurturing nature by loving care-giving of the natural world around them. In practical terms, this means doing such things as cleaning up their lifestyles to be more earth friendly, healing the inner pollution that contributes to pollution of the environment, or working with others to protect the natural world with informed, community education and action.

These three interdependent objectives of ecotherapy and ecoeducation are depicted in what I call the ecological circle:
Implicit in these objectives are three discoveries: (1) People will not have the energy and motivation necessary to change their lifestyles radically enough to stop damaging the earth until they come to love it by being more connected and nurtured by it. (2) A satisfying spiritual awareness of the presence of God's loving Spirit in nature can deepen motivation and provide spiritual power to make constructive changes in people's relationship with nature. The two sides of the "ecological circle"—receiving care from the earth and giving care to the earth—are psychologically and spiritually interdependent dimensions of self-care and earth care. Either without the other is a broken circle. The empowering center of the circle is the earthy spirituality described above. Much of his life Jesus taught, healed, and found spiritual renewal outdoors. The images and stories he used in teaching the good news were often taken from God's creation—e.g., birds and flowers, a farmer sowing seeds, a woman baking bread. As creation mystics like Hildegard of Bingham and Francis of Assisi have known through the centuries, ecological spirituality is rooted in opening ourselves to being more nurtured by nature and experiencing the transcending presence of God there. Energy for avoiding eco-caring fatigue and burnout comes from both these sources. (3) When people join hands and reach out to help heal the earth and care for it lovingly, their healing and growth is shared and deepened. Serendipitously they nurture their continuing healing and well-being.

Healing Earth-Alienation—Cultivating Earth-Intimacy

Our deep need for intimate relating with the earth, according to eminent Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson, is probably genetically based. Our early ancestors who survived long enough to pass along their genes to us, lived for hundreds of thousands of years sensing that to survive with any degree of well-being, they must live in earth-respecting ways. Many of us today, in our urbanized, industrialized, high-tech, pressure-cooker society, have forgotten this time-tested survival wisdom embedded in our bodies, minds, and spirits. To recover that wisdom is a way of cultivating the spiritually centered well-being that is God's intention for both the whole human family and the biosphere.

Ecoalienation and ecobonding have two interdependent dimensions. One is peoples' inner sense of distancing or intimacy with nature. The other is the distancing or closeness, the fear or joy in their actual relating to the natural
world. A positive or negative reciprocity operates between the inner and the outer. The cluster of feelings, attitudes, and beliefs that constitute inner alienation or bonding has a determining influence on the way people either embrace or fear relating intimately to nature.

Alienation from earth bonding should be recognized as a diagnosable and treatable human problem that interacts dynamically with the other alienations that clergy counselors seek to heal and teachers seek to prevent. These are alienations from ourselves, other people, and God. Ecoalienation is an often ignored cause of many forms of psycho-social-physical pathology and violence. The pandemic of global violence against people and groups is rooted, in part, in violence against mother-father Earth. Counseling experience suggests that most women are better connected with their earthiness than are most men, perhaps because their body-mind-spirit organisms are equipped for the very down-to-earth miracle of birthing new human beings.

To assess the dynamics of issues that bring people to counseling or education, it is important to include at least minimal attention to how they relate to the natural world. The findings of such ecological diagnosis of ourselves or others provide the basis for planning what is needed to increase ecological wellness. The simplest way to gain clues is to ask questions such as: "Do you see any connections between your problems and the situation in our community, our world, or the environment?"; "How much time do you spend outdoors in a typical week, and how do you feel then?"; or "How do you feel about the way the environment is being treated in our community and world?" Unless questions like these are asked, most people assume that bringing up issues related to the social or natural environment is not appropriate in counseling sessions. (For an "Ecological Wellness Checkup," see chapter 7 in my *Ecotherapy.*)

**Applying Ecotherapeutic Insights and Methods**

Pastoral theologians, counselors, and teachers can enhance their effectiveness by integrating ecological insights and methods appropriately in many aspects of their work. Fortunately, the insights and skills in which caregivers are trained often can be applied to the ecological dimension of their work. For example, we know the healing power of telling crucial episodes of one's life story and having these really heard in a caring, accepting relationship. Encouraging people to tell something of their earth story—the account of their early and continuing relationship with nature—often illuminates their identity and provides clues about their problems in living. Connections between their formative and continuing relationship with nature, and who they are and how they function today, also may become evident as they tell their earth stories. Having one's earth story really heard by a caring friend, counselor, or teacher can have effects that are growth stimulating as well as healing.

Training in caregiving sharpens our ability to listen with nonjudgmental respect, caring, and empathy to human pain and tears. Now we must retrain our
ears also to hear what Australian environmental pioneer John Seed calls "the sounds of the earth crying," as these tears are expressed by clients and students. Skills in facilitating grief healing also can be readily adapted to help heal the anticipatory grief and anxiety suffered by many ecologically aware youth and adults today. This grief and anxiety are widespread, as are the tidal waves of collective grief and fear after the unprecedented tragedy of September 11, 2001.4

**Greening Our Ministries**

In implementing an ecologically informed approach in ministry as clergy, pastoral counselors, and congregational leaders it is important to start by greening and cleaning the settings where we work and play, worship and live, using ways such as these: Bring in numerous living plants to purify the air and increase the oxygen in them; Choose or design our work and living places with windows that open to let in fresh air and sunlight, and make it possible to see both trees and sky. Yale University surgeon Bernie Siegel cites evidence that patients heal faster after surgery if they can see the sky from their hospital beds. Businesses report that workers whose offices have windows with views of nature are more productive and have less absenteeism than those who do not.

We should work, play, and worship outdoors whenever feasible. An ecologically aware chaplain of a cancer ward tells of dramatic psychological and, in some cases, physical improvements in patients who were taken in wheelchairs outside the high-rise, "climate controlled" hospital with nonopening windows. Breathing fresh air and feeling the wind and sun on their faces were healing experiences for them. We also would do well to remove cleaning materials, office supplies, and carpets that release toxins into the air and thus contribute to the "sick building syndrome" that is so widespread in our high-tech society.

Furthermore, holistic ministry can take these steps to save a healthy planet: (1) serve foods at church gatherings and at home that are lower on the food chain and therefore healthier for both people and the environment, (2) Make difficult changes to make our lifestyle more earth-friendly, (3) Cooperate with others politically to green work settings, church, and community by, e.g., planting trees, creating more parks or green corridors, and making certain that environmental laws are enforced rigorously, (4) Work with others in the community to help eliminate the unfair impact of health-damaging pollution in areas where poor and powerless people often must live. (Ecological racism is epidemic in our country and among nations.) (5) Encourage effective family planning to move toward the goal of ensuring that all children will be wanted and cared for adequately and lovingly. (Unless the soaring population explosion in our country and the world is reversed, a healthful planet for all future generations of all species will not be possible.) (6) Include in the congregation's Holistic Well-being Action Group people whose background equips them to implement a congregational wellness checkup in all seven dimensions of people's lives, including their relationships with God's creation. This will help everyone walk in the footsteps of the Great
Physician who loved profoundly people, life, the Source of life, and God's creation.

Our Key Role: Healing Spiritual and Ethical Root Causes

At the roots of many earth-damaging attitudes and behaviors, intermingled with psychological, social, economic, and political causes, are crucial spiritual and ethical causes that contribute to damaging the health of people, their societies, and the earth. First, there is the people's alienation from a healing, energizing awareness of their connectedness with the biosphere—God's living, evolving creation. This alienation causes them to lack the vital ecological awareness that everything is connected with everything, including themselves. It prevents people from enjoying and celebrating their oneness with the larger scheme of things and cuts them off from the self-transcending spiritual peak experiences in nature described above. This spiritual vacuum spawns all the other ecospiritual pathologies.

Second, there is compulsive acquiring, consuming, and wasting material things, a severe spiritual and ethical sickness that produces massive health problems for both humans and their environment. Compulsive consumption becomes a psychological idol used in a vain effort to allay anxieties caused by, among other things, ethical conflicts and spiritual vacancies in their lives. This psychological idolatry that could be called "thing-a-holism" is the most widespread and destructive behavioral addiction in affluent societies like the United States. It blinds the consciences of the privileged to the way their affluence rides on the backs of poor people and of poverty stricken countries suffering in the global economy.

Third, there is alienation from what Carl Jung mislabeled the "feminine" side of human personality, and therefore from the forgiving, caring, nurturing, grace-full, "feminine" side of God. This alienation feeds violence against and subjugation of women as well as the deprecation of vital caring and relationship values associated with them in our sexist culture. In patriarchal religious institutions with male-dominated beliefs and leadership, both women and men often are deprived of the ancient, earthy spiritual wisdom of wise women. Men who are proenvironment in their attitudes and behavior often are put down by macho men as being unmasculine. Ecofeminist psychologists and theologians today have valuable insights to bring to earth caring and ecotherapy, and to caregiving in general.

Closely related, and among the most earth-destructive religious beliefs, are those that justify depriving oppressed people, including women, of equal opportunities to develop their full, God-given capacities. United Nations population studies in many developing countries show that a most effective way to reverse population explosions is to eliminate the injustices that prevent women from having more economic and educational opportunities. A closely related earth-damaging religious belief justifies not providing effective family planning education and technology to help people interrupt the way more than
six billion of us humans are destroying our habitat by multiplying our numbers exponentially. In all cultures women must be freed to make their full and often unique contributions to the health and salvation of both society and earth. They must be free to use their intelligence, creativity, and care for society’s well-being in all areas, rather than focusing only on birthing and raising numerous children. Nature-loving mothers play key roles in the crucial task of teaching earth caring and earth literacy to the next generation, but this vitally important educational role should also be widely shared by fathers.

Fourth, there is alienation (with serious ethical consequences) from our inner wildness that, if befriended, can be a major wellspring of creativity and zest in living. Our wildness belongs to the side of the human psyche that Freud called the id, holding that it is dangerous unless controlled by the ego. Jung described our wildness as an aspect of the rejected "shadow" side of our minds. Repression or rejection of wildness produces a paranoid demonizing of so-called "wild" animals, of wilderness places, and of such humans perceived to be strange or wild as the mentally ill, gays, disabled, and foreigners. Onto these rejected parts of nature and society are projected the disowned, hidden parts of ourselves, making them seem terribly dangerous. Repressed wildness energies build up to explosive levels until they are expressed in destructive ways that include violence against minorities, against beautiful wilderness places, and against other animal species. Helping people through counseling and education (including growth groups) to enjoy a friendly relationship with their inner wildness can enable them to enliven drab inner lives and enjoy wild places and animals. Instead of depriving themselves of the energy and excitement of befriending their inner wildness, they learn to channel that wildness in constructive expression by integrating it with their socially programmed self. The rich rewards of earthy, spiritual aliveness accrued from awakenings to the wildness of God’s creation have been reported by many eco-spiritual pioneers including such creation mystics as Francis and Claire of Assisi.

Fifth, there is "speciesism," the glorification of our human species’ superiority at the expense of all other species. Jung speculated that when we go very deeply into the collective unconscious, we encounter our early animal ancestors in the evolutionary story of creation. It may be that speciesism results from a defensive rejection of our deep kinship with other animals. Such species narcissism is often linked with the idolatrous worship of in-group beliefs and values. These psychological idolatries produce exclusivistic, tribal religious beliefs that support dangerous ethical tunnel vision. This is used to justify violence against the nonhuman 99 plus percent of the biosphere, and against any group perceived as being tainted by "differentness." This social-ecological pathology breeds narrow, chauvinistic "patriotism" that justifies the gigantic waste of the insane war system, a huge contributor to environmental destruction, resource depletion, and the loss of precious human lives around the planet.

Sixth, there is the hyperprivatized salvation seeking of belief systems that regard justice-making as alien rather than essential to genuine spirituality. Such
ideology lets believers ignore the fact that extreme wealth and extreme poverty, resulting from gross economic injustices, are overarching causes of environmental destruction in both poor and rich countries. This justice vacuum is dangerous because it inhibits efforts to correct the social and economic injustices that have an adverse impact on the health of millions of people as well as the earth itself. Like all responsible therapies, prophetic ecotherapy should include well-timed consciousness-raising (CR) aimed at motivating effective earth-caring and action for social change. With relatively affluent people, ecological CR can begin by considering the negative health consequences resulting from non-sustainable lifestyles characterized by greedy consumerism. Suppressed people should be empowered in their struggles to liberate themselves from the ethical-religious pathologies of society's sexism, racism, classism, economic and political oppression, grandiose nationalism, and religious superiority complexes. The basic survival loyalty of all people must become loyalty to the well-being of the whole human family and the entire biosphere.

Finally, there are the magical, rescue-fantasy beliefs that enable some religious groups to expect to be saved from the brink of the global nuclear or ecological abyss by God, or by the power of religious or political leaders who foolishly are endowed with god-like attributes. Such dangerous beliefs deaden human responsibility to "work like miners under a landslide" to help save a healthy and a healthful society and planet.

**Unique Contributions of Pastoral Counselors**

Pastoral counselors, and to some extent all clergy, are equipped to make unique contributions to diagnosing and treating the complex spiritual and ethical causes at the roots of the ecojustice crisis. We are trained in the psychosocial dynamics of religious beliefs and behavior (psychology of religion), as well as in the psychological sciences, psychotherapy, theology, and comparative religions. In our therapeutic practices we encounter a variety of toxic religious and ethical pathologies, including those that fuel humankind's disastrous failure to live in earth-friendly ways that reflect respect and care for God's creation. As professionals, we need to form innovative partnerships with secular therapists, teachers, and scientists. Only by interprofessional collaboration can each profession bring its special expertise to make an effective response to the unprecedented challenge of a planet in grave peril. No one professional discipline alone can deal with the complex ecological crisis that by definition cuts across all disciplines.

Because many pastoral counselors are trained to deal in a critical, healing way with philosophical and religious issues, we also can help to develop a new multi-cultural, unifying nature-humanity cosmology or worldview. This is urgently needed today to help build bridges of cooperative action across the many religious chasms that divide the human family. Resources for this task can be found in the earthy wisdom of many faith traditions, in ecofeminist theologies and native healing sources, and in the emerging findings of the earth sciences.
that complement much that is found in traditional religious sources. We in the West need to surrender enough of our cultural hubris to open ourselves to learning from the organic earth-wisdom in the psychologies and world views in non-Western, earth-bonded cultures like that of Native Americans. The ecojustice crisis challenges us to join hands with other people of good will, whatever our differences, to reclaim our shared human roots in and love for the earth. Upon the well-being of the earth, nurturing mother of all living creatures, all dimensions of healing and growth work ultimately depend.

Illustrative Cases

I offer here a series of case vignettes that demonstrates a few of the many ways ecotherapy can be used in our work with people.

A male, pastoral psychotherapist tells of a session with a twelve-year-old boy who was very depressed and resistant to talking while they were seated in the office. When they went outside at the suggestion of the lad, he not only began to talk but let his feelings come flowing out. This pattern continued in subsequent sessions.

A clinical social worker who often works with survivors of rape, incest, and domestic violence has found that suggesting to her clients that they walk by the ocean early in the morning often opens them to valuable therapeutic awareness. She reports that a couple who came for marriage therapy discovered that evening walks together not only provided regular times to communicate but also enabled them to share a regular experience of the quiet beauty of nature.

A pastoral therapist in an addiction treatment program tells of a male "hopeless repeater," who was deeply frustrated by not being able to connect with his higher Power in the twelve-step recovery program. When asked to recall when his higher Power felt near, the man remembered a time when he experienced the divine Spirit as very real. At the therapist's suggestion, he relived in his imagination an experience he had while sitting on a rock in the middle of a stream near his campsite in the mountains. As he did this, his face lighted up and he asked rhetorically, "Is it that easy?" He realized that whenever he chose, he could recover this spiritual uplift experience in nature.

A client who had grown up on a ranch was wrestling with fearful feelings about death and dying. In one session he spontaneously remembered a boyhood experience. Two horses had died, and his father chose to leave their bodies to be "recycled by the turkey vultures, bugs, and worms." Therapeutic work around this earthy image highlighted both the death-related and destructive side of nature and its warm, nurturing, life-awakening side. Being put in touch experientially with the rebirth that follows life and death in all the cycles of nature brought this man quiet healing.

Conclusion

I agree with Carl Sagan, the late great astrophysicist, peacemaker, and environmentalist, that mobilizing religious people and groups is extremely
important in the global environmental crisis. This is true, he said, because it is unlikely that the human family will make the difficult but essential radical lifestyle changes needed to save a viable earth unless religious passions and commitments to the environmental struggle are activated in millions of people worldwide. Ecologically aware leaders in the major faith traditions can be key catalysts in awakening such responses of informed spiritual passion.

A Kenyan doctoral student quoted to me this wise proverb from his culture: "Care for the earth. It was loaned to you by your children!" The Great Law of the Iroquois Nations of native Americans also points to our responsibility to future generations: In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations. This is the challenging ethical opportunity we all face as church leaders, as pastoral counselors, and as human beings. But today, living on a planet with thousands of tons of radioactive waste, we must consider the impact of our daily decisions not just on the next seven generations, but on the next seventy generations or more. That is, we must extend our stewardship of the earth farther than ever before.

Because the stakes are so high in all this, our field needs an explosion of tough-minded creative thinking, spirited dialogue, and critical testing from many theological perspectives concerning how we best can respond to these issues in our work, in our family lives, in our local communities, and in our world.

Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and poet Alice Walker grew up in a family of desperately poor African-American sharecroppers in Georgia's Jim Crow era. Her father never earned more than three hundred dollars a year, and her mother earned seventeen dollars a week as a maid. At age nine she had to work in the fields, cook the family's meals, and clean their little shack. Now in her late forties, Walker recalls, "Looking back, I can see that it was an intolerable situation for everyone. But then I was suicidal. I thought of jumping off the roof of the barn." Fortunately, like many psychologically wounded people, she spontaneously turned to the healing energies of nature: "I bonded with the earth, with the spirit of nature. I walked miles and miles through the forest and beside the streams. I felt accepted by nature. I saw myself as an earthling and that gave me peace." Concerning her earthy identity, Walker now declares: "In search of my mother's garden I found my own." May God give us all the wisdom to celebrate the fact that the earth is our only garden as well as God's sacred garden, and to learn that this garden needs our personal and collective care.

ENDNOTES

4 For a wide variety of ecotherapeutic methods see ibid., chapters 7-9.
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