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# THE GREEN FACE OF GOD: RECOVERING THE SPIRIT IN AN ECOCIDAL ERA

Mark I. Wallace

I enter a swamp as a sacred place,—a *sanctum sanctorum*.<sup>1</sup>

Spirit of God in the clear running water,  
blowing to greatness the trees on the hill,  
Spirit of God in the finger of morning,  
fill the earth, bring it to birth and blow where you will.<sup>2</sup>

In the beginning [the Spirit] hovers like a great mother bird over her egg, to hatch the living order of the world out of primordial chaos (Gen 1:2).<sup>3</sup>

At the dawn of a new millennium I believe we are witnessing a profound sea change in the spiritual sensibilities of our culture. Many people now sense that we live in the “age of the Spirit,” a time in which late twentieth century culture is undergoing a fundamental shift in its religious sensibilities. The medieval mystic Joachim of Fiore prophesied that humankind has lived through the periods of the Father and the Son and has now entered the age of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth mused at the end of his life that the Holy Spirit might well be the best point of departure for a theology that is right for the present situation.<sup>5</sup> The theorist Ihab Hassan locates the topic of the “Holy Spirit” along with such themes as “absence,” “difference,” and “indeterminacy” as distinctly postmodern emphases that challenge an earlier modernist paradigm.<sup>6</sup> Practitioners of nature-based religion, from native peoples to modern neopagans, claim that a reverence for the Spirit in all life-forms, from people and animals to trees and watersheds, is the most promising response to the threat of global ecological collapse at the end of the second millennium.<sup>7</sup> There appears to be an emerging sentiment that the topic of pneumatology is the right focus for an ecumenical theology that speaks to the spiritual hopes and desires of our age.

And yet amidst this renewed religious longing for the Spirit is a deeply felt theological and cultural pessimism. The origins of this malaise are many, but I am convinced that one of the root causes of our corporate anxiety—if not the chief cause—is a profound disquiet about the prospects of the planet for future generations. Few observers of the contemporary situation doubt that we face today an ecological crisis of unimaginable proportions. Whether through slow and steady environmental degradation or the sudden exchange of nuclear weapons, the specter of ecocide haunts all human and non-human life that share the resources of our planet home. Many of us have become numb to the various dimensions of the crisis: acid rain, ozone depletion, global warming, food-chain pesticides, soil erosion, mass consumption of nonrenewable fossil fuels, agricultural runoff, radioactive wastes, overpopulation, deforestation and desertification, carbon emissions, and loss of habitat.<sup>8</sup> In our time nature has been commodified and domesticated into a piece of real estate; it has become one more consumer item to be bought and sold in order to maximize profits. Once a source of terror and awe, nature no longer functions as wild and sacred space for the eruption of the sublime or the manifestation of transcendence. We have exchanged the power and mystery of the earth for the invisible hand of the marketplace and we are all the poorer for it.

These two phenomena—the yearning for the Spirit in religious life and the cultural anxiety over the environmental crisis—have led many theologians to a profound awareness of the deep interrelationship between God and the earth. Could it be that the most compelling response to the threat of ecocide lies in a recovery of the Holy Spirit as God's power of life-giving breath (*ruah*) who indwells and sustains all life-forms? Could it be that an earth-centered reenvisioning of the Spirit as the green face of God in the world is the best grounds for hope and renewal at a point in human history when our rapacious appetites seemed destined to destroy the earth?<sup>9</sup> In this essay my thesis is that hope for a renewed earth is best founded on belief in the Spirit as the divine force within the cosmos who continually works to sustain all forms of life. The Nicene (Constantinopolitan) Creed named the Spirit as “the Lord, the Giver of Life”; the purpose of this paper is to contemporize this ancient appellation by reenvisioning the Holy Spirit as God's invigorating presence within the society of all living beings. This life-centered model of the Spirit expands the understanding of the Spirit in terms of its *intratrinitarian* role (tradi-

tionally expressed as the bond of unity between the Father and the Son) to include the Spirit's *biocentric* role as the power of healing and renewal within all creation.

### ECOLOGICAL PNEUMATOLOGY

My methodological approach is rhetorical and exegetical. I do not attempt to prove the reality of the Spirit here but rather perform a hermeneutical retrieval of certain biblical tropes of the Spirit in a manner that is self-reflexively aware of my own commitments and passions. In this vein I seek to recover a variety of earth-centered images of the Spirit in the Bible for the purpose of addressing the environmental crisis we currently face, especially the urban environmental crisis. In conversation with current work in theology and environmental studies I offer a very particular theology of the Spirit that uses imaginative-symbolic discourses as well as argumentive-propositional analyses.<sup>10</sup>

I believe the Spirit is best understood not as a metaphysical entity but as a healing life-force which engenders human flourishing as well as the welfare of the planet. I label this approach "ecological pneumatology" in order to distinguish it from metaphysically-based notions of the Spirit characteristic of normative Western thought. I want this distinction to relocate understandings of the Spirit outside the philosophical question of being and squarely within a nature-based desire for the integrity and health of all life-forms—human and nonhuman. This model understands the Spirit not as divine intellect or the principle of consciousness but as a healing and subversive *life-form*—as water, light, dove, mother, fire, breath, and wind—on the basis of different biblical figurations of the Spirit in nature. Philosophers of consciousness (for example, G. W. F. Hegel) have bequeathed to contemporary theology a metaphysically-burdened idea of the Spirit that has little purchase on the role of the Spirit in creation as the power of unity between all natural kinds. The wager of this paper is that a rhetorical understanding of the Spirit (beyond the categories of being) can provide resources for confronting the environmental violence that marks our time.

The idea of the Spirit has existed in the borderlands of the academy since Hegel's masterful but flawed attempts to subsume all philosophical inquiry under this rubric. Recent studies of the nature of Spirit (or spirit) have reawakened Hegel's concern, but both conventional usage of and residual philosophical prejudice against spirit-

language have prevented an overturning of the traditional biases.<sup>11</sup> “In Western theology and philosophy the very concept of ‘spirit’ has for the most part been fraught with difficulties, conveying something vapid and dualistic, implying a separation of and a hierarchy between the mental and the physical, the soul and the body, the human and the natural, the male and the female, the holy and the profane.”<sup>12</sup> Discourse about spirit remains saddled with ethereal and pejorative connotations, conjuring images of ghosts, phantoms, and other incorporeal forces; of vaporous clouds and gaseous substances; of whatever is airy, immaterial, invisible, nonsubstantial, bloodless, bodiless, passionless, and unearthly.

A nature-based pneumatology challenges these conventional assumptions by figuring the Spirit as a living embodied being who works for healthy communities within our shared planet home. An ecological pneumatology that is right for the current crisis will recapture the disorienting freedom of the Spirit as a wild and insurgent natural force in the healing of human persons’ violence towards nature and one another. As the divine wind in Genesis, the dove in the Gospels, or the tongues of flame in Acts, the Spirit reveals herself in the biblical literatures as a *life-form* who labors to create, sustain, and renew humans and otherkind in solidarity with one another. An earth-based understanding of the Spirit will not domesticate the Spirit by locating her activity simply alongside nature; rather, nature itself in all its variety will be construed as the primary mode of being for the Spirit’s work in the world. In this framework, the earth’s waters and winds and birds and fires will not be regarded only as *symbols* of the Spirit but rather as sharing in her very *being* as the Spirit is enfleshed and embodied through natural organisms and processes.<sup>13</sup>

### THE GREEN FACE OF GOD

In historic Christian thought the work of the Holy Spirit has always been understood in terms of communion, mutuality, and the overcoming of divisions. The early Latin Fathers conceived of the Spirit in the bosom of the Trinity as the divine power that unites the Father and the Son in a bond of mutual love. Basil of Caesarea wrote that the Holy Spirit is the agent of inseparable union within the Trinity. The Spirit labors alongside the Creator and the Redeemer as the Perfector who strengthens and completes the divine work of salvation in the world.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Augustine analyzed the role of the Spirit in terms of the *vinculum caritatis* or the *vinculum Trinitatis*, the com-

munion that binds the other two members of the Godhead together in dynamic unity.<sup>15</sup> The Spirit enables the mutual indwelling of each divine person in the other. Moreover, as the bond of peace and love universal, the Spirit is not only the power of relation between the other members of the Trinity but also between God and the whole creation as well.

A vision of the Spirit as the *vinculum caritatis* elucidates the distinctive temporality of each member of the Godhead. The trinitarian actions of each divine person are embedded in particular temporal structures—present, past, and imperfect—that mediate God's passionate concern for the integrity of the earth and its biotic communities. In the Bible and church tradition, the first person of the Trinity is represented in the present tense as the God who actively nurtures and supports all members of the biosphere. The second member of the Godhead, the Son of God, is definitively figured in the aorist tense as having acted once-and-for-all to redeem the cosmic order from its bondage to sorrow through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Acting in the registry of the imperfect tense, the third member of the Trinity is portrayed as moving on the earth and sustaining all living things in solidarity with one another. Each member of the Trinity acts in its own time: the God who loves is the God who loved us to the point of death even as this selfsame God continually is loving toward us in the maintenance of the biosphere's health and vitality. God is the God of love whose love for all forms of life is both manifested in the cross and actively performed on a daily, ongoing basis as the Spirit invigorates the biota that constitute our common web of life.

From the perspective of biocentric trinitarian theology, nature is the enfleshment of God's sustaining love. As Trinity, God bodies forth divine compassion for all life-forms in the rhythms of the natural order. The divine Trinity's boundless passion for the integrity of all living things is revealed in God's preservation of the life-web that is our common biological inheritance. God as Trinity is set forth in the Father/Mother God's creation of the biosphere, the Son's reconciliation of all beings to himself, and the Spirit's gift of life to every member of the created order who relies on her beneficence for daily sustenance. As creator, God is manifested in the ebb and flow of the seasons whose plantings and harvests are a constant reminder of earth's original blessings. As redeemer, God is revealed in the complex interactions of organisms and the earth in mutual sustenance—an economy

of interdependence best symbolized by Jesus' reconciling work of the cross. And as sustainer, God shows Godself through breathing the breath of life into all members of the life-web, a living testimony to the Divine's compassion for all things.

God's presence in the living Christ through the Spirit's maintenance of the ecosphere is the basis for the greening of trinitarian theology. The then and there incarnation of God in Jesus is recapitulated in the here and now embodiment of the Spirit in the world which hearkens back to the originary Mother God's birthing of order out of chaos. This trinitarian enfleshment of God in nature represents a tripartite movement. The first move to an embodied doctrine of God is signaled by the inaugural hymn of Genesis where the Creator Spirit (*rûah*) breathes the world into existence and thereby enfleshes itself in the creation and maintenance of the natural order. The embodiment of the divine life in Jesus—an earth creature like Adam who is fashioned from the muck and mire of the soil—is the second move toward a nature-centered model of the Godhead. And the perichoretic union of Jesus in the Spirit—like Jesus, an earth being as well but now figured in the biblical tropes of water, dove, fire, and wind—represents the third move toward a biophilic notion of God. It is the move to embodiment—the procession of Godself into the biotic realm that sustains all life—that is the basis for unity within the Godhead. In perichoresis, God as Trinity subsists in interpersonal unity through incarnating itself in all things that swim, creep, crawl, run, fly, and grow upon the earth.

The understanding of the Spirit as a life-form intrinsically related to nature emphasizes a generally neglected model of the Spirit in the history of Western theology. In theory, the Spirit has always been defined as both the Spirit *of God* and the Spirit *of creation*. As the Spirit of God, the Spirit is the power of reciprocity between the first two persons of the Trinity, on the one hand, and the interior power of redemption within human beings, on the other. And as the Spirit of creation, the Spirit has been defined as the breath of God who indwells and sustains the cosmos. In practice, however, the Spirit has been almost exclusively understood as the Spirit of God; the stress has fallen on its roles as the source of consubstantiality within the Godhead and the divine agent of human salvation. The result is that the biocentric role of the Spirit as the power of life-giving breath within creation, including nonhuman as well as human creation, has been consistently downplayed.<sup>16</sup>

This long-standing deemphasis on the Spirit's ecological identity is remarkable given the abundance of imagery about the Spirit drawn from the natural world within the Bible. Indeed, the body of symbolism that is arguably most central to the scriptural portraiture of the Spirit is suffused with nature imagery. Consider the following tropes for the Spirit within the Bible: the *vivifying breath* that animates all living things (Gen 1:2, Ps 104:29-30), the *healing wind* that brings power and salvation to those it indwells (Judg 6:34, John 3:6, Acts 2:1-4), the *living water* that quickens and refreshes all who drink from its eternal springs (John 4:14, 7:37-38), the *purgative fire* that alternately judges evildoers and ignites the prophetic mission of the early church (Acts 2:1-4, Matt 3:11-12), and the *divine dove*, with an olive branch in its mouth, that brings peace and renewal to a broken and divided world (Gen 8:11, Matt 3:16, John 1:32).<sup>17</sup> These nature-based descriptions of the Spirit are the basis of my attempt to shift the theological focus back to the Spirit as the Spirit of creation. Such a focus neither denigrates nor ignores the normative understanding of the Spirit's other roles as the power of relationship between the Father and Son or as the agent of human sanctification within the history of salvation. Rather, this emphasis on the Spirit's cosmic identity as the divine breath who interanimates all other life-forms readdresses our attention to the Spirit's work in *all* realms of life—which includes, but is not limited to, the inner life of God and salvation-history. Part of the burden of this essay, then, is to shift the weight of theological emphasis away from understanding the Spirit either *theocentrically* or *anthropocentrically* toward an explicitly *biocentric* model of the Spirit in nature.

### THE WOUNDED SPIRIT

To reconceive the Spirit as the enfleshment of God's sustaining power in the biosphere is to emphasize the coinherence of the Spirit and the natural world. Whether manifesting herself as a living, breathing organism like a dove, or an inanimate life-form, such as wind or fire, the Spirit indwells nature as its interanimating force in order to lead all creation into a peaceable relationship with itself. Spirit and earth internally condition and permeate one another; both modes of being coinhere through and with one another without collapsing into undifferentiated sameness or equivalence. The reciprocal indwelling of Spirit and earth is neither an absorption of the one into the other nor a confusion of the two. By the same token, this mutual indwelling is



not an outward and transitory connection between the two realities but rather an internal and abiding union of the two in a common life together. Insofar as the Spirit abides in and with all living things, Spirit and earth are *inseparable* and yet at the same time *distinguishable*. Spirit and earth are internally indivisible because both modes of being are living realities with the common goal of sustaining other life-forms. But Spirit and earth also possess their own distinctive identities insofar as the Spirit is the unseen power who vivifies and sustains all living things while the earth is the visible agent of the life that pulsates throughout creation.<sup>18</sup>

Under the control of this dialectic, the earth is the body of the Spirit. Metaphorically speaking, God as Spirit corporealizes Godself through her interanimation of the biosphere. In breathing life into humankind and otherkind a fundamental transformation within Godself occurs: God is fully incarnated in the green fuse that drives all forms of life to their natural fruition in a carnival of praise to the Creator Spirit. As once God became human in the body of Jesus so continually God enfleshes Godself in the embodied reality of life on earth. Quintessentially, then, both Spirit and earth are life-givers: the Spirit ensouls the earth with the quickening breath of divine life and the earth enfleshes the Spirit as it offers spiritual and physical sustenance to all living things. The Spirit inhabits the earth as its invisible and life-giving breath (*rûah*), and the earth (*gaia*) is the outward manifestation, the body, as it were, of the Spirit's presence within, and maintenance of, all life-forms.<sup>19</sup>

This proposal for an ecological pneumatology of internal relatedness presents an extraordinary challenge to the traditional Aristotelian and early Christian doctrine of God as an unchangeable and self-subsistent being fundamentally unaffected by the creation God has spun into existence.<sup>20</sup> One intriguing but troubling implication of ecological pneumatology, therefore, is that it places the divine life at risk in a manner that an extrinsic doctrine of the Spirit vis-à-vis the earth does not. *The theological problem is that if Spirit and earth mutually indwell one another then it appears that God as Spirit is vulnerable to serious loss and trauma just insofar as the earth is abused and despoiled.* In an earth-centered model of the Spirit, God is a thoroughgoing incarnational reality who decides in freedom, and not by any internal necessity, to indwell all things. But in making this decision the Spirit places herself at risk by virtue of her coinherence with a continually degraded biosphere. God, then, is so internally related

to the universe that the specter of ecocide raises the risk of deicide: to wreak environmental havoc on the earth is to run the risk that we will do irreparable harm to the Love and Mystery we call God. The wager of this model is that while God and world are not identical to one another, their basic unity and common destiny raises the possibility that ongoing assaults against the earth's biotic communities may eventually result in permanent injury to the divine life itself.

Moltmann's *The Crucified God* (and the wealth of similar books it spawned on the topic of divine suffering) argues that God in Jesus suffers the godforsaken death of the cross.<sup>21</sup> In antitheopaschite terms, the cross does not signify the "death of God" but rather the death of Jesus as a terrifying event of loss and suffering within the inner life of Godself. The cross is not an instance of God dying but an event in Godself where the divine life takes into itself the death of the godless son of God crucified for the sins of the world. In the cross God now becomes radically discontinuous with Godself by taking up the crucified one. Moltmann maintains:

[W]hat happened on the cross was an event between God and God. It was a deep division in God himself, insofar as God abandoned God and contradicted himself, and at the same time a unity in God, insofar as God was at one with God and corresponded to himself. In that case one would have to put the formula in a paradoxical way: God died the death of the godless on the cross and yet did not die. God is dead and yet is not dead.<sup>22</sup>

In the cross God splits Godself by incorporating the godless death of Jesus into the inner life of the Godhead. In this rift caused by Jesus' death God now undergoes a permanent and fundamental change by becoming a willing victim of death itself.

As Jesus' death on the cross brought death and loss into Godself so the Spirit's suffering from persistent environmental trauma engenders chronic agony in the Godhead. From the perspective of ecological pneumatology, Moltmann's "crucified God" has a double valence: death enters the inner life of God through the cross of Jesus even as the prospect of ecological mass death enters the life of God through the Spirit's communion with a despoiled planet. Because this trauma deeply grieves the Spirit she pleads with God's people to nurture and protect the fragile bioregions we all inhabit. Paul writes that human arrogance causes the whole creation to groan in agony as it waits for deliverance; he continues that as creation sighs in pain the Spirit on

our behalf likewise groans in sounds too deep for words—interceding on our behalf that God's love for all creation will be consummated (Romans 8:18-39). In the midst of the current crisis the created order groans under the weight of humankind's habitual ecoviolence; in turn the Spirit intensely beseeches us to care for our planetary heritage. God as Spirit agonizes over the squalor we have caused and through her abiding earthly presence implores us to stop the violence before it is too late.

From this viewpoint, as the God who knows death through the cross of Jesus is the crucified God, so also is the Spirit who enfleshes divine presence in nature the wounded Spirit. Jesus' body was inscribed with the marks of human sin even as God's enfleshed presence—the earth body of the Spirit—is lacerated by continued assaults upon our planet home. Consider the sad parallels between the crucified Jesus and our debased planet: the lash marks of human sin cut into the body of the crucified God are now even more graphically displayed across the expanse of the whole planet as the body of the wounded Spirit bears the incisions of further abuse. God is the wounded Spirit even as God is the crucified Christ—as God suffered on a tree by taking onto Godself humankind's sin so God continually suffers the agony of death and loss by bringing into Godself the environmental squalor that humankind has wrought.

### THE SPIRIT IN THE KILLING FIELDS OF URBAN AMERICA

I have suggested that we refer to the Spirit in our time as the “wounded Spirit” who, like Christ, takes into herself the burden of human sin and the deep ecological damage this sin has wrought in the biosphere. But as Christ's wounds become the eucharistic blood that nourishes the believer so also does the Spirit's agony over damage to the earth become a source of hope for communities facing seemingly hopeless environmental destitution. The message of the cross is that senseless death is not foreign to God because it is through the cross that God lives in solidarity with all who suffer. The promise of new life that flows from the suffering God hanging from a tree is recapitulated in the ministry of the wounded Spirit whose solidarity with a broken world is a token of divine forbearance and love. Hope, then, for a restored earth in our time is theologically rooted in the belief in the Spirit's benevolent cohabitation with all of the damaged and forgotten members of the biosphere—human and nonhuman alike. The Spirit's abiding presence in a world wracked by human greed is a

constant reminder that God desires the welfare of all members of the life-web—indeed, that no population of life-forms is beyond the ken of divine love, no matter how serious, even permanent, the ecological damage is to these biotic communities. And yet a Spirit-centered and earth-centered basis for this hope is difficult to sustain on a planet scarred by savage violence. Such hope is difficult to sustain when one's bioregion is under daily assault by ravenous demonic forces that labor to destroy hope through the politics of despair. Such is the case in the bioregion where I live, in close proximity to the city of Chester, Pennsylvania, nearby my home and the college where I teach.

I remember well my first visit to the west end of the city of Chester a couple of years ago. Chester, a postindustrial city just outside Philadelphia, was known by me at the time as notorious for its chronic environmental problems, and I had traveled there to see first hand the nature of its difficulties. The first thing I noticed upon arriving in Chester was the smell: waves of noxious fumes enveloped me like the stench of rotting meat. Next I felt the bone-jarring rumble of giant eighteen-wheel trash trucks, dozens of trucks from all over the mid-atlantic and eastern seaboard, bearing down on the residential streets on which I was walking with tons of trash—trash which I knew contained everything from toxic chemicals and contaminated soil to sewage sludge and body parts. Then I remember looking to the horizon and seeing the destination of these terrible truck convoys: a line of giant chemical and waste processing plants belching putrid smoke—like Blake's dark Satanic Mills—tightly interspersed among the homes and churches and businesses of Chester residents. I was then and remain now overwhelmed by the bald injustice of siting these plants in a residential area. Since the time of this visit I have asked myself what is the role of an earth-centered faith in the Spirit—in short, what is the role of green spirituality—in resisting and combatting the injustice done to the people, and the wider biosphere, of Chester.

Many local economies in urban and rural America today are dependent upon the production and management of toxic wastes. In economically distressed communities the promise of a stabilized tax base, improved infrastructure, and jobs for underemployed residents is almost impossible to resist. The waste management industry offers an immediate quick-fix to chronic poverty and instability in declining cities and neighborhoods that can no longer attract government and private investment. The price for allowing the storage and treat-

ment of biohazardous materials in one's community may be long-term environmental problems. But people in the grip of poverty and joblessness have few options when their very survival, materially speaking, is contingent upon the construction of a trash incinerator or chemical dump in their neighborhood.

Corporate investors know a good thing when they see it. Waste management facilities cannot be sited where politically empowered middle- and upper-class residents will fight through the courts the establishment of such facilities. Close proximity to hazardous industries immediately depresses property values in residential areas where virtually no one wants to risk endangering his or her physical and economic well being by allowing such a liability to be built in their own backyard. And in those rare instances where such facilities have come on line in high-income areas the residents have the means and mobility to "vote with their feet" and move away from a high risk place of residence.<sup>23</sup>

Chester is an impoverished, predominantly African-American community in an almost all-white suburb, Delaware County. Its median family income is 45% lower than the rest of Delaware County; its poverty rate is 25%, more than three times the rate in the rest of Delaware County; and its unemployment rate is 30%. Chester has the highest infant mortality rate and the highest percentage of low-weight births in the state.<sup>24</sup> In the light of its alarmingly bad public health, Chester would appear to be the last place to build a constellation of hazardous facilities. Nevertheless, three waste and treatment plants recently have been built on a square-mile site surrounded by homes and parks in a low-income neighborhood in Chester. The facilities include the American Ref-Fuel trash-to-steam incinerator, the Delcora sewage-treatment plant, and the Thermal Pure Systems medical-waste autoclave. A fourth waste processing plant devoted to treating PCB contaminated soil has recently received a construction permit. The clustering of waste industries only a few yards from a large residential area has made worse the high rate of asthma and other respiratory and health problems in Chester; it has brought about an infestation of rodents, the impact of five-hundred trucks a day at all hours into the neighborhood, soot and dust covering even the insides of people's homes, and waves of noxious odors that have made life unbearable.<sup>25</sup> In a landmark health study of the environmental degradation of Chester, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found that lead poisoning is a significant health problem for the

majority of Chester children; that toxic air emissions have raised the specter of cancer to two-and-a-half times greater than the average risk for area residents; and that the fish in Chester waters are hopelessly contaminated with PCB's from current and previous industrial abuses.<sup>26</sup>

The EPA study has made public what many Chester residents have long known: the unequal dumping of municipal wastes in Chester has permanently undermined the health and well being of its population. Chester is a stunning example of environmental racism. 100% of all municipal solid waste in Delaware County is burned at the incinerator; 90% of all sewage is treated at the Delcora plant; and close to a hundred tons of hospital waste per day from a half-dozen nearby states is sterilized at the Thermal Pure plant.<sup>27</sup> As Jerome Balter, a Philadelphia environmental lawyer puts it, "When Delaware County passes an act that says all of the waste has to come to the city of Chester, that *is* environmental racism."<sup>28</sup> Or as Peter Kostmayer, former congressman and head of the EPA's midatlantic region says, high levels of pollution in Chester would "not have happened if this were Bryn Mawr, Haverford or Swarthmore [nearby well-to-do white suburbs]. I think we have to face the fact that the reason this happened is because this city is largely—though not all—African American, and a large number of its residents are people of low income."<sup>29</sup> *Chester has become a "local sacrifice zone" where the disproportionate pollution from its waste-industrial complex is tolerated because of the promise of economic revitalization.*<sup>30</sup> But the promise of dozens of jobs and major funds for the immediate areas around the existing toxics industries have never materialized. Indeed, of the \$20 million the incinerator pays to local governments in taxes only \$2 million goes to Chester while \$18 million goes to Delaware County.<sup>31</sup>

Chester is Delaware County's sacrifice zone. The surrounding middle-class, white neighborhoods would never allow for the systematic over-exposure of their citizens to such a toxics complex. The health and economic impact of siting even one of the facilities now housed in Chester would likely be regarded as too high a risk. But to build a whole cluster of such complexes in nearby Chester is another matter. Nevertheless, many in Chester have tried to fight back against this exercise in environmental apartheid. The Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living, led by community activist (or as she prefers, "reactivist") Zulene Mayfield, has used nonviolent resistance tactics—mass protests, monitoring of emissions levels, protracted

court actions, and so forth—to block the expansion of the complex. In opposition to the granting of a permit for operation for the fourth waste facility to be built in the area, the Soil Remediation plant, the former mayor of Chester, Barbara Bohannon-Sheppard, concluded her remarks at a public hearing with the following: “Chester should not and will not serve as a dumping ground. A dumping ground for what no other borough, no other township, or no other city will accept. Yes, Chester needs the taxes, Chester needs the jobs. But, Chester also needs to improve its image and not be a killing field.”<sup>32</sup> Hope is not lost in Chester. There is a growing awareness of the injustice being done to low-income, often minority communities that have suffered from the unequal distribution of environmental hazards in their neighborhoods. Bill Clinton has signed an executive order mandating all federal agencies to ensure the equitable location of polluting industries across race and economic lines.<sup>33</sup> And recently the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia ruled that the Chester Residents organization has the legal right to file a class action lawsuit against the Department of Environmental Protection charging that the DEP violated their civil rights by clustering a series of waste-processing facilities in their neighborhood.<sup>34</sup>

What role if any can green spirituality play in the struggle against environmental racism in areas such as Chester, Pennsylvania? What is the place of the wounded Spirit, the green face of God, in the struggle for environmental equity in neighborhoods that bear a disproportionate and unfair burden for society’s pollution? In response, it should first be noted that few people see it in their interests to express solidarity with disadvantaged communities that have suffered the brunt of unequal distribution of environmental risks. Many people have become inured to the gradual environmental degradation of their home and work environments and most likely consider the development of occasional toxic “sacrifice zones” and “killing fields” to be a tragic but necessary result of modern technological life and its attendant creature comforts. If everyone has the right to pursue his or her own material self-interests, and if some persons are better able to do this than others due in part to their family or national origin, socio-economic class, and so forth, then it follows that some disadvantaged groups will be marginalized in the human struggle for increased wealth, security, and power. Green spirituality challenges this self-centered assumption by affirming instead that all persons are fundamentally equal and that everyone has the right to family stabil-

ity and meaningful work in a healthy environment regardless of one's racial, cultural, economic, or sexual identity. *Green spirituality affirms the common interdependence of all persons with each other—in-deed, of all species with each other—as we all struggle to protect the integrity of the life-web that holds together our planet home.*<sup>35</sup> Insofar as the Spirit breathes into and sustains life for all members of the web, green religion testifies to the bond of unity that unites all God's children together on a sacred earth. As the participants of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit put it: "Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction."<sup>36</sup> Thus, earth-centered religion values the interconnections between all members of the biosphere in contradistinction to the egoistic ideal of maximizing self-interest.

## CONCLUSION

In the struggle against environmental injustice green spirituality can serve an important role: the inculcation of an empowering vision in which all forms of life subsist together in mutual interdependence through the agency of the Spirit. I believe this vision of a green earth infused by the wounded Spirit's love for all creation can sustain communities of resistance over the long haul. While this model cannot directly fund the material needs of antitoxics campaigns, it can fire the imagination and empower the will as members of embattled communities seek to end the inequitable dumping of hazards and toxins in their neighborhoods. The study and use of fact sheets and health reports alone is not enough to enable the struggle over the long term and in the face of overwhelming odds. By motivating all of the participants to better understand their interdependence on one another—to envision the common bond between rich and poor, cityfolk and suburbanites, anglos and people of color, humankind and otherkind—green religion provides the attitudinal resources necessary for enduring commitments to combatting environmental racism and injustice.

One of the many ironies of Christian faith is the belief that out of death comes life, from loss and suffering comes the possibility of hope and renewal. This irony is symbolized in the Creator's emptying of herself in creation so that all beings may enjoy fullness of life; in Jesus' crucifixion where the spilling of his life blood becomes the opportunity for all persons to experience the fullness of new life in



him; and in the Spirit's kenotic coinherence with the earth and concomitant willingness to endure our ecological violence so that we can be offered again and again the chance to change our habits and reenter the sorority of the earth and her Creator. Our rapacious habits daily wound afresh the Earth Spirit who breathes life into all things; and daily the Earth Spirit intercedes for us and protects us by allowing us to remain richly alive in spite of our behavior to the contrary. The Spirit in and through the body of the earth groans in travail over our addictions to ecoviolence. But in her wounds we have life because it is in the wounded Spirit that we see God's love overabundant and outpouring on our behalf. In her wounds we see God's refusal to remain aloof from creation—apathetic, unmoved, uncaring—just insofar as God decided to enflesh herself in all of the processes and life-forms that constitute life as we know it. We continue unabated in our ravaging of the earth body of the one who has given herself for us so that we might live. But to this point the Spirit has not withdrawn her sustaining presence from the planet—a reminder to us that God is a lover of all things bodily and earthly—and a call to a renewed passion on our part for nurturing and protecting the biosphere that is our common inheritance and common home.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*, ed. Robert Finch and John Elder (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 183.

<sup>2</sup>East African Medical Missionary Sisters, "Invocation," in *Earth Prayers: From Around the World, 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring the Earth*, ed. Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 177.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 134.

<sup>4</sup>See the analysis of Joachim's tripartite theology of history in George H. Tavard, "Apostolic Life and Church Reform," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 1-11.

<sup>5</sup>See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 494.

<sup>6</sup>Ihab Hassan, quoted in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 42-45.

<sup>7</sup>See Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (rev. ed.; Boston: Beacon, 1986).

<sup>8</sup>See Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989), and Jeremy Rifkin, *Biosphere Politics: A Cultural Odyssey from the Middle Ages to the New Age* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 71-91.

<sup>9</sup>My position is that an ecological recovery of the Spirit is the best theological model for changing the attitudes that lead to violence against the earth. Sallie McFague's recent work is similarly optimistic about a pneumatological approach to ecotheology. In her earlier work, however, McFague argued that the model of God as Spirit is not retrievable in an ecological age. She criticized traditional descriptions of the Spirit as ethereal and vacant, and concluded that Spirit-language is an inadequate resource for the task of earth-healing because such language is "amorphous, vague, and colorless." See *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 169-72. But in her recent writing McFague performs the very retrieval of pneumatology she had earlier claimed to be impossible: a revisioning of God as Spirit in order to thematize the immanent and dynamic presence of the divine life within all creation. See *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 141-50. For an appreciation and critique of McFague's ecotheology see my *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence, and the Renewal of Creation* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 139-44. Some of the material in this section of my paper is borrowed from *Fragments of the Spirit*.

<sup>10</sup>Martin Heidegger maintains that any mode of inquiry into "first principles" is liable to the charge of begging the question. He continues, however, that such fundamental inquiry is not viciously circular whenever the inquirer makes clear the provisional answers she always already presupposes in response to the questions at issue. For Heidegger the question of Being cannot be approached in a manner entirely divorced from the presumptions of the inquirer. Rather, the critical awareness of such presumptions productively enables fundamental inquiry in the first place. Philosophy, then, is a hermeneutical investigation into what the inquirer tacitly regards to be the structures of lived experience rather than a presuppositionless attempt to prove certain apodictic truths as incorrigibly certain. Heidegger's method makes theological sense as well. The problem of the Spirit in Christian thought is a "first principle" question akin to the interrogation of Being in hermeneutic philosophy. While the material focus of this inquiry is different (the reality of the Spirit in Christian witness should not be conflated with the question of Being in general philosophy) the structural agreement between both fields of inquiry is noteworthy: thinking toward first principles in hermeneutical disciplines should begin with one's tacit assumptions about such principles and avoid the temptation of commencing thought from a neutral starting-point. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (from the 7<sup>th</sup> German ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 24-35.

<sup>11</sup>A number of recent texts have initiated recoveries of discourse about "spirit," "the Spirit" or "the spiritual" in a variety of genres. In theology, see José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), D. Lyle Dabney, "What is the Task of Theology Now?" unpublished paper, 1995, Peter C. Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), Chung Hyun-Kyung, "Welcome the Spirit; Hear Her Cries: The Holy Spirit, Creation, and the Culture of Life," *Christianity and Crisis* 51 (1991): 220-23, Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), Mark McClain-Taylor, "Tracking Spirit: Theology as Cul-

tural Critique in America,” in *Changing Conversations: Religious Reflection and Cultural Analysis*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Sheila Greeve Davaney (New York: Routledge, 1996), Anselm Min, “Liberation, The Other, and Hegel in Recent Pneumatologies,” *Religious Studies Review* 22 (1996): 28-33, Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *God’s Spirit: Transforming a World in Crisis*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1995), Mark I. Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence, and the Renewal of Creation* (New York: Continuum, 1996), and Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); in philosophy, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kampf (New York: Routledge, 1994), and Steven G. Smith, *The Concept of the Spiritual: An Essay in First Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); and in cultural studies, see Joel Kovel, *History and Spirit: An Inquiry into the Philosophy of Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1991).

<sup>12</sup>Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit*, 276.

<sup>13</sup>A note on some issues of style. I have capitalized “Spirit” throughout in order to distinguish the divine personality (Holy Spirit or Spirit of the Lord) from other similar spirit-term significations (spirit of the times, public spirit, and so forth). I also use the female pronoun for the Spirit in order rhetorically to realize aspects of the transgressive freedom the Spirit promises, including the freedom to complicate and confuse her/his/its gender. This complication is not original to me: grammatically speaking, the term for Spirit in Hebrew is feminine (*rûah*), neuter in Greek (*pneuma*), and masculine in Latin (*spiritus*) and its derivative Romance languages. On the history of woman-identified language for the Spirit, see Gary Steven Kinkel, *Our Dear Mother the Spirit: An Investigation of Count Zinzendorf’s Theology and Praxis* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990), and Johnson, *She Who Is*, 128-31. Finally, I refer to divine, human, and nonhuman realities simultaneously as “life-forms” or “natural beings” in order to signal the value of construing all entities as interdependent members of a common biotic community.

<sup>14</sup>Basil of Caesarea *De Spiritu Sancto* 16.

<sup>15</sup>Augustine *De Trinitate* 15.

<sup>16</sup>There are notable exceptions to this general orientation (for example, Hyun-Kyung, Johnson, Moltmann, Müller-Fahrenholz, Welker), but most other contemporary theologies of the Holy Spirit generally deemphasize, or ignore altogether, the model of the Spirit as God’s mode of ecological renewal and healing within the cosmos. This shortcoming applies to a number of otherwise invaluable books in pneumatology, including Hendrikus Berkhof, *Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (2d ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1988), Yves M. J. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. Geoffrey Chapman, 3 vols. (New York: Seabury, 1983), George S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*

(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), Alasdair I. C. Heron, *The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Bible, the History of Christian Thought, and Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), G. W. H. Lampe, *God as Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), and John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972). As well, the writings on the Spirit in the important systematic theologies of authors such as Barth, Rahner, and Tillich reflect a similar lacuna, though this oversight is understandable given the general lack of cultural awareness of the ecocrisis at the time these authors were writing. (This anachronistic qualification applies to some of the other writers listed above as well.)

<sup>17</sup>My basic source for a life-centered portrait of the Spirit is the Bible. I use the scriptures to craft a postmetaphysical model of the Spirit in the struggle for ecological renewal. In *Fragments of the Spirit* I note, however, that since the Bible is in travail over its depictions of the Spirit—the Spirit is alternately portrayed as healing and life-giving, on the one hand, and as capricious and judgmental, on the other—a biblically-informed pneumatology must guard against an overly positive and one-sided view of the Spirit’s ministry of renewal and reconciliation. Throughout the scriptures the Spirit is generally figured as empowering persons and communities to live in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. But this is not the whole story when it comes to the Spirit in the Bible. In Judges, for example, the Spirit is presented as a vengeful power who inspires Israel’s wars against its aggressors (*pace* Welker, *God the Spirit*, 56 *passim*). And in Acts the Spirit is similarly portrayed as a terrifying judge who condemns to death two renegade disciples, Ananias and Sapphira, for their lying and disobedience. A well-rounded understanding of the Spirit for our time must account for the Spirit’s Janus-faced role as both healing, and exacerbating, the plight of victims within the stories of the Bible. Unfortunately, however, the virtual absence of discussion about this double-edged portrait of the Holy Spirit in the current literature is symptomatic, I fear, of a studied ignorance concerning the “dark side” of the Spirit within contemporary theology.

<sup>18</sup>My understanding of the union of Spirit and earth follows the dialectical logic of Christ’s two natures reciprocally indwelling one another—without confusion or division—formulated in the Creed of Chalcedon (451 C.E.). This logic became the basis of the scholastic doctrine of *perichoresis*, the mutual interrelationship of each member of the Trinity in one another. My suggestion is that we consider expanding the Chalcedonian formula classically applied to Christ’s two natures and the mutual, inner life of the three members of the Godhead to the wider economic relationship between the Spirit and the earth: even as the one person of Christ possesses two natures, divine and human, and the three persons of the Trinity are united in perichoretic harmony, so also do the two realities of Spirit and earth reciprocally interpenetrate one another and continually share one common life together. *Perichoresis*, therefore, not only explains the intrinsic relationships within the Godhead but also the broader economic relationship of God as Spirit to the whole biosphere.

<sup>19</sup>See Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Spirit of Life*, 274–89, and his model of the Spirit as the *vita vivificans* who sustains all creation, and James E. Lovelock’s *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) in defense of the model of the earth as a single living organism which supports all life-forms within

- a common ecosystem. Regarding the problems with Moltmann's nature theology, see my "The Wild Bird Who Heals: Recovering the Spirit in Nature," *Theology Today* 50 (1993): 13-28.
- <sup>20</sup>See McFague's case that traditional theology has been dominated by a dualistic and monarchical model of God in which God was seen as both in control of, and unrelated to, the world in a manner similar to a medieval king's relationship to his feudal possessions, and her corollary argument that an organic or bodily understanding of God is a much needed counterpoint to the regnant monarchical model, in *The Body of God*.
- <sup>21</sup>See *inter alia* Edward Farley, *Divine Empathy: A Theology of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), Joseph Halloran, *The Descent of God: Divine Suffering in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), and Grace Jantzen, *God's World and God's Body* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).
- <sup>22</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 244.
- <sup>23</sup>Bob Edwards, "With Liberty and Environmental Justice For All: The Emergence and Challenge of Grassroots Environmentalism in the United States," in *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism*, ed. Bron Raymond Taylor (Albany: SUNY, 1995), 37. On the challenge of urban environmentalism also see Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington: Island, 1993), and Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
- <sup>24</sup>I have drawn this information from "Chester Decides It's Tired of Being a Wasteland," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 26 (July, 1994); and Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living, "Environmental Justice Fact Sheet" and "Pollution and Industry in Chester's 'West End,'" pamphlets. I am grateful to Swarthmore College students Laird Hedlund and Ryan Peterson for making available to me their expertise and research concerning the Chester waste facilities.
- <sup>25</sup>Maryanne Voller, "Everyone Has Got to Breathe," *Audubon* (March-April, 1995).
- <sup>26</sup>Editorial, "Chester a Proving Ground," *Delaware County Daily Times* 8 (December, 1994), and "EPA Cites Lead in City Kids, Bad Fish," *Delaware County Daily Times* 2 (December, 1994).
- <sup>27</sup>Maryanne Voller, "Everyone Has Got to Breathe," *Audubon* (March-April, 1995), and Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living, "Environmental Justice Fact Sheet," pamphlet.
- <sup>28</sup>Voller, *Delaware County Times*, 1 August 1995.
- <sup>29</sup>Howard Goodman, "Politically Incorrect," *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, 11 February 1996.
- <sup>30</sup>The phrase belongs to Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology*, 163.
- <sup>31</sup>Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living, "Pollution and Industry in Chester's 'West End,'" pamphlet.
- <sup>32</sup>Barbara Bohannon-Sheppard, "Remarks" (Department of Environmental Resources Public Hearing, 17 February 1994, transcript).
- <sup>33</sup>Bill Clinton, Executive Order Number 12898, February 1995; cf. Gretchen Leslie and Colleen Casper, "Environmental Equity: An Issue for the 90s?" *Environmental Insight*, 1995.

<sup>34</sup>"Minority Areas Gain in Suit on Waste Sites," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 January 1998.

<sup>35</sup>For further development on this point see my "Environmental Justice, Neopreservationism, and Sustainable Spirituality," in *The Ecological Community: Environmental Challenges for Philosophy, Politics, and Morality*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1997), 292-310.

<sup>36</sup>The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, "Principles of Environmental Justice," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996), 634.