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Ecofeminism and Religion: Christianity and the Ethical Approach to the Environment

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ECOFEMINISM AND RELIGION: CHRISTIANITY AND THE ETHICAL APPROACH TO
THE ENVIRONMENT

By

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INTRODUCTION

The main concern of this work is locating and exploring a sufficiently deep foundation for ecocentric ethics. The environmental problems during the last hundred years have become one of the most urgent global issues the humankind has to face, prompting a plethora of proposals, practical as well as theoretical, from commentators of various schools and backgrounds, such as eco-scientists, eco-feminists, environmental philosophers, and theologians. A considerable part of the difficulties involved into finding ways to address these problems is the fact that the ethical system of the Western world, one of the largest contributors to the ecological crisis, is a moral philosophy and set of values developed for humans by humans. Even though the recent significant shift in that area allowed to address economic, gender, and racial inequalities, ethical thought has little experience in including and accounting for the relationships with the un-human species. The scale of the scope of the ethical questions rapidly grows from the relatively spatially isolated, homeland problems to the problem of global coexistence and survival.

As a grave global issue, the problem of relationship between humans and the environment needs a truly deep grounding, and some of the commentators agree that only religious ethics, rather than mechanistic ethics founded on pragmatism can satisfy such requirement. As the eco-feminists present the issue, its core is the schism between the self and the other, characteristic for the secular, particularly Western, mentality (See K.Warren, 1990, 125-46, 137; Val Plumwood, 1993, Chap.6). According to such view, the diverse incarnations of the problem of

domination and exploitation, no matter what area of social life such inequality affects, be it discrimination against women, other races, the afflicted, children or nature, are deeply rooted in our rationalistic, dichotomist mentality, which divides the world into "the self" and "the other", i.e., alienates what/who is perceived as the other from the sphere of the self. It is this schism that makes us perceive and often demonize nature as "the other".

Nature for eco-feminists is primarily our natural environment: "trees, water, animals" (Warren, 1997, 4), but it also continues into the functioning of the human body, biological as well as psychological (Merchant 1992, 191-92).

Many scholars who dedicated their thoughts to the spiritual aspect of the environmental crisis saw the resolution of the crisis arising from the ascendance of a new myth, "New Story", which would reconcile our modern rationalism with a revived spirituality. The attempts to move the environmental issues onto the grounds of religions, such as the Native American spiritualities, Zen Buddhism, Taoism, Islam are equally promising in introduction of the higher ideal for our relationship with the earth; however, in order to construct a spiritual environmental ethics, the nature of religions should be better understood. Considering a modern society, with its commitment to the separation of religion from public life, such understanding is paramount in order to make obligations to a certain religious tradition.

According to Thomas Tweed's definition, "religions are confluences, of organic-cultural flows, that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries" (Tweed, 2006, 54).

Religions are complex dynamic processes, lived and organically changed by humans through generations: they lose their value and meaning if they are prescribed.

Social/cultural historical context is multidimensional and organic; historical events and their mythological interpretations, allusions, cosmological cycles, life patterns, intimate and communal memory constitute a complex but united body with the dimensions of organic life, capable of changes, spontaneity as well as preservation of basic homeostasis and identity. In the life process of a religious tradition, the rationalistic choices and decisions are included on equal pars and among the wide range of experiences of the world, and religiously preconditioned ways of experiencing it in order to create meaning. Rationally invented "religions" do not possess the length and dimensions of life immanent to historic religious traditions, by nature being no more than logical construct, the one-dimensional attempt to create wholeness of human life through history. They cease to be religions when rationally invented and are expected not to change once set in motion/practice.

Drawing on an understanding of religions as cultural and social human activity that flows through time and space, with generations of dwellers and travelers, in this thesis paper I propose to ground the ethics of the environment in the Christian tradition that is inseparable from our long history, the history of the Western world. I argue against the recently and rationally constructed "Goddess spirituality", which seems to be produced in an attempt to quickly offer a solution by introducing a global divine figure whose function is to care exclusively about the afflicted, the earth and women on the first place. I see the "Goddess spirituality" as partial and divisive, albeit well intended.

Along the lines of the general response of the eco-feminists and environmental philosophers to the widely discussed seminal article by Lynn White Jr., *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, (1967, 1203-207), where he lays blame for the environmental crisis solely on Christian tradition, I approach his argument as insufficient as he draws his radical conclusion from his analysis of Genesis only. To show his analysis as limited and selective, I concentrate on other parts of the Bible, including the New Testament. As Judeo-Christian thought is ever-changing spatial and temporal flow, I limit my focus to the two specific time periods, the second one of which is seminal to the creation of the written Christian tradition.

The first period is when the most of the sapiential literature was written (around 970-931 BC); I also use some passages from *The Book of Job* and *Ecclesiasticus*, to explore the dynamics of Judaic vision of Wisdom of God, interpreted by some feminists as the legitimate Goddess of the Old Testament. Unlike the modern construct of the Goddess, she is balanced by her binary opposition, Yahweh, together with him comprising a holistic unity.

I was especially compelled to turn to Sophia-Wisdom as a mother of creation because of my roots and upbringing. Growing up in Russia when Christian Orthodox cultural heritage was intermingled with the notion of the political incorrectness of an interest in a religion, I felt drawn to icons of Sophia as the Mother of cosmos. Later after graduating from college I studied Russian religious philosophers, who interpreted Sophia as the "fourth Person" of the Trinity.

As the institutionalized strand of Christian religious thought at a certain historical point merges with the Western mentality of superiority and domination and used as

a colonizing force, I then recover one of the multiple strands of Christianity that ecologist Thomas Berry, interpreted as egalitarian and free from the corruptive, hyper-egotic tendencies of the Western mentality. This strand is limited to a very short period of time, from the religious movement's very beginning in the first century to the beginning of the fourth century AD, the time of writing of the Nicene creed, when the free tide of the Christian worldview becomes institutionalized, braced and enforced as "orthodox". As a historical strand of the Christian tradition, counting some two thousand years since its appearance in Western culture, it retains its cultural anchoring, so important as a feature of a true religious tradition, in contrast with attempts to advance an artifact such as the Goddess spirituality. (Being well aware that the strands of Judeo-Christian tradition I focus on had experienced significant influence of the Greek and later Roman philosophical and spiritual thought, and that the early Christianity of the Gospels co-existed and interpenetrate with the various schools of Gnosticism, I do not explore these influences due to the limits of this paper).

The analysis shows that religious thought of these historical periods of Judeo-Christian tradition, as a complex social and historical process, can provide a basis for the ecocentric environmental ethics by reconciling the schism between the self and the other and paying tribute to nature/creation. It can be seen that the spiritualization of the earth is one of the main focuses of the early Christian thinkers. Christian tradition possesses the spiritual outlook that can be laid in the foundation of the holistic, all-inclusive environmental ethics.

Based on such understanding of the religious tradition I propose a formulation of the Christian ecocentric ethics as a truly holistic, spiritualized ethics of the environment. I used Carolyn Merchant's ethical proposal as a point of reference, which I discuss in detail in the first chapter.

The theocentric-ecocentric ethics will be based on:

1. Reverence to the divine source of life as the archetypal source of love for the other, recognizing the numinous within all works of nature, including us, humans, valuing the other as the self.

2. Human active role in reversing the condition of the ecological crisis and creating conditions to sustain life and well-being of all natural entities, including humans, based on taking on personal responsibility for the destruction. An ecologically sound management consistent with the continued health of the earth community.

3. Equity between all the members of the earth's community, human and nonhuman, of live and 'non-living' nature, based on inherent worth.

4. Moral consideration for both humans and other species, as well as so-called 'non-living' nature, based on love and recognition that we all are parts of the diverse family in a relationship of brother/sisterhood, in deep interconnectedness/intercommunion with each other.

5. Promotion of vegetarianism as both a practical way to halt the violence and a way to change the mentality of egocentrism toward the awareness of feelings in animals.

6. Respect for cultural, religious diversity and biodiversity.

7. Inclusion of women, children, minorities, and non-human nature in the code of ethical accountability.

The accent is made on the numinosity of nature, thus making the ethics of the 'new story' the theocentric-ecocentric. By considering to emphasize the numinous aspect of the universe in the ethics of the environment, we return, according to T. Berry's requirement, the feeling qualities into the way to relate to the other, which brings out the sense of value and meaning.

As the central problem of inequity and drive to dominate is the split into the self and the other, in application to the self-aware beings it can be seen as the problem of the relationship between the ego and the deeper self; the connection between the self and the internalized divinity will then provide the experience of the numinous value dispersed through the external world.

The ability to self-reflect and actively create is instrumental in rethinking our relationships with nature, in order to save the earth from destruction and human race from self-destruction. The ego with its ability to reason and self-reflect can be seen as a tool of a global positive change of the earth's ecological conditions, not an indication of privilege and superiority.

The greater mode of relationship, human – nature mode cannot achieve its balance without solving inequities within human community, as the root of the violence and drive to dominate is the unresolved tension between the self and the other. Since such ethics are all-inclusive and based on multiple references in the New Testament, children must be included as equal and respected members of the

earth community alongside with women, afflicted, minorities, and non-human nature of all four kingdoms, mineral, plant, and animal, without discrimination.

The proposal of the principle of vegetarianism is based on the idea of human and animals' equality.

My primary area of concentration is the supposed limitation of the Christian tradition to solely human-God relationship that produces a spirituality that supposedly completely leaves out physicality, the earth, and the nature with all its "non-spiritual", non-human creatures. This theme in Christianity ultimately leads to the problem of the transcendence of the Judeo-Christian God. The second area is the place of woman in the Christian tradition, which is connected to the general problem of the valuation of the feminine in Judeo-Christian thought. The subject of national/racial equality and the ethical consideration toward afflicted and children are three other recurrent themes in this research due to their deep interconnectedness with the two primary themes on the philosophical, psychological, religious, and cultural levels, being derivative from the tradition's specific vision of the problem of "the self and the other".

In my research, I demonstrate that the early Christian thought addresses all these areas in a holistic, egalitarian way, where nature and the feminine are equal, *sine qua non* partners with the masculine and the spiritual, together presenting a picture of a spiritualized creation.

In the last part of my paper I contemplate a theoretical and practical application of my findings, bringing the Christian ecofeminists and ecotheologians, alongside

Catholic ecology movement representatives (the green sisters) into the discussion of what Christian ecocentric ethics would look like.

CHAPTER 1

SPIRITUALITY VERSUS RATIONALISM, CHRISTIANITY VERSUS GAIA

1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 of my thesis, I concentrate on laying out the problem of choice of the religious tradition within the framework of spiritual grounding of environmental ethics in the ecofeminist and environmental philosophical thought. First, I explore the problems of the spiritual branch of ecofeminism. I look into the characteristically modern Western pragmatism with which the choice of a religious tradition tends to be made in formulating spirituality into a base of eco-feminist ethics of the environment. I inquire into what features constitute the appeal of the figure of Gaia/Mother Goddess, constructed by some eco-feminists, such as Z.Budapest, Starhawk, C.Christ, and assess the negative impact of such religion in working out a truly ecocentric, holistic ethic. While in turning to true traditional religious practices of native spirituality we find considerable ethical resources to support holistic, ecocentric environmentalism, the rational concept of the all-female deity is not all-inclusive by definition and cannot constitute a lasting spiritual commitment due to lack of rootedness in any organic, lived-through spirituality. I show how in the eco-feminist quest for Gaia spirituality reason is being devalued, which makes an all-inclusive, holistic approach to environmental ethics impossible. Finally, I discuss why turning to Judeo-Christian religious thought in its early

formative stages would reveal its all-inclusive ethics, which would answer the eco-feminist quest for locating a spiritual base for the ecocentric environmental ethics.

2. SPIRITUALITY VERSUS RATIONALISM

Ecofeminism is often defined as a spiritual movement. "Ecofeminism is a movement with an implicit and sometimes explicit spiritual base", according to Starhawk. (Starhawk, 1989, 174). As such, it has an inherent inclination to perceive a uniting spiritual foundation beneath the diverse fabric of nature (as well as various aspects of human life), which introduces a dimension of the sacred, i.e., worthy of reverential respect far beyond the vision of nature as possessing purely instrumental value, into our relationship with the environment. Philosophical quest of formulating "an ethic of the environment, not a "management ethic"" (Regan, 1981, 19-34, 20) is concerned with locating a theory of, using a Kantian formulation, adopted by P. Taylor, "inherent worth" (Taylor, 1986, 197-218) for natural world as a whole and its non-human entities/components.

The existing Western ethical theory developed along the lines of binary mentality, as the "ethics by us for us" based on alienation and exploitation of "the other". As it was recognized by many commentators, the underlying cause of the mentality of domination over nature is our Western, one-sided perception of nature as the ultimate other.

The vision of such eco-feminists as Karen Warren and Chaia Heller, who find ways to non-violently relate to the other as the other, (Heller, 1993, 233; K.Warren, 1990, 137) does seem to appease the problem of schism into the self and the other, but is not sufficient to heal it.

With the recent tendency in Western philosophy to question the legitimacy of the age-long dictatorship of reason and reintroduction of feelings, senses and intuition as important functions of world-perception, it became possible to see over the boundary that used to isolate us from animals, whose reasoning abilities are quite different than these of humans, but who are our equals when it comes to feelings, senses and intuition, which created a wave of striving for a bio-centric ecology and animal rights ethics. The underpinnings of such ethics is to find some characteristics in "the other" that make it like "us", in order to be covered by the originally anthropocentric ethics. Such approach, too, does not address the underlying cause of the environmental problems. The ecocentric ethics, due to their holistic, all-inclusive scope of moral standing and eliminating the emphasis on humans in order to establish the egalitarian interrelationships is equipped to heal the schism (Callicott 1999, 192). The founder of the ecocentric ethics, Aldo Leopold explains that it "enlarges the boundaries of the [human] community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land" (Leopold, 1966, 239). Ecocentrism emphasizes the importance of the community, and, ultimately, of the earth as a living system and as such also a subject of the ethical concern.

Ecocentrism rests on the notion of harmony in diversity, the global interdependency of all members of the Earth community, its stability. Such orderly

interdependency results in an integral system that is capable of self-regulation, maintaining homeostasis, readjusting, responding to outer stimuli, regenerating itself. Ecocentrism maintains that unguarded invasion and destruction of any given element of the ecosystem is fraught with global destruction of all other life forms. The ecocentric ethics claim "that the biotic mechanism is so complex that its working may never be fully understood, thus undercutting the possibility of its total successful domination and control by humans". (Devall, Sessions, 1985, 86)

The ecocentric approach is founded on premises that all parts of the ecosystem, living or "non-living" nature has such value, or, using the more "human-independent" term, "inherent worth".

However, the ecocentric environmental model has difficulties in ethically supporting the inherent worth and equality of entities that happened to be below animals on the evolutionary ladder (See Callicott, 1999, 14). Inherent worth, associated with the "good of its own" (Taylor, 2001, 27), applied to the plant kingdom and "non-living" nature is not easily embraced, as plants and rocks are not said, scientifically, to have any perceptive qualities (except, arguably, for primitive sensory perception in plants), which often brings the ethics that ascribe the "good of its own" to the mineral kingdom under fire (Thompson, 1990, 147-160).

In such context, a turn to spiritualizing the natural environment, both its living and "non-living" components, advocated by eco-feminists, can prove extremely fruitful in developing an eco-theory that assesses an inherent worth to nature as a whole and makes such theory "come alive" in people's hearts and minds, so it makes sense emotionally and practically (Jenkins, 2008, 18) in developing an

appreciation for the environment as a complex living communal body of interconnected life-forms, in the spirit of the original environmental thought as ecocentric. Spiritual perspective inherent in religious vision, even though more explicit in some traditions than in others, naturally provides that inclusion, since it shows all existing entities in their unity, no matter how diverse, as creation, brought forth by a mutual "parent", a Divinity.

What is not evident for a scientific point of view can be allocated as a (religious) truth if by truth we understand ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences, as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system (Tweed, 2006, 17).

There seems to be four options in locating a form of spirituality that would ground ecocentrism. The first option is our Western religious tradition, Christianity. The problem is that the present, contemporary Western religious tradition, Christianity is in many ways wedded to rationalistic, divisive tendencies of mechanistic, material worldview. Meanwhile, spiritual perspective is a distinct outlook or attitude, and, as inclusive as it is, requires a decisive departure from a worldview based preeminently on reason, which means a necessity of being submerged, for a time, in the realm of the unknown. Reason, as a superstructure and extension of the survival instinct, is hardwired into the very being of humans, and a perspective of exploring the world without feeding it through the rational outlook threatens the ego with dissociation, perceived as total destruction of our identity.

There cannot be a compromise between a mechanistic/material and spiritual perspective. In turning to its historical roots, Christian spirituality in a Western

society requires a *metanoia*, as Rosemary Radford Ruether asserts; assessing the problem of a holistic focus in the environmental ethics, she writes: "This is not simply a task of intellectual understanding, but of *metanoia* in the full sense of the word: of conversion of our spirit and culture" (Ruether, 1992, 86). The Greek word *metanoia*, which literally means "a change of mind" (Taylor, 1991, 137), in such context points to its spiritual interpretation, as used in the text of the New Testament in connection with transition from blind idolatry/physicality into a spiritual enlightenment (Matt.3:2) and comes to signify a deep transformation of mentality, which requires a wide recognition and overcoming of mental clichés on societal as well as personal level.

The second option is spiritual traditions other than Christian, equally promising in their offer to become a foundation of the ecocentric ethics. However, there is a possibility of a certain worry that such religious traditions could be approached without cultural embeddedness and internalization, viewed as exotic and thus more exciting substitutes for our historical Christian ties.

The third option is the invented, bricolage spirituality. If neither of these two options seems applicable in providing the spiritual foundation for the all-inclusive ethical system, many eco-feminists turn to creation of a "new spirituality" or a new religion, usually described as Goddess spirituality.

There seem to exist, among the eco-feminists' spiritual proposals, the fourth option, of spirituality as "just spirituality". (Gaard, 1993, 309) It seems to stem from a romanticized idea of spirituality that is considered present as an elevated, morally perfected state of mind simply by admitting a need of such spirituality, without any

outer form to fixate it, such as the forms that crystallized over millennia to contain spiritualities of existing cultures.

The problems with all these options seem to stem from the same source: our Western hyper-individualistic tendency to view reason as an intrinsic part of our identity and having difficulties with reassessing it as an impersonal, collective, historical civilizational tool. Such rationalistic way of adopting one or another religion stand out as far removed from spirituality itself. True religiosity, the one that produces real, serious, life-long commitment and decisively direct moral choices stems from deeply historically rooted communal and intimately personal experiences and thoughts lived by generations of interconnected but unique personalities, flowing together to form unique features of a religious tradition. Religious beliefs as the revelatory extensions of the archetypal nature of the field of the irrational cannot be properly adopted as guiding principals of the environmental ethics without mentally and psychologically growing into such belief, without developing understanding of the roots of a certain spirituality, based on deep feeling of cultural and intimate connection to its core. Turning to a certain spiritual tradition must be historically, culturally, and intimately grounded rather than randomly picked and worn on one's sleeve.

In the words of Thomas Berry, only truly religious forces within human mind can move human consciousness at the depth needed and can sustain the effort that will be required over the long period of time during which adjustment must be made" (Berry 2009, 11).

It is true that, for the Western culture, a turn to spirituality has a distinctly rational component, it is facilitated by knowledge and understanding, considering that intellect is at the very base of the Western mentality. We do need to understand, for example, why Christian religious form of self-expression matters in order to have a meaningful personal religious experience, to become Christians. Only such experience is the proof of the truth of the religious dogma, if by truth we understand some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system (Putnam in Tweed, 2006, 17). However, tapping into the depths of the immediate, intuitive truths of inner life is possible, for people of Western mentality, predominantly through understanding of the logic behind religious dogmas and/or rites and ritual behaviors. The importance of seeing the role of knowledge/understanding of religious dogmas as no more and no less than the triggers of the deep inner personal experience as the only way to assert their value cannot be overemphasized.

The eco-feminists such as Karen Warren (who incidentally denies any moral validity to caring for the oppressor), who wish to distance themselves from rationalism/male compound as oppressive, sometimes tend to overlook the validity of rational thinking. Reason was acquired, through the course of human history, in perpetual battle against elements (i.e., to some certain extent, against nature; with the entropy engrained in nature), within themselves, and is, maybe, not the core, but a signature ability of humanity. The precious, initially fragile reward for the hardship, rational thinking, is a fruit and an unalienable part of civilization and

human culture, a priceless and refined instrument to assimilate the unknown, which always was one of the forces that shaped history (Cuomo, 2002, 9).

A feminist Judy Grahn thus celebrates historic achievement of rationality: "Our originators could not have stepped across the Abyss without simultaneously finding a way to hold the first few ideas in place, since they disappear in the absence of culture. Neither instinct nor the central nervous system stores such imagery. It has to be externalized, and it is fragile. It has to be taught, it has to be remembered. This required techniques resembling metaphor but much more extreme; the metaphor somehow had to be actualized, acted out in the physical" (Grahn, 1993, 19-20).

Even though the problem of locating a spiritual theoretic base to ground the ecocentric ethics is only a few decades old, the ecocentric ethical vision being a new way to see the field of ethics, a variety of eco-feminist writers elaborated on the offer in order to sanctify the eco-feminist thought, unite the movement and anchor eco-ethics. However, as it seems that so far, the problem of internalization of spiritual tradition was not acknowledged.

In the course of this research I look into the problem of the Christian tradition versus Gaia/Mother Goddess spirituality as the competing spiritual proposals for the foundation for the ecocentric ethics. I focus primarily on the Christian environmental ethical ideas of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Carolyn Merchant, J.Baird Callicott, and Thomas Berry as these scholars made arguably the most significant contribution to the field. The idea of looking to Christian tradition as the spiritual foundation of the ecocentric ethics was sharply disputed by an early seminal environmental work of Lynn White Jr, "The Historical Roots of our

Ecological Crisis"(1967, 1203-07). In it, White profiles the Christian religion as being primarily responsible for the environmental crisis (Hay, 2002, 27). White's argument is based on his reading of Genesis, which he interprets as a source of mentality of Western arrogant individualism, hyper-individualism and philosophy of dominance. He concedes that the passage that 'man' is made in God's image means that humans share "in God's transcendence of nature" (White, 1967, 1205). Nature in Genesis is given to man's disposal as he pleases, according to White, pre-dating the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century, or the "Industrial Revolution" of the 18th century, where from the mentality of domination is usually traced (Hay 2002, 101).

However, his analysis of Christianity is limited to Genesis, particularly to Genesis 1 and does not consider the rest of the Bible, which limits the validity of his conclusion. White's interpretation is concerned with the social aspects of the Scripture. The Bible, however, as any holy book of a religious tradition, has multiple cultural strata allowing for multitude of interpretations, and the socio-historical one does not seem sufficient a reason to condemn the entire tradition.

Merchant agrees with the arguments regarding White that a "more complex scenario was needed that included capitalism, industrialization, population growth, and property ownership" and that "rise of science and technology contributed to the ability of humanity to dominate nature and to the idea that mechanistic science promoted the separation of humans from nature" (Merchant 2003, 5). Rosemary Radford Ruether also sees White's argument as simplistic attempt to interpret the Bible (Dalton, Simmons, 2010, 47) F.B. Welbourn sums up this line of argument

claiming that "it is difficult to give so much primacy to the causal function of ideas" (in Hay 2002, 103). Callicott agrees: "though certainly ideas influence behavior, obviously they do not determine it" (Callicott, 1990, 65-90).

Berry seems to concur with White: to him, the root of ecological problems is itself largely mythic, and so the resolution of the crisis will naturally stem from the ascendance of a new myth, "New Story" (Berry, 2009, 82). Berry offers a vision where Christianity is reinterpreted to reconcile with science in creating a New Story within the tenets of the Christian tradition: "at the present time we are in between stories. Since our traditional creation story no longer carries meaning for many people, we need another story that will educate, heal, guide, and discipline us" (See the interview with T.Berry in Ryley, 1998, 239). It would unite reason and faith, science and religion, philosophical musings and the voice of the heart; it would revise human relationships with the earth, reevaluate human place within the natural world, and ascribe an inherent worth to the non-human life forms and 'non-living' nature. Thus, to Berry, the answers to ecological problems will come largely from within religion, because ecological problems arise from particular religious world-views, which are themselves constructed of particular myths. However, Berry's "new story" seems to parallel the holistic worldview that can be found in the early strand of the historical Christianity, as we will see in the next chapter. Berry himself believed that fundamental elements of Christian tradition can be reinterpreted to create a foundation for this new story, and are not at odds with it. All of these commentators view Christian tradition fit to be the spiritual foundation for the new, inclusive environmental ethics; nevertheless, their approach to

Christian tradition often has inorganic, rigid character of a pragmatic choice rather than the feeling of inner historical immersion and congruency with the tradition.

Lynn White Jr.'s radical approach to the role of the Christian tradition was extremely influential. Beyond generating a large amount of criticism it helped, in a roundabout way, it started a positive, constructive philosophic discussion that shaped eco-feminist as well as non-feminist eco-ethicists' determination to look into Christian spirituality to ground environmental ethics and cement the movement.

Merchant's early vision of religious ecofeminism as "celebrating the relationship between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals centered on goddess worship, the moon, animals and the female reproductive system" (C. Merchant, 1992, 191) is predominantly the situation of a bricolage spirituality. Her approach is to skim historical religious traditions in search of utilizing their common elements in her construct of the Goddess spirituality. She states that "many cultural eco-feminists celebrate an era in prehistory when nature was symbolized by pregnant female figures, trees, butterflies, and snakes and in which women were held in high esteem as bringers forth of life" (C. Merchant, 1992, 191). The proposal is a religion based on our limited knowledge of matriarchal/matrifocal societies, whose existence was recently questioned (Tilley 1995, 30), but is not an attempt to reconstruct a specific tradition. It is rather a mix of such data that disregards the religions' historical embeddedness and delimitations than a single tradition. Without deep analysis and understanding, on many interpretational levels, the cultural associations of such images as trees (symbolism of the Tree of life), butterfly (symbolism of death and resurrection, in Ancient Greece), snake (the

emotional power of the pre-rational inner life), celebrating the relationship between women and nature lacks depth and grounding proper to a religious mentality and stands out as "prescriptions of spirituality". It is not a specific single religious tradition and not even a reconstruction, but a nostalgic/sentimental but nevertheless rational construct of an abstract "Mother-Goddess".

Merchant's way to solving the problem of cultural cliché of seeing women and nature as inferior to males lays in "goddess worship and rituals, lectures, concerts, art exhibits, street and theater productions, and direct political action" (Merchant 2012, 202), which consists in reviving and reinforcing belief in the Mother Goddess. The religious *metanoia* is thought of being provided by propaganda. The construction of the deity and enactment of her rituals are based on a purely logical connection of societal esteem for women, using nature images in ritual symbolism and worshipping to the Mother Earth. If the lack of understanding of the rituals, symbols and myths of the Mother Goddess is taken to provide the required, in religious practices, sense of mystery, it is not profound enough to make such worshipping enterprise meaningful to become a lasting commitment.

Merchant later opts for the Christian tradition and becomes more engaged with working out the spiritualized all-inclusive ethics. Her focus on Christian tradition as a spiritual background intrinsic to Western culture provides certain keys to understanding Christian symbolic narrative, but does not deviate from the idea of reintroducing it as a spiritual base of ecofeminism as an outer, hand-picked and rationally institutionalized external knowledge. She seems to utilize Christianity as a western spiritual "theory" useful in the ecological revolution, bypassing the *Homo*

emotionalis. Being religious means being immersed into a cultural historical tradition that is constituted of human lives, is lived by people's actions, thoughts, beliefs, memories, reflections, experiences and emotions. The multi-layered perception of life, imbedded in a religious tradition, is intimately reflected in the emotionally charged feeling of belonging to a tradition. Rational understanding of the tradition plays its part, but cannot be accounted for the wholeness of a living religious faith. Western emphasis of the rational in humankind often leaves out the *Homo emotionalis*, the emotional compound within *Homo sapiens* that makes humans unique and human relationship, such as implied within a religious tradition, intimate and deeply devoted.

After investigation into the first two chapters of Genesis, Merchant follows the development of two different Christian stories, that of the Stewardship and that of Domination, which (both) she rejects as anthropocentric/male-centered, and, therefore, unsuitable for "elevating and liberating women and nature" (Merchant, 2012, 202.) and instead constructs the Christianity of Partnership. She defines Partnership as the ethics that "makes visible the connections between people and the environment in an effort to find new cultural and economic forms that fulfill vital needs, provide security, and enhance the quality of life without degrading the local or global environment" (Merchant 2003, 228).

She offers five precepts for a human community in a sustainable partnership with a nonhuman community:

1. Equity between the human and nonhuman communities.
2. Moral consideration for both humans and other species.

3. Respect for both cultural diversity and biodiversity.
4. Inclusion of women, minorities, and non-human nature in the code of ethical accountability.
5. An ecologically sound management consistent with the continued health of both the human and the non-human communities (Merchant 2003, 224).

The model is all-inclusive, ecocentric. Merchant understands the importance of egalitarianism within the human community as the matrix of the relationship within the larger ethical system than includes also the non-human world. She includes equity of genders as well as racial and cultural equity, which seems to include equity of religions and religious tolerance, providing for the truly spiritually inclusive ethics, modeled on the archetypal egalitarian relationship within the global community before the Fall. The natural world is included on the equal rights with the human world.

However, Merchant's formulation of the egalitarian human community does not articulate the inclusion of the afflicted and children.

The second concern with Merchant's model is that the interaction between humans and nature is founded in each side's localized interests; nature is envisioned as an opponent placed at the other side of the table of negotiations, across from humans (Merchant 2003, 228-231).

Merchant's proposal of seeing nature as a partner at the table is a picture of negotiation (Merchant, 2003, 228-229); while it advances the notion of hearing the voice of nature, also presents a notion of separation: the picture of the table of negotiation is far-removed from the all-inclusive community vision as the basis of

the ecocentric ethics, developed by their founder, A. Leopold. Humans and nature are not integrated in this vision; there is no overcoming the schism of the self and the other. Christian Partnership with all its merits of an ethics of equality of all live and non-living parts of creation is a rationed-out narrative that can be adopted by the ecofeminism through rational appreciation of its moral contents as an "outside" logical construction. Still, the Partnership vision with its call to hearing nature's voice and addressing its needs can be seen as a significant starting point toward constructing a Christian environmental ethics.

Merchant's Partnership proposal is connected with her idea of the Recovery narrative. Merchant notes that the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century marks the time of the secularization of the Western mentality, and is the time of the formation of the secular mainstream Recovery narrative (Merchant 2003, 11) over the socially repressed matrix of the Christian story. To her, it is a story of a continuous upward linear progress to a "perfect future" where "humanity gains the power to manage and control the earth" (Merchant 2003, 12). The counter-story of the Recovery narrative seems to develop as an afterthought, and "depicts a slow decline from a prehistoric past in which the world was ecologically more pristine and societally was more equitable for all people and for both genders" (Merchant 2003, 12). Both stories "reflect the beliefs and hopes of many people for achieving a better world" (Merchant 2003, 12). Merchant also highlights the fundamental differences of the mainstream Recovery and environmental Recovery stories: the first is the story of human life of ease at the expense of the earth, where women

were the cause of decline; in the second story the earth, as well as women, are the victims of exploitation and the beneficiaries of restoration (Merchant 2003, 12).

By rejecting both narratives and advancing her proposal of the third story based on the ethics of partnership between humanity and the earth and between women and men (Merchant 2003, 12), Merchant seems to imply another similarity between both stories as the lack of equality in both; the first story is that of man/male domination, and the second rises and glorifies woman and earth.

However, she seems to overlook another fundamental difference between the two stories as well as transformations within the mainstream story, which may have important implications. The mainstream story is a projection story: the golden past that we once lost is somewhat illogically projected to the future. Also, with the development of science the very idea of the Golden Age/Eden disappears from the cultural narrative: within such current of the Western mentality, the perfect state of life is somehow removed from the past and, by the force of collective belief carried to and placed into the future, leaving the past obscure and hollow as the time of most primitive matriarchal cultures or, much earlier, the inferior forms of life. Such interpretation of human and world's history seems to quickly become truly mainstream, and, while it is certainly geared up toward the "perfect" technological future, it technically cannot be called a recovery narrative, as it is an upside down "Fall from Eden" story. It is a linear and secular narrative that moves from a non-living matter to primitive organisms to a miserable past of humans' total dependency on the merciless nature to the perfect future of the complete victory of the intellect over the merely pre-rational forces of nature. If the belief in the golden

past persists within the secular narrative, it becomes largely marginalized, so it cannot be defined as "mainstream".

The declension narrative is very different from the progressive one in that it is not linear, but cyclical. It is a narrative of the Great Return, in line with the thought of Mircea Eliade, mythical in its nature. According to this story, the golden time had once existed, was lost through inflated human ego-centrism, and can and should be recovered again through human/male humility. This narrative advances the notion of reverence to the force that surpasses human's. It has a covertly religious attitude that associates the earth/nature with a force greater than human intellect/the ego. At the same time, it has materialistic undertones, with the earth/matter replacing the spiritual, the immaterial God.

Merchant is right in locating two opposing but deeply interdependent narratives as two opposing tendencies within the mechanistic Western mentality with its binary thinking. Her rejection of the mainstream narrative as the story of domination and exploitation is well grounded. However, her rejection of the environmental recovery narrative seems to eliminate a story that, in careful formulation, can be helpful for eco-feminists to ground their spirituality. As we will see, only the Goddess-spirituality construct is covertly materialistic and fraught with domination as a mentality of female superiority. Merchant is right in rejecting such narrative as divisive; however, she ends up rejecting all of the environmental narrative.

The problem with Merchant's solution seems to lay in missing a deeper divide within the Western mentality, the divide between spirituality and materialism. The

way she formulates the two similar but opposing "recovery" narratives places them both, more or less, in the plane of the materialism. Merchant does distance her thought from the Christian tradition; while her ethics are largely built on the analysis of the Christian mentality, she does not belong to the quest of grounding the ecocentric ethics in spirituality. Her ethics remain grounded in biological, materialistic vision, while the task set by many eco-feminists is to locate a deep spirituality that would not only help formulate the scholarly basis of the ecocentric ethics and help unite the movement but also do what, borrowing Bron Taylor's formulation, "many religions purport to do: transform consciousness and facilitate the development of an authentic, awakened self" (Taylor, 2007, 923-951, 940), the "ecological self". The task of mental transformation, proclaimed by Ruether is the task of expanding from the plane of materialism to embrace its complimentary opposition. The looked-for spirituality is a holistic force that will unite the oppositions of male and female, subject and object, self and other, but in a deeper level than proposed by Merchant, through giving an alternative, holistic view to the opposition of matter and spirit. It is a spirituality that early strands of Judaic and Christian tradition can be seen as preserving. These strands of the tradition can be seen as synthesizing the "environmental narrative" and the linear historical narrative on the side of spirituality, as we will see further.

Even in eco-feminist authors who initially concentrate on Christian spirituality to anchor the theory and to unite and inspire the movement, seeing it as the religious tradition that shaped Western culture (Merchant, 2003, 2) and therefore the only

viable choice for the West, describe the process of adopting it in terms of strictly rational, well-calculated decision.

Ruether, who advocates a transformed Judeo-Christian narrative, sees religious belief as a reflection of human order. (See Ruether, 1992, 15) If, according to Ruether, religious narratives are only products of projected social mentality, it follows that we can rationally select better, more environment-friendly stories, hybridize, and adjust them to create a better, more environment-friendly society; the contextual, historical rootedness of a religion is somehow completely disregarded.

Ruether's other work, *Goddess and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History*, attempts to re-appropriate Christian Goddess stories in search of a pro-woman spirituality, (Ruether, 2005, 10) where such spirituality is constructed from various Christian narratives based on their validity for eco-feminist theories and practice, as a rationally selected pieces, which she also sees as extremely useful as a weapon against fundamentalist patriarchal spirituality (Ruether, 2005, 10). Such treatment of Christian narrative is an ideological offer; a vision of Judeo-Christian tradition as a useful/convenient ideology threatens to turn organic, living, breathing ever-changing Christian tradition into "christianism", yet another "ism" that can attract pragmatics as well as fanatics, but cannot be converted into spirituality without "a profound shift in consciousness: a recovery of more ancient and traditional views that revere the profound connection of all beings in the web of life and rethinking of the relation of both humanity and divinity in nature"(Christ, 1990, 61).

Ruether concentrates on the male-female equality in the early Christian thought and interprets the "new story" as based on the ethic of Stewardship. According to Ruether, the message of the sages behind Genesis, adapted by early Christianity is the message of Stewardship over creation as God's image shared equally with women and men. (Ruether, 2005A, 69ff). However, such vision is inconsistent with the all-inclusive egalitarian ethics, the possibilities for which we saw in the early Christian thought. Ruether shows the vital need in the ethic of woman's rights and recognizes the urgent necessity of the egalitarian turn within global human society, seeing the problem of discrimination against women, minorities, and the problem of poverty as deeply interconnected (Ruether 2005A, 6). To her, humanity's new mandate is to "redeem our sister, the earth, from her bondage of destruction", since the earth is our "partner" in "the creation of that new world where all things can be 'very good'" (R.Ruether, 1995, 83).

However, Ruether's Christian ethics are derived from her analysis of the Old Testament; she pays little attention to such ecologically promising Christian doctrine as God dying to redeem the entire creation. Her analysis of the Christian tradition as a possible foundation for the ecocentric ethics seems incomplete. Even though Ruether does "acknowledge the ethics in which humanity is only one of a number of equal parts" (Merchant, 2003, 25), she does not formulate the principles of such ethics.]

The ideas of incorporating Christian tradition into ecological thought were looked into by philosophers who do not belong to ecofeminism, but whose fresh,

holistic outlook at Christian thought is helpful in re-evaluating the very origins of the religion.

Callicott explores different modern interpretations of Christian religion and turns to such profoundly spiritual ecological thinker as John Muir. Muir, the 19th century naturalist and an early advocate of preservation, opposed the hierarchical, anthropocentric model of Creation and saw humans as equal and plain "members and citizens" of nature, as later did the pioneer of ecocentric environmental ethic, Aldo Leopold (Leopold, 1968, first published 1949, 204).

Leopold's secular "land ethic" exchanges "Homo sapiens' 'conqueror role' in respect to the "biotic community", not for the role of viceroy or steward, but for that of "plain member and citizen" (Callicott 1999, 195).

Callicott writes that an adequate value theory for non-anthropocentric environmental ethics must provide for the intrinsic value of both individual organisms and a hierarchy of super-organismic entities – populations, species, biocoenoses, biomes, and biosphere." (Callicott, 1982, 299-309).

Callicott turns to explore Christian moral philosophy in order to address the question of grounding the requirement of inherent worth of nature and develops an ecocentric interpretation of Genesis I, paving the way to creating Judeo-Christian ecocentric ethics. He evokes a psycho-spiritual dimension of Genesis in his interpretation of the eating of the forbidden fruit as a symbolic expression of the acquisition of the self-consciousness (See Callicott, 1999, 208). As Berry remarked, "nowhere do we hear our New Story of the universe told as a sacred story" (Berry

2009, 85), and Callicott's vision is close to being a sacred story of the universe as the communion of the spiritual and the material.

Even though Callicott endorses the Christian stewardship ethics as the only one capable of theoretical grounding of nature's inherent worth (1999, 192), he takes it on a new level of unbiased equality of humans and non-human nature. Callicott's vision of the new ethics is a Citizenship ethics.

Callicott posits that, to change our destiny and that of our natural environment, we need to "rethink it" (Callicott, 1999, 189-221). In his quest of "rethinking" our mentality, the philosopher comes to the idea of existence of "a collective mind, a *Zeitgeist*", (Callicott, 1999, 190) which shapes our mentality, ethics and behavior and retains our ideas as a sort of a "collective personality" of a nation/culture. Such an idea can be seen as instrumental in understanding Christianity as an organic part of Western mentality and the Judeo-Christian narrative as a matrix of Western culture.

Callicott's spiritualized ecocentric ethics proposal has its limitations. Like in Ruether and Merchant, Callicott's analysis is tied to the Old Testament, it does not take in consideration the Christian thought. Despite his claim that the original religious ideas are archetypal images, Callicott sees religious thought as an intentionally constructed story, which harmonizes with general belief of environmental philosophers and eco-feminists that a looked-for spiritual base for grounding ecocentric ethics can be pragmatically selected or constructed and artificially grafted on the tree of modern environmentalism.

Being generally opposed to ecofeminism (C.Cuomo, 2002, 118-119), Callicott appears to overlook the deep eco-feminist insight that the root of the ecological crisis is in the hyper-individualistic mentality of "the self versus the Other", and that the "spiritual theory" he is after should be the one that can heal that deepest wound of the Western mentality, not only its projection into human-nature relationship.

Berry's Christian environmental thought seem to answer to J.Braid Callicott's leaning toward the "virgin nature" ideal. One of the most fundamental of Berry's environmental ethical ideas is that "the universe story, the Earth story, the life story, and the human story – all are a single story" (Berry 2009, 41).

Humans are essentially inseparable from the natural processes, as well as the life of the universe is unthinkable without a human dimension. Not only humanity and nature are seen as equal partners, as in Merchant's ethical vision, nor are they only interconnected, they are actually the dimensions of one another.

Like Callicott, Berry emphasizes the uniqueness of the (human) self-awareness, but in Berry it is a universal event, not a special and disconnected human achievement: it is not a specific human mission to achieve self-reflection, but rather it is the universe, in its development, attains the level of (its) self-reflection in humans. The achievement of the level of self-awareness is part of the spiritual dynamics of the cosmic process; "the relentless developmental mode of cosmic unfolding is reaching a new level of integrative, reflexive understanding" (Berry 2009, 6). In Berry's ethical holism, the "self and the other" opposition between humankind and nature does not exist.

Berry develops a trinitarian scheme of the universal structure: the universe has dimensions of the natural world, the "higher numinous spirits", and the human existence; now that humans have awakened from the long period of alienation with the other two universal dimensions, the oneness of the universe can be seen as consisting of the causal spiritual world, the human community and world of nature. These three can be restored to the state of intercommunion (Berry 2009, 3). Human cannot effectively exist without the other two dimensions of the universe.

Another environmental idea that sets Berry's ethics apart from Ruether's, Merchant's, and to an extent from Callicott's ethical views is that he frames human regard to nature in terms of reverence (Berry 2009, 3). Berry does not merge humans with the other two universal dimensions, the three existing as unity in diversity. In Berry, diversity is necessary to reveal all perfection of God (Berry 2009, 11); diversity of creation is in communion with monotheistic nature of God (Berry, 2009, 24). Instead of the traditional oppositional pairing (humans – God; humans – nature), Berry expresses the relationship in terms of communion through human reverence to nature as well as to God (Berry, 2009, 3).

Berry maintains that "all human traditions are dimensions of each other. If, as Christians, we assert the Christian dimension of the entire world, we must not refuse to be dimensions of the Hindu world, of Buddhist world, of the Islamic world" (Berry 2009, 5). Berry sees an importance of the ethical offer based on the equality and coexistence of religious traditions as a way to a fuller expression of the Divine, and so a way to a fuller expression of the human dimension of life on earth, adding to Merchant's ethical requirement of equality among nationalities and races.

Berry goes further in his holistic vision and claims that the new story can be lived out according to his ethical "proposal based on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Colossians where we are told that in Christ all things hold together and that we look forward to the time when God will be "all in all" (Berry 2009, 39). Berry's vision of God immanent to the creation interprets nature as a sacred realm of God, equating reverence to nature with reverence to God. Berry's proposal of the human relation to the other (spiritualized earth or immanent Divinity) is not a sign of human inferiority, since "the story of the universe is our personal story" (Berry 2009, 41), but is in tune with the early Christian idea of the relatedness to the other as sacred.

Berry requires that such holistic, egalitarian ethical vision of the relationship between humanity and the sacralized earth remain egalitarian within the human dimension, in human-human relationships.

Unlike Callicott, Berry joins Ruether in realization that "social and ecological concerns are seen as deeply intertwined"; to establish a more lasting and positive human presence on Earth, we need to overcome "massive inequities and crippling poverty"(Berry 2009, 40).

The universe in Berry's vision is not only a community of equal citizens, but a communion of subjects (Berry 2009, 75). Such notion somewhat echoes Leopold's idea of the land's community, but also is a departure from it: Berry's notion of intercommunion introduces a deeper, (than purely biological, in Leopold's case) i.e., spiritual way of interconnection. A communion presupposes love that connects even 'non-living' natural components as spiritual subjects, created by the same spiritual 'parent'.

The idea of agape as well as the idea of God as love is as yet reflected insufficiently in the thought of the Christian eco-feminists and theologians; Berry reintroduces *agape* into the Christian environmental discourse. In addition to the traditional Judeo-Christian requirements of love of God and love of all humans, the new story should also refer to the love of the natural world: "Earth entire was born of divine love and will survive only through our human and Christian love" (Berry 2009, 71). Love and compassion are important elements on which Berry builds his environmental ethics. Such Berry's emphasis has a potentiality of opening a further dialog on spiritual love/compassion as a cornerstone and binding element of the environmental ethics.

Berry's ideas have been criticized by such commentators as David Bohm and Ted Peters as endorsing "metareligious naturalism" by attributing to the earth the characteristics of the deity (D'Costa, 2005, 213; also, Ted Peters, 1998, 20-21), which could be considered as ultimate idolatry. However, Berry's intention is to emphasize that the traditional Christianity, concerned with personal savior orientation "easily dispenses with earth except as a convenient support for life" (Berry 1990, 152). Earth is a part of the universe, which is the physical body of the divine Creator, and sacred as such. It is infused with spiritual energy that flows through all life (Berry, 1990, 153). It is not the earth by itself, but its immersion in and communion with the spiritual that makes it sacred.

To Berry, "the universe is ... the primary sacred community, the primary revelation of the divine, the primary subject of incarnation, the primary unit of redemption" (Berry, 2009, 25). Berry's outlook is in line with developed by

Ruether's panentheism (Katz et al, 2000, 296); however, Berry's analysis is primarily concerned with the New Testament, showing that the early Christian thought can be looked into to ground the ecocentric ethics.

Berry's creation theology contains a notion of a transcendent-immanent God, in line with the early Christian thought: the universe in Berry's writings is the ultimate wholeness, it also is "the only self-referential reality in the phenomenal world. It is the only text without context. Everything else has to be seen in the context of the universe" (Berry et al., 1991, 24). Berry argues that it is time for us to understand universe as sacred, it is "the same universe as that presented in the Book of Genesis", which "has a spiritual dimension from the beginning" (Berry, 2009, 65). God is not only transcendent, but also immanently present in it, his presence makes the universe sacred.

For Berry, ascribing the non-instrumental value to the earth and all non-human life-forms does not contradict to the Christian tradition; the vision of nature's inherent worth can be elicited from the Christian teachings (See Berry 2009, 8-13). Such vision is the larger dimension of the Christian thought.

It is crucial to know the story of the universe, as it is "the quintessence of reality... If you do not know the story, in a sense you do not know yourself". Berry connects self-awareness with the intimate knowledge of the other, thus overcoming the split between the two.

His eco-theology/Christian deep ecology is a New story, a spiritual ecocentric narrative, based on a vision of relating to oneself as the sacred other, and seems to hold an answer to the quest of the spiritual grounding of the ecocentric ethics.

Willis Jenkins describes the project of Christian-centered environmental ethics in terms of revaluing, renovating and re-imagining our myths and ethically transforming our desires require. (W. J Jenkins, 2008, 14f) Such vision suggests turning our attention to a better understanding of the very origins of the Christian tradition. Instead, he focuses on constructing an environment-friendly Christian ethical account by connecting the Creation narrative with the concepts of grace, finding inspiration in similar undertakings of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth. To date, the Christian tradition's capability of grounding the ecocentric ethics does not seem to have been shown sufficiently, its all-inclusive spirituality not emphasized enough, as it is seen in the eco-feminists' arguments of the Goddess spirituality versus the Christian tradition.

3. CHRISTIANITY VERSUS GAIA.

In the discussion between the proponents of the constructed Mother-Goddess spirituality and those of Christian tradition, the latter has often been criticized based on the common cliché of interpreting the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition as "male", as a "distant, detached, domineering godhead" (Charlene Spretnak, 1990, 5), while Gaia religions advance an image of a fleshier, warmer, more approachable Mother Goddess/Gaia, who comes to be seen as a total opposite of the abstract, unreachable, male God. Since the deeds of Gaia are available for the five senses, she is perceived as more "real", while the unknown Spiritual Father is often seen as a

suspicious result of priests' manipulations. Thus, the reverie restricted to the figure of Gaia/Mother Goddess presents, in its root, an extension of Western materialistic tradition and shares its divisive characteristics by emphasizing one gender over the other, while at the same time pointing to the symptomatic absence, at large, of the personal spiritual experience. The Goddess spirituality, as an immediate reaction to the rationalistic materialism, carries the characteristics of the excessive materiality itself. In the modern materialistic mentality, the ideal image of the Mother Goddess was replaced by the scientific concept of matter, and the archetypal, spiritual male image by the notion of the intellect. The fleshy materiality of the Goddess, her immanent, sensual presence in nature seems to be a theoretical superstructure added to a generally materialistic worldview rather than a committed turn to spirituality, which requires mental transformation.

Spretnak is all against pragmatic picks and dogmatic theorizing and highlights a tremendous importance of personal experience, where such personal experience means life, and pragmatism and ideology represent death and destruction. "... (T) he experience of knowing Gaia, her voluptuous contours and fertile plains, her flowing waters that give life, her animal teachers" (Spretnak, 1990, 5). Without personal knowing, either through intuitive cognition or feeling of inner experience, the idea of spiritual underpinnings of the world is only weakened, romanticized materialism. Only personal experience can convey meaning and purpose; the world of nature given through the five senses is experienced, and, intuitively cognized as unity, communicates meaning and purpose. A religion that honored a female and seemed to have nature as its holy book, Spretnak states (Spretnak, 1990, 5) , held for many

eco-feminists an extreme interest, while the perspective to have as a central deity "Yahweh in a skirt", who feels detached, cold and domineering was less than attractive.

The appeal of Gaia as the spiritual basis for feminism, for women-eco-feminists, also lies in the possibility to reconnect to the ideal image of woman, to identify oneself with all its archetypal qualities such as grace, beauty, inner power, generosity, healing, wholeness, caring, motherly love, abundance, but also mystery, stillness, meditation, magic, darkness. For many women such connection means finding their inner core, the deepest self different from the rationalizing ego, and for many eco-feminists, such communion is reached through nature, which is often seen as an outer expression of the archetypal Woman, the Goddess. Joanna Macy sums eco-feminists' spiritual quest for the "real self" by claiming that "ecological self is spiritual self". (Macy, 1989, 210) Identification with Gaia is capable of conveying a strong sense of empowerment for the oppressed, both women and nature. Spretnak writes that eco-feminist sense of the spiritual emerges through experiences of ecocommunion with nature. For Warren, it is an experience of oneself as a particular expression of the sacred cosmic body (Warren, 2000, 32); a statement that illustrates the power of an emotional charge that the notion of the Goddess may convey, while emphasizing a pre-rational world perception over the rational.

However, in appealing to the Goddess, eco-feminists risk to fall into the partiality many of them try to avoid. Wholeness and inclusion, proclaimed as the eco-feminist core values, require bringing both types of the world perception together, not replacing rationalism by intuitive knowledge and male archetype by female

archetypal image. Juxtaposing 'feminine positive values' as pre-rational to 'masculine negative rational' values is not only playing to Western essentialist view of women as the object of domination, in line with Cuomo's argument; such thinking is also divisive as based on "us versus others" mentality, which the spiritual eco-feminist ethical quest is set to overcome.

The divisive nature of the Goddess idea seems to lay behind what can be called the "Goddess paradox": its building on the prerational/irrational divine feminine which is, at the same time, a rational construct (as oppose to revelatory experience cited by religious people as roots of religious tradition). The rationalistically constructed idea of a Deity of the prerational brings to mind the enthronement of the "Deesse Raison" by the French Revolution (Jung, 1971, 78), with corresponding, if opposite, meaning, the Goddess of Reason being a reaction to the "darkness of superstition", the irrational.

In the second chapter of my thesis I will show how Christian tradition provides the all-inclusive picture that connect the masculine and feminine polarities as of the whole; here it is enough to say that the Goddess spirituality can be seen as a symptomatic first reaction against the oppressive rationalism. As materialistic and divisive, it is too shallow to aspire to a personal and collective communion with the true, core self, which presupposes the transcending of the ego, to aspire to reconcile the self and the other, the oppressor and the oppressed.

Transcending the ego without abandoning it is a necessary step in eliminating the negative space between the self and the other. The autonomy of self appears to be tightly bound up with solicitude for the other: "recognition is a structure of the self

reflecting on the movement that carries self-esteem toward solicitude and solicitude toward justice" (Ricoeur, 1995, 296). One should identify not exclusively with the ego, as probably the majority of us (still) do, but also with one's spiritual self, which is at the same time an "ecological self", an all-inclusive "I am" of the universe (Berry, 2009, 42).

Since both the fixation with the female spirituality and the reliance on rational choice of spirituality reflect the traits of the divisive, hierarchical traits of the Western mentality, which is, according to Warren, ingrained in our most fundamental perceptions (1987, 6; Hay 2002, 73), particular care should be taken in relation of the incorporating, by eco-feminists, a religious tradition/spirituality as the basis for the environmental ethics. The criterion for such spirituality seems to be an inquiry into whether or not it is built along the lines of exclusion, whether or not it is capable of healing the split between the self and the other. The solution to conquering the divisiveness of the anthropo/androcentric mentality would consist in including the male/rationality/transcendence compound, not counteracting it: the masculine *and*, not *or*, the feminine. The looked-for spiritual ecocentric foundation would be holistic and egalitarian.

Christian religious thought and practice is often seen as the original source of arrogant anthropocentrist/androcentrist, individualist mentality, which is the very root of the destructive exploitation of nature (Christ, 1987, 117-132, 162). Assessing the problem, R.Ruether writes: "...the dominant spirituality of the Fathers of the Church finally accepted the antibody, anti-feminine view of the late antique religious culture. Recent proponents of ecology, therefore, pointed the finger at a Christianity

as the originator of these debased view of nature as the religious sanction for modern technological exploitation of the earth" (Ruether, 1979, 49). Christian religion came to be seen as primarily a body-transcendent religion with a strong emphasis on the disembodied afterlife, where woman as a giver of physical life is depreciated, where masculinized, rationalized spirit strives to liberate itself from "inert, dark, confining, sinful" matter, a religion that fuels the mentality of human/male oppression, exploitation and domination.

Such vision, however, stems from confusion of the rationalistic, ego-centered characteristics Western culture took on developing and the religion of love and equality that emerged as the highest expression of the ideal of human values. Inherent rationalism of the Western mentality emphasizes individualistic split between the "I" and the "other" with following drive to assimilate the "other", which is at the root of a multitude of cultural, political and societal dichotomies (such as "man and woman", "humans and nature"). Christianity as a Western religious tradition became fused with the history of Western civilization, going through all the painful turns together with it while Western culture was gaining its global prevalence; it become the reflection of Western rationalistic dualism in its many historical schisms, and sometimes even a tool/form of domination. Such is the picture of the historic Christian tradition, which often compels commentators to see Christianity as a Western ideology per se, to blame for the split in general and the oppression of women and ecological crisis in particular.

However, the invocation of the egalitarian, inclusive ethics, formulated by the early founders of Christian tradition points toward the early teachings of the still

uninstitutionalized religion, as was shown by T.Berry. Christian thought, while supporting the development of the individual in its dogma of individualized God and its condemnation of the irrational state of mind as sin, professes a *metanoia* for the rationalistically conditioned mindset, which holds a remedy for the split as the relationship of love.

The appeal of the Christian religious thought as the spiritual foundation of the environmental ethics lies in both it being a Western world's own religious tradition, our natural cultural/historic background, and not an adscititious graft of a borrowed spirituality, and it containing the undercurrents that can be interpreted as holistic and egalitarian.

Such reading of Judeo-Christian tradition, as offered by Berry, is far from what is usually defined as the modern mainstream, particularly Catholic interpretation, however, we should not look at religious traditions as static, once and forever given laws and prescribed formulas. Christianity is an evolving tradition: it is "a continuing historical movement within which, in each new age, new generations with new ideas rightly participate. Through their participation, the religion can itself take new forms. A new generation's faithfulness to Christ does not lie in absolutizing the Christian past" (McDaniel, 1986, 37-38). The early texts of the Old Testament can be seen in the light of the early Judaic mentality of a more egalitarian society; with farther development of the ego-centered, militant mentality patriarchal relationships takes place, setting the societal patterns of estrangement and destructive domination over nature, as Ruether notes (2005, 284), which, as many eco-feminists see it, intensified in the transition to modernity in Europe in 16th and

17th centuries (Starhawk, 1989, in Ruether, 2005, 284), when the Christian narrative had merged with advances in science, technology, and capitalism (Merchant 2003, 11).

It is probably safe to say that the majority of modern Christians are raised within the domination patterns of the patriarchal mentality; however, new currents in Catholicism demonstrate strong tendencies toward egalitarianism and the "greening" of the Christianity, such as Green nuns movement, as we will see in the chapter 3, which shows Christianity as the organic, dynamic cultural flow, capable of supporting Berrian New Story. Christian scriptures are complex records of a multi-layered spiritual tradition that yielded various interpretations through various historical periods. The mainstream modern Western interpretation of it, albeit itself constituting a tradition with distinctive rationalistic anthropo/androcentric features, cannot by any means be considered as "the true/right/the only one". As the number of Western religiously-minded people who are not satisfied with the current mainstream Christianity grows, the vastness and depth of the Christian teachings will help, according to Berry, to develop a new, more holistic reading based on the internalization of the spiritual aspects of these teachings.

Turning to the early formative period of Christian tradition can offer a solution to the difficulties of choice of the form of spirituality suitable to express eco-feminist quest because it is free from its (later) associations with a destructive war of the opposites within a rationalistic mindset and stands at the cultural origins of the Western world as its moral guide. As Western culture is now coming to realization, in its newest developments such as feminism and ecological concerns, of the

inherent worth of the "other" on the global level and learns to appreciate the "other" in its striving for wholeness, the desire for locating a deeper grounding for such morality can be answered by the turn to the early strand of Christian tradition with its both understanding and transcending of the individual in the relationships of love. Turning to Christian religion would provide eco-feminism with a profound grounding for developing values of ethics of the environment. Better understanding of the early Christian teachings as origins of Western religious mentality, their revelatory source and nature will help to address the problem that arises from rationalization of the need for a certain form of eco-feminist spirituality.

* * *

Out of an array of the ecocentric ethical proposals that take in consideration the historical groundness of the specific features of the Western mentality, only Merchant's proposal represents a clear and compact formulation. However, her ethics are secular. Jenkins' proposal seems insufficient. Even though Callicott's and Ruether's proposals are enriching in application to developing an all-inclusive, egalitarian ethics, it is Berry's vision that provided the most ethical material to flesh out Merchant's formulation.

While the Goddess spirituality appears overly materialistic and divisive to serve the ecofeminists' purpose of developing ethical principles that would revert the patterns of domination and hyper-rationalism, the Judeo-Christian tradition is seen to contain a historically anchored egalitarian, holistic strand that would answer the ecofeminists' quest for a spiritual foundation of such ethics.

In the second chapter I analyze the feminine in the Bible and early strand of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order to locate an interpretative framework that would support an egalitarian, holistic, ecocentric ethics.

CHAPTER 2

BACK TO THE ORIGINAL CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I turn to the history of Christian thought, starting from the formation of the Creatrix (Sophia, Wisdom of God) ideas. I analyze the history of the all-male Trinity dogma, tracing its origins as a male-female compound. Then I focus on history of the New Testament ideas, such as Jesus Christ's implied androgyny and his oneness with Sophia, and the original teaching of universal equality, non-violence and love. I show that Christian tradition in both, being a specifically Western religious form of human self-expression and possessing theological and axiological features to heal the deep split in modern Western mentality, can provide the looked-for spiritual base for the environmental ethics while avoiding negative, divisive tendencies of the modern Mother Goddess religion. I look at the early historic strand of Christian tradition through Berry's eyes, as a form of Christianity alternative to the modern mainstream interpretation.

I concentrate here on five deeply interconnected themes, relevant for locating the egalitarian, all-inclusive, holistic ethics within Judeo-Christian tradition. Such themes are equal inclusion of women, afflicted, children, different races/nationalities, and all natural entities, live and "non-living", in the scope of direct moral standing, as well as the theme of the grounding of such equality in the notion of all creation in its diversity having a mutual spiritual parent, as the sixth

theme. The themes of the feminine and nature are genetically interconnected. The early Christian thought adds the seventh theme, the interconnectedness within such diverse community/family of beings by disinterested, spiritual love, which, as we will see, becomes a tool of reconciliation within the dichotomy of the self and the other.

In search of the Christian spiritual grounding of ecocentric environmental ethics, we will turn to the history of Judeo-Christian ideas, starting with the narrative of a figure that can be seen as the Goddess of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and see how this figure differs from the modern Mother-Goddess construct.

2. THE GODDESS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Even though in Genesis Yahweh seems to be presented as a masculine figure, acting apparently alone in ensouling the creation, multiple biblical texts show Yahweh as a composite, androgynous Being (Swidler, 1979, 53). Often these features of Yahweh become lost in translation; however, new studies based on careful analysis and translation of the Hebrew part of the Old Testament reflect Yahweh's androgyny and both paternal and maternal imagery. (Bird, 1992, 53). Further reading of the Bible shows that the feminine side of the totality of God can be thought of as hypostatized, personalized feminine figure, acting in accord but separately from the masculine side of God, the way Eve was separated from the androgyny of the holistic humanity.

Masculine God is shown as having a divine feminine partner in creating the world, who is first mentioned in Genesis 1 as *ruach*. The God's spirit, in Hebrew *ruach*, in some translations rendered as "wind", is not an inanimate element or tool of creation. "God's *ruach*, his spirit, breath, or his spoken word, the emanation of the Divine moved upon the surface of the waters. God's breath is presented as a giant bird whose wings quietly move"" (Luise Shottroff, 1993, 24). The white giant bird in the midst of the darkness of chaos can be seen as a precursor of *Lux Fiat*, a potentiality of consciousness within creation.

This God's *ruach* is a feminine noun, and designate a female divinity (Luise Shottroff, 1993, 24). *Ruach*, God-Creator's co-eternal emanation, is destined to play an important role in the historic development of Judeo-Christian religious ideas. God's *Ruach*, mentioned in the sapiential books of the Old Testament as personalized Wisdom of God; most commentators include the Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach), The Book of Wisdom, the deuterocanonical book accepted by both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions (Schipflinger, 1998, 3) and some the Song of Songs (Bland, 2002, 13). In the texts in Hebrew the name of the femininity of God is Hokma, becoming Sophia in Greek translation (Schroer, 2000, 4), which (both) means "wisdom"; so the name Wisdom will be used further. Wisdom of God is a more prominent figure in the Eastern Orthodox tradition than in Western Christianity; however, Ruether critically analyzes this divine figure to assess her potential role in advancing and glorifying women within the Judeo-Christian tradition and highlights her role as a mediator between God and "men" (Ruether, 2005, 90-97; Ruether, 1977, 29).

Even though the Wisdom books' narrative gives much attention to the human and male values, as Ruether notes (Wisdom "found delight in the sons of men" (Prov. 8:31)), it unceasingly highlights her formative, ordering role through all of the creation. Therefore Wisdom can be looked at as a Goddess of nature of the Judaic tradition, complemented by her male counterpart; together they create a holistic picture of spirit-and-matter, humans-and-nature, male-and-female. She is an active cause of all things, she produces all things (Wisd.8:5), "the artificer of all" (Wisd. 7:22), which implies her role as the creatrix. The text of the Proverbs furthers such reading; there, Wisdom speaks of herself: "When he established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep; When he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth; When he set for the sea its limit, so that the waters should not transgress his command; Then was I beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, Playing before him all the while, playing on the surface of his earth (Prov. 8:24-31) She seems to be indicated here as an eternal and active, productive force of creation process, while the masculine Divinity has an "engineering" function outside the creation.

Wisdom's work is to give it law of justice, structure and order: "She reaches from end to end, mightily and governs all things well". (Wisd.8:1-2) She is a goddess of cosmic order. (Schroer, 2000, 4).

She produced, sustains, and penetrates all cosmos, heaven and earth, spiritual world and the world of matter: "In the highest heaven did I dwell, my throne on a pillar of cloud. The vault of heaven I compassed alone, through the deep abyss I wandered (Ecclus.24:4-6).

The Proverbs portray Wisdom as the guardian of justice, love, kindness and equality. The introduction to the book of the Proverbs begins with verses that establish mutual relationship among wisdom, justice, right and equity (Schoer, 2000, 5). She is equally a deity of nature and of humans: "Over waves of the sea, over all the land, over every people and nation I held sway". (Ecclus.24:4-6) The creation, the earth/nature and (created) humans are glorified as the products of the joyful activity of the mighty Goddess. "Hokma stands like a goddess next to the creator and is co-creator of the cosmos" (Schroer, 2000, 4). All of the parts of the creation are equal by virtue of being brought forth by the same mother. Wisdom is a Goddess of the natural world, which includes humans; she is a historically rooted feminine Deity of nature that influenced the Judeo-Christian tradition in alluding to a holistic, ecocentric picture of creation. Analyzing the continuity of the idea of Wisdom in Judeo-Christian tradition, Ruether notes: "As Father and Mother, God/Sophia is the source of our true life and being and that of the whole creation" (Ruether, 2005, 227). Wisdom can be interpreted as a uniting divine force.

Ruether contests the notion of equality between the figure of Wisdom and God, implying her secondary role connected with the patriarchal mentality. She writes: "...Wisdom is not a separate divine hypostasis, but simply God's wisdom...she is also God's creation" (Ruether, 2005, 95), citing Ecclesiasticus 1:4,9; 14-15: "She was created before all things... it is he who created her, he saw her and took her measure", she is "created with the faithful in the womb".

However, within the wisdom literature, the passages referring to Sophia as created by God as his first, initial creation, before the world, exist alongside the texts

where she is treated as co-eternal with the masculine (part of) God. The source of the ambiguity is in translation. Sometimes the same passage designates createdness of Sophia in one translation and her co-eternity with God in other: in Proverbs 8:22, the Hebrew verb *qanani* was translated as "possessed" in some Greek translations and as "created" in others, including the Septuagint's Greek; (Swidler, 40) the verb can also mean "to possess", "to acquire"; a number of biblical parallels support such translation also (Farmer, 1991, 53). Such understanding of the verb depicts Wisdom as existing "within God, prior to creation", (Farmer, 1991, 54) i.e., as co-existing with the masculine part of God, while rendering her as created would, as in the case of Eve, make her derivative and secondary, subordinated to the masculine God, his feminine servant in creation of the world. The rendering of the passage as "The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago" in some translations of the Bible is no less legitimate as "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago" in others. Some versions translate *qanani* as "created", but the majority of the translations agree on interpreting it as "possessed" or "begot" (Green, 1994, 41). Out of eight main modern English translations of the Bible, only three treat Sophia as created. The "possession" reading is considered more in accord with the meaning of original text by many commentators such as Jay P. Green, Sr., the renowned translator of the Bible, Leonard Swidler, Kathleen Anne Farmer.

As the feminine part of the androgynous totality of the Creator, she is a breath of creative power; "Lady Wisdom identifies herself with the spirit (*ruach*, also of feminine gender in Hebrew) of God hovering over creation in Gen.1:2."(Swidler,

1979, 45) She is sent from heaven and from the glorious throne as a "holy spirit" (Wisd. of Sol., 9:10;17). Such characteristics show Wisdom as coeternal with Yahweh, "born" into creation in terms of God's spiritualizing, life-giving breath, *ruach*; she "is a coeternal and more or less hypostasized pneuma of feminine nature that existed before the Creation" (Jung, 1958, 24, #609), i.e., she can be seen as the *sine qua non* feminine creative essence within God. As born from his mouth, Wisdom's power is God's creative Word that God "spoke" into existence, (Swidler, 1979, 52) giving it structure, law and order. Coeternity implies equality; Wisdom can be therefore seen as equal to Yahweh, but not opposing to him as his feminine polarity, but in syzygy, co-creating in harmony.

Ruether notes that the Wisdom of Solomon, a work of the Hellenistic Jewish community of Egypt, expands the role of Wisdom to include the inner spiritual life of the soul (Ruether, 2005, 95); it is not only cosmological but intimately pertains to human inner world. However, her initial understanding as God's breath that gives life to humans make her a transitional Being between God's mental qualities and these of humans. She is Wisdom that has come from God into human souls. As she structures creation, bringing it from chaos to order, Divine Wisdom also structures and brings from chaos to order human minds. "I, Wisdom, dwell with experience, and judicious knowledge I attain. ... Mine is counsel and advice, mine is strength, I am understanding" (Prov.8:12,14). The voice of counsel and advice, the ability of understanding that lives within human mind is the "divine" light of consciousness. Wisdom is described as "the refulgence of eternal light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God" (Wisd.7:26). She is thus compared with the light of consciousness

from Genesis 1, with the divine Lux Fiat that marks the beginning of the self-conscious life, the only life to know. Only Wisdom's law can give humans (divine) immortality: "justice is undying". (Wisd.1:15).

When self-reflection becomes an absolute necessity, Wisdom is needed (Jung, 1958, 29, #617). Wisdom cries (Prov.1:20) to whosoever will listen to turn humankind (back) to God. It is as if Hokma's wisdom was offering that special knowledge that makes humans truly like God, the fruit of the Tree of life. Yahweh did not lie to Adam and Eve: by eating the fruit of the Tree of knowledge humans acquired self-awareness that made them like gods, and underwent death (Gen.3:22): a death of separation and encapsulating into the ego-centered consciousness. The just Mother Wisdom, who took special interest in her human "children", humankind, (Prov.8:31) offers the immortality (Wisd.6:19) that, as a fruit of the Tree of life, was guarded from "the simple fools" who are content with their simplicity (Prov.1:22) by a cherubim and a fiery revolving sword (Gen.3:24). Wisdom is associated with the Tree of life through the multiple comparisons of her to the most valuable trees of the ancient world (Ecclus.24:12-17), which have from ancient times been symbols of the Semitic love- and mother-goddess, (Jung, 1958, 6, #612) the life-giver.

Like in the seduction with the fruit of the Tree of knowledge narrative, Wisdom also offers to those who would listen, to come "and be filled with my fruits". (Ecclus.24: 19) The sage writer of the Proverbs is clearly aware of it: "She is a tree of life for those who hold her fast." (Prov. 3:13)

The evident parallelism of the Wisdom and Eve narratives traces the role of the feminine in the process of human maturation. If Eve acquires the ego-consciousness that takes humans away from God and implies the distancing of the self by the nascent ego, Wisdom calls for self-reflection that "mirrors" the self as the deeper center of personality. Wisdom possesses the key to human self-knowledge that makes them god-like, one that makes a human not only self-aware, but justly, equally and lovingly aware of "the other(s)", to grow into the experience of the shared awareness as "divine" omniscience and immortality. Wisdom is God's omniscience (Wisd.8:4; Wisd.7:23).

Self-reflection is an internalized awareness, a thinking process turned into the depths of oneself, toward the inner self as an ultimate "other", and is a complimentary opposition of the outside projected force of rationalistic drive to cognize/possess the (outer) world, congruent with the man/male drive for domination. Self-reflection can be interpreted as a tool of bridging the gap between the self and the other, which the biblical sages seemed to perceive as a feminine trait.

Wisdom is God's omniscience (Wisd.8: 4; Wisd.. 7:23); God is power, and Sophia is the light of consciousness, but the wisdom is better than force (Eccl. 9:16). As Ruether notes, she is a principle of inner human life, but not in an abstract "spiritual" way; as a knowledge that reflects God, she can be interpreted as human ability to self-reflect.

Ruether concludes her analysis of the figure of Wisdom by arguing that she is "hardly a feminist", her primary work being "to link male to males, the male divine

father to human sons, and human fathers, as parents and teachers, to human sons" (Ruether, 2005, 8). She argues that it only seems that she gives women an exalted identity as quasi-divine mediators between God and "men" (2005, 96). However, she seems to leave out the idea of Wisdom as the bride of God, explicitly present in the Song of Songs and implicitly in Proverbs 7:1-27. Even though "women as seekers of knowledge and teachers of wisdom are absent or invisible" does not mean that they don't possess them. Men in the biblical narrative need/seek higher wisdom; a woman's figure is a giver of it. Therefore, women can be seen as reflections of Wisdom; while men possess ego-centered reason, likened, at its worst, to the woman Folly (Prov. 9:1-2). Women can teach self-reflection that leads to knowing one's deeper self, the inner "other".

Wisdom hates "pride, arrogance, the evil way, and the perverse mouth" (Prov.8:13), the ego-centeredness, lies and premeditated actions against others for personal gain, characteristics of individualism, often seen by feminists as predominantly male qualities. Following Wisdom as a principle of self-awareness on the spiritual level, one transcends the ego in the process of *metanoia* and identify with the communal self, where everything is perceived in mutual dependency, in Merchant's phrasing, as "web-like human-nature relationship" (Merchant, 1992, 202). Wisdom becomes the sons of men's bride as men (humans) are the images of God, and God is Wisdom's true bridegroom. In the both cases, the gender-specific language is inevitable in order to translate the spiritual ideas in the every-day's reality.

In her viewing Wisdom as a religious tool of patriarchal domination, Ruether seems to also overlook Wisdom's holistic role in the Judaic tradition. This daughter/bride of God was worshiped as a Mother of all the living beings, mother and protectress of all animals, groves, rivers, as Mother nature, who bestows her divine order and wisdom on the smallest creatures, who teaches spiders to weave, birds to migrate, flowers to bloom etc. "Cycles of years, positions of the stars, nature of animals, temper of beasts, powers of the winds and thoughts of men, uses of plants and virtues of roots," (Wisd.7:19-20) this is the knowledge of Wisdom, which embraces all the nature and where the human being is not the dominating possessor but is listed modestly between animals and plants, his thoughts alongside the might of the wind, which can bring the desired rain or destroy as a violent hurricane.

Wisdom's role is not only to pass this knowledge to humans, which indicates her salvific status, but also to unite and internalize the knowledge of natural processes in rendering it as "God's knowledge", an inner spiritual law of the universe. Wisdom can be seen as the goddess of nature, but her quality of self-reflection/reflection of her origins preserves her interconnection with God as a spiritual center of the universe, reflecting in the reciprocal relationships within the creation. Her role as the goddess of nature being absorbed into the most High as his bride in the sacred marriage makes for the notion of transcendent-immanent interpretation of Yahweh in the Old Testament.

Ruether's doubts as to Wisdom being suitable as a feminist/eco-feminist Deity may be well founded, however, but for the reasons other than she cites. Even though she can be seen as a uniting force in meditating between nature and humans, nature

and God, humans and nature, humans and humans, instilling the relationship of peace, mutual respect based on understanding, and equality, her holistic embrace is limited when it comes to social relationships. Among humans she is partial to Israel, as is Yahweh; she is associated with Jerusalem as its special *spiritus loci*, after making the city her dwelling: "Then the Creator of all ..., ... chose the spot for my tent, //Saying, 'In Jacob make your dwelling, in Israel your inheritance.' ... In the holy tent I ministered before him, and in Zion I fixed my abode" (Ecclesiasticus 24: 8-10). Wisdom is a Judaic goddess and do not care for spiritual advancement/betterment of other peoples. She thus is far from being universally uniting and, inspire her syzygy with the masculine/spiritual can hardly be seen as a holistic deity who would embody eco-feminist strive for the spiritual egalitarian ecocentric ethics.

Such all-embracing, impartial, uniting universal love and equality principle we see in the coming of the figure of Jesus Christ.

3. THE FEMININE, THE MASCULINE, AND NATURE IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

To date, the attempts to construct the holistic ethics based on Christian tradition were for most part restricted to the ecocentric interpretations of the Old Testament. The theo-ecology of the Passionist priest and "geologian" Thomas Berry, however, has Christian tradition as its focus. I look at the early strand of Christianity through his eyes.

Berry draws on the early strand of Christianity; in his texts he largely builds on passages from John, Paul and St. Augustine. This early current in the Christian tradition can be read as weaving around the theme of self-transcending communal love, which is largely reflected in Berry's eco-theology.

Berry argues that, "apart from the primary intentions of the scriptures, the practice of Western Christians has been to consider that every earthly reality is subject to the free disposition of humans insofar as we are able to assert this dominion" (2009, 40). He sees the early strand of Christian tradition as characterized by holism and equality, not domination and exploitation. He turns to the scriptures to show that God loves all of his creation equally and is not partial to humans. Berry quotes John 3:16: "God so loved the world [kosmos] that he gave his only Son" that the world might be redeemed by him (2009, 66).

One of the main threads of the early Christian narrative can be seen as two intertwined themes that support the notion of God's immanency, or panentheism, - God's femininity and God's love, as we will see further.

In accord with the Christian tradition, Berry's vision of God is trinitary, it is the notion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, he explains the Persons in quite unconventional for the dogma form: they are, for Berry, differentiation, interiority, and universal bonding, the three most basic tendencies seen through the created universe (2009, 81). The mode of differentiation in God is the mode of expanding in creation, which corresponds to the Christian dogmatic notion of the transcendence of God (Father, who can only be known through Son). The principle of interiority is God within the self or the sacred essence shared by all created entities (S. Taylor,

2007, 200), Son. The universal bonding is the mode of communion, Holy Spirit, who carries the notion of God's immanent presence as creation. To Berry, Christian God is transcendent-immanent.

The androgyny of God-Wisdom of the Judaism reflects in the early Christian interpretation of all three Persons of the Trinity.

The early Christian texts, starting from the second century Greek and Syriac church fathers, show that gender imagery for God does not mean God was perceived as male or female: one of the recurrent images in these writings is Father's breasts of love supplying milk to Christians; it was commonly agreed that such gender images are taken from our bodily experience and applied to God metaphorically (Ruether, 2005, 134). Gregory Nazianzus, 330 – 390 AD, mocks the Arians for their literalism in imagining that using the male grammatical gender for God makes God literally male, by saying that God is not male although he is called father. (Ruether, 2005, 135). Thus, God's fatherhood was understood, in early Christian writings, as his ability to give not only biological, but also spiritual birth.

Jesus, who is thought as the embodiment of God ("if you know me then you will also know the Father", John 14:7) is an image of God's androgyny, as much as having a healthy human body allows. In addition to Jesus's explicit masculinity, he could be seen as having a second, feminine nature. He is holistic, spiritually androgynous Being.

Berry's interpretation implicitly contains the notion of God's femininity. In the gospels, the only begotten Son, incarnated as Jesus of Nazareth, displays many specifically Sophian and also broadly feminine qualities. Like Sophia-Wisdom, he

loves his followers and nourishes them spiritually, motherly offering to the immature in spirit "the milk", and to spiritually grown disciples, "solid food". He nourishes them bodily (as in dividing bread and fishes, and in offering the last Supper's bread and wine) (Mark 6:33, John 6:1-15; Luke 24:30-31,42-43; John 21:9,12-13; Luke 22:17-19). He gives the immortality through the baptism, offering the cleansing water of the eternal life (Ruether, 2005, 131), like the Mother, ancient goddess of the waters. He speaks in the revelatory "I am" language for which Wisdom praises herself (Ruether, 2005, 131); he is co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father, as the daughter-Wisdom is. As Wisdom's, his home is "above the clouds" and his kingdom is the Spiritual realm, but he came to people, into the creation, in hopes to turn them to the just and righteous ways.

Wisdom of the Old Testament was crying aloud on the street, in the open squares and crowded ways, at the city gates for people to accept her and to change their ego-centered, shallow-materialistic ways. Christ came to the world as Jesus, inviting "whosoever will" to follow. Paul states that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (in 1 Cor.1:24; 1 Cor.1:30), is knowledge (1 Cor.1:5). There seems to be a tendency in early Christian texts to blend the figures of Wisdom and Christ together. Ruether states that "Christ can also appear as Virgin Wisdom, who calls her sons and daughters to her, recalling the image of Wisdom in Proverbs" (Ruether, 2005, 134), indicating Christ's androgynous, holistic, synthetic nature.

To Berry, as to Paul, Wisdom is part of Christ, but it does not mean that Berry, like the later current of Christian tradition, eliminates the feminine from the divine. In Berry, God has reconciled all things to himself in Christ (2009, 16), therefore Christ

is fullness, the enantiodromia of oppositions. As such, he is the incarnation of Wisdom-God, of the masculine as well as the feminine.

The requirements of the new spirituality Jesus teaches are not at all the masculine qualities, expected from a masculine messiah as the king-liberator of the Jews. Jesus was chaste, gentle, protective. He teaches love, by giving his followers the new commandment that stands above the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, to love one another, (John 13:34), not just love, but love the other the way God loves his children (John 15:12). He teaches non-violence, as in turning to the offender the other cheek, in his Sermon on the mount; his message is non-retaliation, no exaction of recompense, no taking revenge, and an openhanded generosity and detachment (Hart, 2012, 63).

As cosmological Jesus, who contains a loving and wise feminine nature, came to earth, so, to Berry, Wisdom as a feminine-identified mystery of God must return to the earth as the "wisdom of women", which is the capacity to "join the knowing of the body to that of the mind, to join soul to spirit, intuition to reasoning, feeling consciousness to objective distance" (Berry, 1999, 180). In listing the characteristics that are usually seen as feminine alongside with their "masculine" opposites with the notion of women being able to join the polarities, Berry seems to assert that not only women possess the alternative to what environmental thinkers describe Western traits that caused the ecological crisis, but also and mainly that this is women who can reconcile the split and establish the holistic mentality in humans that is healing for the earth.

As we saw, the Third Person of Berry's Trinity, the Holy Spirit, operates in the mode of universal bonding, which sounds much like women's work of "joining" the opposites. Such vision of the Holy Spirit echoes Biblical rendering of Sophia as a holy spirit in Wisdom 9:10-17, which demonstrates the inner interconnectedness of the Greek idea of Logos and that of the Holy Spirit in the early Christian thought: "Ruach Hakodesh usually translated as "Holy Spirit"... (which) can be seen as the intermediate between Voice and Speech", (Kaplan, 1997, 71). God's world-forming breath symbolized by a giant white bird in the Old Testament (Luise Shottroff, 1993, 24) transforms into the white dove that represents the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Sophia's rendering as *ruach* in literal Greek translation becomes *pneuma*, also a feminine noun, unlike Logos (Jackson et al., 2006, 12). However, later, with the translation of the Scripture in Latin and the further latinization of the religion feminine *pneuma* becomes masculine *spiritus*, which makes Wisdom's absorption into terminology completely masculinizing.

The femininity of the Holy Spirit, the hypostatized creativity of God, is often thought to persist only until 381 AD, when the Nicene Creed was formulated with its specific emphasis on masculinity of all the persons. However, the masculinization of the Trinity to accord it with the way men progressively perceived the universal order of things, was still not fully evident in the Creed. Its original Greek translation emphasizes Mary's active role in the bringing forth the Son, and the Holy Spirit is never mentioned as "he", as oppose to widely used International Consultation on

English Texts (1975) translation: "there are no restrictive articles related to the Holy Spirit; rather, they are neuter" (Geitz, 1995, 5).

Ruether states that with the further development of the Christian tradition, "metaphorical masculinity became tied to intellect and divinity, while metaphysical femininity was linked to the nondivine world of sense, knowledge and bodily nature" (Ruether, 2005, 135). Such transformation can be seen as a rationalization of the Christian tradition; Berry agrees, stating that "our Western industrial civilization was itself a deviation from Christian ideals" (2009, 35).

In addition to the God's Feminine, manifesting through all of the three Persons of the early Christian vision of the Divinity, Wisdom partially manifests in Mary, who due to her unsophistication, purity, self-giving, patience is a perfect picture of *agape* in the unselfish choice of her spiritual mission in order to bring salvation to the earth.

Mary's functional, intermediate role in salvation is also seen in the "new Eve" ideas of the second century. Drawing on Paul's vision of Christ as a new Adam (Rom. 5:12-21), several church fathers interpret Mary as the "new Eve", tying her to the story of the Fall and to the history of creation (Ruether, 2005, 150). As these later commentators saw it, Eve, the creation's bodily mother caused her children to fall by disobedience, while Mary saves the creation by her commitment, which leads to giving birth to the Savior. Eve acted under the impulse of curiosity, half-instinctually, for self-gratification; Mary shows self-possession, she is in conscious control and responsible for her decision, is putting higher will before her ego, acts out of love and concern for others.

Mary's mystery is primarily in her divine motherhood, as for the nine months she contained the spirit of the universe. Berry contends that "The Universe is more in Mary than Mary in the Universe" (In S.Taylor, 2007, 137). Mary is canonized and worshiped as a woman who reached the status of the Goddess of the universe. Charlene Spretnak echoes Berry by arguing that as with other, non-Christian goddesses, her divine quality is achieved by the self-directed power of "sacred parthenogenesis", which makes her a creatrix of life with no need of a male counterpart (Spretnak, 2004, in S. Taylor, 2007, 143). Mary, therefore, can be seen as a divinized woman and the goddess of the natural world.

Mary's narrative seems to have another dimension in addition to the human and universal ones. Christian mystical tradition projects it into the dimension of the inner world. If the marriage of Christ and Ecclesia, the church as Christ's communal body, is a fulfillment of history, the marriage of the soul and God follows an individual and vertical trajectory (Ruether, 2005, 140). Mary can be seen therefore as symbolic of the human soul, showing her connection with Wisdom who has an affinity with living souls.

Mary's symbolism as a mother of God in the early Christian mysticism is connected with that of the "mustard seed", which can be cultivated and, like an embryo, grown to become the Kingdom of God. Such symbolism can be read as an event of human inner world, where the previously sleeping self reemerges in the spiritual rebirth, indicating a *metanoia*, called on by John the Baptist. Such transformation is needed to achieve the higher level of self-identification, based on establishing reverential acceptance of the other. Such ideal of the relationships is

developed by Christian teaching of agape and the idea of the universal brother(sister)hood.

Early Christian texts advance equality among humans.

Jesus Christ came as the messiah to his own people, who never recognized him as such (John 1:11) but widely surpassed the limitations of the messianic ideas of the "chosen people" and the Sophia's affinity with Jerusalem. The early Christian thought expands the Judaic idea of "partial salvation", possible only for Jews and among these only for the "wise one" (who are "married" to God/Wisdom), offering the way to salvation to "whosoever will": Jesus' death rent the veil of the Jerusalem's Temple (Mat 27:51), the veil that traditionally separated the Sanctum Sanctorum from the eyes of "uninitiated", inviting all, without any social or racial discrimination, to partake of spirituality (Scottish Herald, 1836, 490).

John specifically contrasts the all-encompassing justice, equality for "Jews and Greeks alike", which would be unthinkable among the sages of the Old Testament, (1 Cor.1:24).

As oppose to its Hebrew original form, Wisdom, the Goddess of the Jews par excellence, the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is seen by the writers of the New Testament as a trans-national unifying force: the apostles were filled with it, which enabled them to speak different languages they did not speak before and thus spread the Christian message of the risen God (Acts 1).

In Paul's writings a picture of an egalitarian community emerges: "For in one Spirit we were all baptizes into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free

persons" (1 Cor.12:13). All are children of God, no matter the sex, social status (as in the case of Mary of Magdala), or nationality.

The "Christ's people" described as humble, uneducated, simple, not of the noble birth, poor, sinful, weak, lowly, counting for nothing, the foolish and the despised of the world", (1 Cor. 1:26 - 30) who live based on their heart rather than reason, i.e. what we can call "irrational". These are traditional characteristics given by the dominating "strong, powerful, educated, of noble birth" to whom they oppress, the poor, women and nature.

Gentiles, women and the afflicted/slaves are the respected children of God. The writers of the New Testament overcome the Old Testament's patriarchal tendencies toward children, the requirement of their inferiority and complete obedience to the father, up to children's sacrifice to appease God (Ruether, 2005, 269). Luke 2:42-43 relates that Jesus himself acted disobediently when he as a child left his family to return to the Jerusalem temple. In the many passages of the New Testament children are referred as natural citizens of the redeemed earth, the Kingdom of God. Humble and defenseless children are the greatest in the kingdom of God (Matt.18:2-6). In Mark, Jesus is quoted as saying that being like a child is the only way to enter the Kingdom of heaven (10:13-16). In Matthew we read that Jesus thought that treating children equally is a necessary part of human's spiritual maturity: "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (18:10). The ego-centered, divisive mentality needs time to develop in history as well as on the personal level, and so young children represent the picture of the whole humans before the fall; the

gender-division is not fully manifested before puberty, which reinforces the similarity. In children, the definition "children of God" is amplified.

Early Christian texts do not explicitly speak of the inclusion of the natural world in the Christian brother/sisterhood, but Berry sees a legitimate possibility of such reading.

One of the recurrent themes of Berry's eco-theological thought is the double occurrence of revelation: God revealed himself first through the creation of the universe and then through the holy scriptures of the Bible (Berry 2009, 32). He quotes St. Paul's "we came to know the invisible nature" of God through "the things that have been made" (2009, 32). To Berry, both express the same ultimate spiritual truth and so the Bible can be legitimately read and interpreted in the context of the knowledge of the natural world.

Paul in his passage about the collective body of Christ, "...there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:25-26), a holistic picture of an organic unity emerges. Berry argues that the body of Christ is ultimately the entire universe; "Otherwise, neither the incarnation nor the redemption is complete" (2009, 11), so, to him, Paul's passage could be read in the context of the entire body of the universe. To Berry, the limiting of Christ's purpose to that of saving only humans, albeit all humans, would mean the limitation of Christ's divinity and the Father's status of the Creator of the universe. In Berry, the Ecclesia is not only the Church's collective body of the followers of Jesus, but the whole nature, the whole universe.

Berry argues that Christian brother/sisterhood is wide enough to include non-human life forms and "non-living" nature. The new reading of the Bible should understand the biblical texts in "the larger cosmological and historical context" (2009, 32). This global, or even universal contest gives, to Berry, a better basis to understand the mission of Christ and Christian community. To Berry, such reading is not a misinterpretation of the scriptures but understanding them on a new level of consciousness, the level of "intercommunion with the numinous mystery" in other entities of the universe. It is necessary for us to adopt such vision of the global community if we intend to revert the ecological crisis: "the human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish in the desert" (Berry et al., 1991, 39). Such reading was lost as "our society has lost vital contact with its written scriptures" (2009, 32), so the mainstream Christianity, with its tendency to disrespect the creation, misinterpreted both revelations.

He contends that Christians have been for a long time concerned primarily with divine-human and inter-human affairs in accord with two commandments, love of God and love of neighbors (2009, 71), somewhat conflating the Old Testament's and the New Testament's narratives. Berry, however, adds that there is "a third component that cannot be neglected, namely, love of the natural world" (2009, 71).

Berry points out that love/compassion, expressed by Paul in his reference to the world "groaning for deliverance", needed now for the suffering Earth (2009, 71). Paul, among other early Christian writers, saw all nature as being gravely affected by the fall of man and spoke of nature as groaning a travailing (Romans 8:22). The

nature is striving blindly towards the same goal of union with Christ to which the Church is tending, until it is reestablished in harmony of the returned Eden. To Paul, "Creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God, for creation was made subject to futility..., in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom.8:19-21). This passage could be understood, like it is by Berry, directly, - that we are killing our world by our "managerial mania" (2009, 12).

However, there can be an additional, deeper reading of Paul, based on Genesis' description of the after-Fall earth, corrupted by violence, inherited by Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Eden. The symbolic eating of the fruit initiated the mentality of alienation that led us "to think that we humans liberated ourselves from both Earthly and spiritual dimensions of our surroundings. The ideal ecological process... must be... one that includes the physical and the spiritual as well the physical and the human dimensions of reality", as Berry writes elsewhere (2009, 2). As Paul's notion of the current suffering of the whole nature can be read in terms of the acquisition of the ego causing not exclusively human, but whole earth's nature's loss of Eden, we humans become directly responsible for earth's suffering just by virtue of being "the children of Adam and Eve". Berry echoes this thought: "Christians are ineffective just now largely because we have not understood the need of compassion for suffering Earth" (2009, 71).

It is high time to realize that the "Universe is not a collection of objects" but "a community of subjects" (Swimme, Berry, 1992, 77-79). That means that the deadening hyper-rationalism of the ego must be overcome to see the universe as not

only an outer chaos of forms and events that end up in entropy but also as a meaningful spiritual order of the interconnected beings in all their diversity. To Berry, we need to realize that what makes all of the parts of the universe subjects, live as well as "non-living" nature, is the "interiority principle", a presence of the numinous within each and every part, which makes for a community connected by spiritual interrelatedness/presence of God.

Such transformation of consciousness, which reverses the separation of the ego from the larger and deeper self, prompts the all-inclusiveness. Aided by Christ's archetypal act of choosing his (divine) self over his ego at his death, it will ensure nature's liberation from suffering, slavery and corruption caused by humans' engagement into ego-centric hyper-rationality and shallow materialism.

Sufferings of the entire creation are the reason of the Creator's incarnation and world-redeeming death. As the Christian tradition draws in many ways on the Near-Eastern religious symbolism, Jesus's death and return to sit at the right hand of the Father, (Mark 16:19) would not be unlike the stories of the "dying gods" of the ancient Near East, such as the death of Osiris or Dionysus. However, Jesus's sacrificial death has an aspect that Berry does not explicitly spell out but that is in line with his ecological interpretation of the early Christian text. God's death on earth, as the man Jesus, would not be worth special record if his physical body was buried and left to decompose, as it happens with all corpses. Jesus Christ, however, combines an extreme emotional and physical suffering in his last hours, common for all sentient earth beings and his un-godlike, purely biological, and thus emphatically tragic death with a completely un-biological resurrection, where his physical body,

thoroughly biological, born of a mother and thus an immanent part of the creation, is "spiritualized", i.e. becomes so permeable for his spirit that it becomes one with it. It does not mean that his physical body disappears, since Jesus comes, bodily, to his disciples after his resurrection (e.g. Mark 16:9,12; John 21:26-29). The new properties of physicality, of the createdness, demonstrated by Jesus, give hope of the possible return of lost immortality, of the redemption of all creation from emotional and physical suffering, pain and death.

Christian idea of life after death is a holistic idea of spiritualizing the body, which becomes possible to achieve by the creation through Jesus, as oppose to pre-Christian religions with their body/spirit dualism, where the earthly bodies are temporary vessels of spirit, irreparably destroyed by death and left to decay. Once achieved by human Jesus, through interconnectedness of all creation, resurrection, immortality, the recovered Eden becomes an anticipation and hope of the followers of Christ. Rising (with his) physical body means rising of physicality, creation to the divine status.

Christian mystical tradition seems to confirm Berry's reading of Christ's sacrifice as not limited to redeeming humans: Jesus "takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) with his blood, spilled from the cross. It had flown to the ground and, through the contact with the earth, his spirit instantly penetrated the world and cleansed it all from the evil conditions following the Fall (Heindel, 1998, 104), as a form of self-sacrificial baptism, to prepare the nature for the beginning of a return to the edenic, non-violent conditions of peaceful co-existence based on universal justice and equality. Such belief shows early Christians' vision of the earth as a community,

where humans and nature are both legitimate members, equally valued and loved by God.

Berry emphasizes both Christ's cosmological aspect (the universe emanates as his body) and his immanency within the earth: Jesus' relation to nature can be also seen in Christian celebration of his life in projection on the yearly cycle. Berry thinks that, for instance, "our Lenten season is not merely a religious or human ritual". Berry sees its origin in a profound Earth renewal process; "the redemptive sacrifice of Christ was associated with the springtime renewal of Earth" (2009, 13). Jesus's birth and resurrection are both connected with the earth renewal cycle; the time of birth being tied with the winter solstice, the birth of the new sun, new light, as at the beginning of the creation, and the Catholic Lenten season marks the beginning of the earth's productive period. Christ's life was weaved into the life of nature. Jesus, in his words to his disciples, states that baked grain and fermented grape juice are his body and blood, which makes him not only heavenly Son of transcended God, but the Spirit of the earth as well, whose life cycle reflects in the agricultural cycle, including earth's wakening to the lengthening daylight, tilling, sowing, tending crops, harvest, celebration of the plenty, and rest until the next awakening.

Berry emphasizes "Christ identity with the natural world" (2009, 93). Jesus Christ can be seen as the divinity of nature in his immanent and intimate connection with the life of the entire creation, which is reflected in human-nature relationship in the early Christian writings.

Jesus is baptized and baptizes in natural settings, rendering the river water holy, before the sacred act becomes a ritual and is performed in churches. He preaches on

a mountain, by a river; he comes in contact with the Father on the top of the mountain Sinai, where two of his disciples witness his transfiguration. He briefly appears in a big city, which brings about his death; he has the forebodings of death and steps out to meditate on it on the Mount of Olives, and dies in the natural setting.

Nature is largely included in the narrative of the New Testament and is seen in constant contact with the spiritual world. The waters of the pool of Bethesda, where Jesus heals the crippled man, becomes stirred as by themselves every now and then, "for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted" (John 5:4, NAS, 1995). Nowhere in the New Testament humans are juxtaposed to nature. The simple fishermen, first followers of Jesus live in nature and of nature.

In his teachings, Jesus uses metaphors borrowed from the natural world; he brings the example of the modest wild lily as an object of God's nurturing love (Matt.6:28-29), a blooming fig tree is compared to changes in the world that announce the approach of the kingdom of God (Luke 21: 29-33), compares this Kingdom to a tiny mustard seed, that produces a very large plant (Matt.13:31-32). He compares himself with the (grape) vine, his disciples with its branches, and the Father with the gardener (John 15:1-5). In Luke 5:10 we read that Jesus sees Peter fishing for human souls as his apostle; early Christians were using the image of fish to recognize each other (Mulder, 1991, 23). The fish symbolism ties Jesus with the Mother-Goddess in her primordial aspect of the waters of chaos. The lost souls swim

in it before being caught in the new order of creation brought by Christ. The writers of the gospels are aware of the natural background of their narratives and weave natural entities into the story of God's appearance on earth as its legitimate participants. Christ can be seen, due to him being God incarnate and human at once, as a transcendent-immanent deity who unites earth and God, matter and spirit, as a god of a truly holistic religious worldview.

Jesus symbolizes the new/renewed creation, his life is one with the earth.

According to Berry's interpretation of the New Testament, the creation is a sacred community of diverse but equal beings and entities that exists in a family relational mode.

Berry offers a reading of the Trinity symbolism as a family model (2009, 56). To Berry, the three Persons in God interrelate like a family: father, son, mother (in Berry's interpretation of the scriptures, the Holy Spirit has an implicit feminine character, in line with the early Christian beliefs). According to his thought, God projects his qualities onto the universe as his body in the process of creation, which means projecting the archetypal "family mode" as a mode of interrelation between all created entities.

The created entities in all their diversity are brothers and sisters by virtue of being the children of the same spiritual Parent(s). Drawing on Psalm 82:6, "I said, "You are gods, And all of you are sons of the Most High", Jesus of the John 10:34-36 confirms the truthfulness of the Scripture, emphasizing the equality of all as children of the same spiritual Father and including himself into the universal "sibling" relationship with others.

Jesus teaches to treat others as brothers and sisters; "whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt.12:50). Echoing the words of the Psalm 82:6, Jesus reveals that humans are gods, reminding them that the true equality can be established through spiritual "sonship" of God. Berry echoes the idea, stating that "Every living being is cousin to every other being"(2009, 33). To him, the creation exists in a state of "the genetic relatedness of every being in the universe with every other being in the universe" (2009, 33). Berry emphasizes that in the larger picture, Berry's reading of the scriptures is an all-inclusive community held together by family relatedness.

Berry contends that Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, which speaks of all things as held together in Christ, and the passage that in time God will be "all in all" from 1 Corinthians 15:28 can both be seen as a statement "that the ultimate sacred community could be the universe itself" (Berry 2009, 39). These "all things" Berry understands as a direct reference to the earth with its live and "non-living" nature and, on a larger scale, all the universe. Berry sees "all things" deeply intrinsically interconnected by virtue of being permeated by love of God, being his (Son's) one communal body. Such understanding of the intercommunion within the universe is based on the mystical early Christian idea of the archetypal sacred marriage of Christ and Ecclesia, drawn on the symbolism the relationship between Wisdom and Jerusalem reflected also in the Song of Songs. Ecclesia was thought of as the collective body of Christ, a vessel of his spirit. Such idea is referred widely to in the gospels, as was noted by Ruether (Ruether, 2005, 138). Matthew, Mark, and Luke

speak of "the bridegroom" (Matt.9:15; Mark 2:19, Luke 5:34-35), and in John we find: "He who has a bride is a bridegroom" (John 3:29).

Love as the inner mode of existence of the trinitary God is expressed in the sacred, unconditional, self-sacrificial love of God for the creation, which becomes the means of the communal interconnectedness of all parts of the creation.

"Earth entire was born of divine love and will survive only through our human and Christian love", writes Berry (2009, 71), his thought congruent with the reading of pauline teaching about agape as equal selfless love of all parts/entities of the creation. The whole universe was created/differentiated by Father's love. God lives deep within creatures as the inner self, as it was noted in deep psychology: "the self ... is identical with the image of God" (Jung, 1963, 499, #711), no matter if it is a conscious being or an unconscious entity. The universe is one gigantic body, the body of God, therefore all the parts are kept in integrity of the universal bonding by God's love. All the three modes of God's existence harmonize with each other and complement each other, as the three modes of God's love for the universe.

Christian ethical ideal of the relationships of the interconnectedness is most fully expressed in 1 Cor.13:1-13, where Paul expands on the Christian ideal of the disinterested, all-uniting love. Even though every person within the collective body of Christ, the Ecclesia, should "strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts" (1Cor.12:27), such as Wisdom, discussed in the earlier section, there still is, according to Paul, a more excellent way: love, that streams from within, from the depths of human nature, spiritually gifted or not. Wisdom is better than might, according to the Old Testament; however, love is better than wisdom: speaking

human and angelical tongues (gift to the Apostles by Wisdom/the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Acts 2:1-4), gifts of prophecy, comprehension of all mysteries and all knowledge, even faith strong as if to move mountains (attributes and gifts of Wisdom to the chosen people), even self-sacrifice are all nothing without love. The gifts of wisdom can be formal, as wisdom is gained individualistically and can be divisive (Wisdom and Jerusalem); as an intellectual quality, wisdom can be easily corrupted by reason, inflating self-pride.

The Greek word used for "love" is *agape*, which was a rare word in extrabiblical Greek, not a common word for love, found only in the Greek translation of Hebrew scripture, the Septuagint, at the time; (Freedman 1992, 490) Paul also uses it in Rom.5:5, (Thiselton, 2006, 326) to explain that this type of love originates in God and is passed down to us by the Holy Spirit. Paul in 1Cor.13:5 tells us that *agape* does not seek its own interests, it is opposite of selfish love, *eros*, which can transpose a person, a Thou, into an object of possession where love turns into domination (Thiselton, 2006, 490). *Eros* and *Gnosis* both have to do with the mastery of an object (Thiselton, 2006, 490), while *agape* does not aim to possess; "no one should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor", (1Cor.10:24) "For Christ did not please himself"; (Rom.15:3) he lived out *agape* by his self-sacrificial death on the cross. *Agape* could be seen as a term introduced into the vernacular language of the young Christian church to express the new, higher ethical ideal of pure, unlimited, unconditional love experienced as the essence of the universe.

Both possession and mastery signify the relationship of an isolated subject, the ego, to the desired objects, spelling out the alienation of the self from the other;

agape, however, is predominantly the love from God and for God; relating to the neighbors with *agape* first of all means treating them according to the maxim "you are gods", the way God should be treated by the faithful. *Agape* stands as the highest, so far, human standard of the relationships, where the ego is transcended and the other is perceived as the self. Love "bears all things" (1Cor.1:7), all God's creatures can be seen as instruments of cosmogonic love: it is not desiring, preferring, favoring, wishing, but something superior to the individual, a unified and undivided whole. (Jung, 1961, 353-354) Christian love, *agape*, is a certain vantage point that takes us out of our daily submergence into the small, separate and personal, to the level where all separate beings are united; it gives humans an ability to scale down their personality, suggesting a presence of something higher than hyperinflated persona, characteristic to the Western culture. Such love for the other is the sacralization of the other, the condition related to the fuller experience of life, experience of life as full of meaning.

It is not an impersonal, "abstract" love, only extra-rational and extra-egoic, it is compassion that completely neglects differences. To humans, it gives the potential possibility to include, as "us", "all the fishes, flies, shrubs, and amoebas... (...) the rocks too, and the interstellar gasses, and whatever exists" (Tilley, 1995, 99). Such way to relate brims with the potential of all-inclusiveness. *Agape* is described as a function of the heart but it is also based on understanding, conscious work of envisioning God in the other; it unites the heart and the head, feelings and discrimination.

The introduction of this type of the relationship in among the Christian community makes a cultural break away from common understanding of the interrelational love as exclusively sexual. *Agape* transcends all differences such as sex, age, social position, ethnicity etc.; it eliminates the division into the self and the other in rising to love all and any part of the creation more than one's own ego, as much as one loves God and as much as God loves us "in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom.5:8): spirit embraces spirit. The "createdness", mortality, physicality and separatedness of the creation is transcended in *agape*, merging all parts of it into togetherness and the creation and the Creator into unity and immortality. *Agape* as a higher type of relation is able to transcend the differences between the other and the object/self, the other's separatedness itself, which all appears to be ultimately the same thing, and to love the other as the self.

As the birth of Christ is parallel to a new creation, or a renewal of the creation, *agape* then also has its parallel in Genesis. Being a relatively new concept, to the masses, at Paul's time, it has its origin in the relationships between all created entities in Eden. However, *agape* has a specific feature that makes it a unique ideal of the relationships between God's creatures after the Fall: it embraces creation in its current state of imperfection; the other who is supposed to be loved more than one's own ego is expected to be loved as is, with his shadowy part, with his evil: we should love the wicked. John the Apostle says: "We should love one another" (1John 3:11), since, as the children of God, we are all "brothers".

Jesus introduces a revolutionary update of Leviticus 19:18, which taught to love our neighbor, one's people as oneself, stressing the new ideal of loving our enemy, "for if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have?" (Matt.5:43). Those who don't do the Father's will are also included in the earth's family through the communal relationship of love (Matt.5:43-46), as we are told to love those who hate us. This type of love is free from partialities, it is the way to overcome the suffering conditions of the fallen creation, its shadow, evil side.

This love is not only love for the blood relatives, for those like us and for those we like; it is definitely the love of the other, the love of those who are different, who hate us: "Bless those who persecute [you], bless and do not curse them". (Rom.13:14). *Agape* can be seen as a mode of a family relationship, where all members are equally loved, respected and appreciated by their parent(s) and by each other.

Christian God is love, which means God is in relationships, he is the relationship between all that exists, he is the interconnectedness and relatedness of all beings. Jesus exclusively addresses to God as Abba, informally, as "daddy", and teaches his followers to call him that (Stein, Jesus, 1996, 132), which amplify the interpretation of all beings as a family.

Our comprehension of the world after the Fall becomes partial, we perceive the world as a set of dualities, our wisdom turned into reason; "...we know partially and we prophecy partially, but when perfect comes, the partial will pass away" (1Cor.13:9-10). *Agape* "never fails", "endures all things", it is kind; it unites opposites and embraces all; it is perfect, but never loud or pompous. (1Cor.13:4-8)

Agape has power to unite the opposites and thus repeat the act of creation, where feminine *prima materia* and Spirit were first united. It is love that possesses a creative power. *Agape*, in Paul, is the strongest thing in the world, stronger even than faith and hope (1Cor.1:13); love seems to mean to Paul some invisible underlying, true foundation of the universe, not unlike the firmament of the creation narrative that existed before the light.

Berry's idea that cosmological Wisdom comes to Earth through wisdom of women, seems to resonate well with the Christian idea of *agape*. In the pre-Christian history, love usually had been associated with females and attributed to goddesses and to the Goddess par excellence. Paul speaks about maturity, his own masculine maturity, while explaining agape: "When I was a child, I used to ... think ... like a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things" (1 Cor.13:11), "when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away" (1 Cor.13:10). Maturity he understands as totality, as stepping out of the "childish" partiality, as overcoming of warring dualities, rising over dividing rationality by introducing unselfish, disinterested love. The implication seems to be that love is immanent in femininity but only comes to properly spiritually mature men. Women therefore can be understood as spiritual guides for men when it comes to extra-personal loving relatedness, as the story of Mary and Joseph shows (Joseph providing physical conditions for Mary's spiritual service, Luke 2:8-14).]

Agape in the pauline Christian thought can be seen as interchangeable with "God". "He who does not love, does not know God"(1John 1:5). If we substitute "love" by "God" in 1Cor. 13, we would have a nearly perfect description of Christian

God: as a superior to the individual, a unified and united whole, related to the process of creation, extra-egotic and transrational, *agape* is a deep mystery, the object of aspirations of Christian mysticism. When it comes to agape, "we may name *ignotum per ignotius*, the unknown by the more unknown – by the name of God" (Jung, 1961, in Tilley, 1995, 93). "Love calls us beyond our most bounded selves, and that which calls we have sometimes named God" (Tilley, 1995, 93).

God being love means that God, who in Judaism is referred as "the Most High" and is thought of as dwelling in heaven, is also found in human heart, legitimately belonging in our inner world. Such internalizing of the Creator, establishing God as the true inner center, higher than the ego, "the Other within oneself" can be seen as an impulse, in the early Christian thought, of loving the other as oneself, of counterbalancing and, ultimately, overcoming growing individualism in the forming Western mentality.

Berry seems to be building on pauline internalization of the Creator: he speaks of the outer and inner dimensions of God when arguing that by destroying the integrity of nature we simultaneously empty our inner world. "Our inner spiritual world cannot be activated without experience of the outer world of wonder for the mind, beauty for the imagination, and intimacy for the emotions" (2009, 74). Berry cites an equation between the "profound intimacy with the inner self" and the perception of Earth as precious (2009, 80), thus emphasizing the necessity of eliminating the negative space between the ego and the self within the individual in order to "bring about the difficult transformation in human life required of us" in

order to heal the earth (2009, 80). Such transformation of consciousness, a *metanoia*, according to Paul, is acquired through the disinterested love.

In Berry's thought, humans have cosmic dimensions, assured by initial, cosmic dimensions of Christ (2009, 30). He argues that in accord with the teachings of the Apostles, there is a Christ dimension to human community of the earth (2009, 45). By Christ dimension Berry primarily means the cosmological Christ, thus establishing intimate relationships between humans and the spiritual underpinnings of the creation. In humans, universe in its entirety reaches the level of conscious self-awareness (2009, 42). Humans, therefore, are reflections of the original *Lux Fiat*, the realization of the universe's strife for self-consciousness.

Christ's birth as a human has a notion of the repetition of the creation of the intelligent universe out of darkness; Jesus says of himself: "I came into this world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness" (John 12:46). It is a re-creation, the light of God now came into the world as all-uniting love. The new master of the creation says of himself: "I came into this world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness" (John 12:46). He corresponds to the *Lux Fiat* of the abstract, likened to the Greek philosophy Genesis P (Callicott, 1999, 202-203) and represents the newly-born, divinely conceived principle of consciousness, which in its early stages is associated with the ego, reason and the individualism (C.G.Jung, 1958, 79f).

Berry argues, quoting St. Augustine, that as the Trinity shows the psychological model of intellect reflecting on itself (the Son being "the principle of articulation", a mediator, a mirror of sorts) (2009, 56), that is projected onto the (Trinitary) God's

body, the universe, through the process of creation and so in an inherent ability of the creation, according to Berry's thought. Jesus can be seen as the archetypal principle of consciousness, "divine" by nature but coming and dwelling in the world.

Berry points to the transformations in human consciousness that bring us closer to the understanding of our interconnectedness with nature in the context of the interconnectedness of all parts of the universe. He writes that "within human intelligence the creative process attains a capacity for self-awareness and for a human inter-communion with the numinous mystery present through this process" (2009, 24). Self-awareness, even though initially leading to the divisive ego-mentality (the Fall) has, as its next level, an ability of internalization as self-reflection, which leads to experiencing God's "numinous mystery" within, as the state of the inter-communion with the higher self.

Such level of awareness, achieved through the internalization of the idea of God, in a *metanoia*, is needed now when we "are rewriting The City of God of Saint Augustine, not this time as the story of two cities seeking each other's destruction but as the story of an immense cosmic process, both spiritual and physical from the beginning" (Berry, 2009, 23). St. Augustine's City of God is the picture of the recovered Eden, a global community where the consolidating power of love and concern for others overcomes the destructive tendencies of the self-centeredness. Berry goes on to assert that we need to establish ourselves in a single integral community including all component members of our planet; Berry draws this assertion on the reasoning of St. Paul in the twelfth chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians (2009, 49).

Berry expresses concern that modern Christians has difficulty relating to the earth stemming from their reading of the Book of Revelation. John's "promise of bliss in a transformed earthly context" leads to "radical dissatisfaction within the historical process" (2009, 40). Berry contends that our times reveal deep conviction of "the prophetic announcement that justice will one day be achieved, that the human conditions will be radically altered by a complete renewal of the established order of things in favor of a new Earth and a new heaven" (Berry, 2009 A, 64).

In the Apocalypse's vision of salvation, "a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue" (Rev.7:9) inherits the transformed world. There will be "a new earth and a new heaven" (Rev.21:1), i.e., the new universe. John seems to see it as a universal externalized *metanoia*, it is "not merely ethical renovation but transformation of the fundamental cosmic structure" (Beale, 1999, 1040).

In John's vision, the natural world will be cleansed and restored, but not in its former, pre-fall state: "it will not be a return to Eden – we do not grow backwards – but the flowering of a new level of community" (Tilley, 1995, 105). The notion of the renewed, perfected earth seems to echo the theme of the feminine in the Bible: the creation that was produced by Wisdom and fell through Eve will be perpetually renewed through Mary. Mary is, symbolically, purified matter, the transformed earth.

The "new earth and new heaven", a new purified from evil and violence existence based on the principle of equality, the love of the other, and interconnectedness in

the early Christian thought is assured by spiritual *metanoia*, the reconnection with our higher self.

Modern Christian "radical dissatisfaction within the historical process", leading to the difficulty in relating to Earth seems to be unfounded: John's vision of the future does not eliminate the earth in favor of a pure spiritual existence. He can be read as speaking of the earth purified from violence, suffering, enslaved conditions of the nature mentioned in Paul, brought about by human desire of divisive ego-knowledge. Earth, nature are being included into the Christian idea of salvation in such reading of the New Testament.

The early Christian thought can be read as wedding the linear history of the world with the cyclical time-thinking: the glorious result of history/creation is being included in the triumph of the Spirit as the salvation. It is not just a shedding the material conditions of the earth's nature and returning to the same pristine spiritual state of the mutual pre-conscious interdependency of Eden; nature, as we saw earlier, is reborn and renewed, spiritualized, purified, to become the new Eden and new Jerusalem, the unity, totality, conjunction of oppositions of spirit-matter, humans-nature, a fully realized sacred marriage. It is a holistic vision that combines the rational linear thinking and the cyclical, mythological perception of time and seems to accomplish what C. Merchant was looking for by delimiting, analyzing and consecutively rejecting the "progressive" and "declension" narratives, an all-inclusive story of Earth.

As, how Berry puts it, the new Earth will not come down to us from heaven without a joint human effort to bring this new age about (2009A, 64), we need to

start from developing a new vision of history, the New Story of the universe. Early Christian thought could be interpreted as containing the basis for such vision and could be developed into a foundation for the Christian ecocentric ethics, to anchor and direct eco-feminists' movement to save and protect the natural environment.

* * *

The Old Testament does have a Goddess, who is the feminine side of God of the Yahwistic tradition. Hokma-Sophia has many traits that, while tying her to the archetypal male-female dynamics of Genesis, give us additional insight to the feminine within the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Sophia-Wisdom is a canonized by the Hebraic-Judaic tradition Mother-Goddess of the Ancient Near East. Unlike in modern eco-feminist revival of the Goddess, Sophia is a uniting force, nurturing and fair mother of the natural world; of all of the creation, men and the products of the "masculine" mind (reason; technology in the form of a city etc.) included. She does not conceive and operate the world alone but, being a half of the whole, acts as a complimentary part to its masculine opposite, together constituting the transcendent-immanent totality of (androgynous) God.

She is not a created quasi-divinity in service of Yahweh, but co-eternal, consubstantial with him, both being differentiated polarities of the creative divine Force. She descends out of the mouth of the divine totality as the Divinity's breath or creative Word, ordering the world out of primordial chaos and darkness.

She is a life-giver in a maternal, biological sense, but also a giver of a life spiritual, ego-transcending, communal with the totality of other lives, and thus of immortality. She is a goddess/giver of the principle of self-consciousness. She is Light in the darkness, divine Breath-*ruach*, the most pure virgin spirit, mighty life-giver. She is associated with the Lux Fiat of Genesis 1, and symbolized as a bird/dove.

She is the Creatrix in the cosmological and biological sense, but also the principle of creativity within human mind.

Her role is also to eventually pass her omniscience to humans, which indicates her salvific status.

She is the ultimate expression of creativity, which is, together with self-awareness, are feminine human characteristics. She is the archetype of self-awareness, which is the ultimate remedy for the split between the self and the other.

She is the guardian of equality, justice and love among all, a protectress of the entities/parts of creation as a sacred mirror of its divine Creator.

She is set against separation and is a uniting force, attracted to its opposite pole to embrace it in a sacred marriage to eternally renew the creation.

Even though Sophia of the Old Testament is the mother, the spirit and the protectress of all natural world, among humans she is partial to Israel, as it is Yahweh, associated with Jerusalem and so is shown by Jewish sages as divisive and can hardly be seen as a universal uniting principle. Such all-embracing, impartial, uniting, universal love and equality principle, as well as the development of the principle of self-awareness to the next level we see in the coming of the figure of Jesus Christ.

Early Christian thought weaves around the themes of God's immanency-transcendence as the androgynous Being, and God's *modus operandi* as self-transcendent, self-sacrificial love for all creation. The "Son", God incarnate, reflects the same androgynous nature as a compound of the "Daughter", Wisdom, and Jesus.

Mary's parthenogenesis is empowering. Wisdom created this world, Eve caused it to fall, through Mary the unity can be reborn again. Women are seen as naturally proficient in the ways of *agape*, while only mature men attain it, therefore women are men's spiritual guides in the matter of the communal love.

Christian ethics related to the community widens the Old Testament ideal to eliminate social, racial, gender, and age inequities, denouncing violence and force as the tools of the mentality of domination. Such inclusive nucleus is formative to the holistic ethical vision which includes nature as a part of creation. The creation, the universe is God's body, the ultimate sacred community of all natural beings as well as "non-living" nature.

Jesus's life is intimately interconnected with life of the earth and the universe, he establishes the symbolism of the earth's abundance as the central symbolism of the nascent Church. He is symbolic of the new creation.

Principle of love, non-violence, acceptance, and equality as a family relational mode culminates in the early Christian idea of the universal brother(sister)hood, wide enough to be able to include all creation indiscriminately. It is the model for the world "outside God", the mode of relation of the self to the other where the other is seen as sacred and the relation is of love: "love the other like yourself". The

self is sacralized. The love for the other can be seen as an outer projection that reflects in overcoming the split in the self and the other.

Agape as a universal uniting principle comes with this new level of consciousness in order to revert evil and suffering in the world. Jesus's sacrifice is an intrinsic law of Divinity, his violent death washes the imprints of past violence, creating condition for establishing an earth-wide human-nature community.

The internalization of the image of God projects the edenic state as a condition that needs to be cultivated within one's heart. Such transformation of consciousness is achieved through a *metanoia*. The Christian promise professes the New heaven and the New earth, a purified universe purged of violence and held together by disinterested love. It is not a return to the primordial Eden but a better reconstruction - a new level of community.

Early Christian narrative combines the linear logical and cyclical mythological perceptions of time, creating a holistic story of the creation.

Such interpretation of the early Christian narrative supports an ecocentric ethic.

CHAPTER 3

LIVING OUT THE ECOCENTRIC ETHICS.

1. INTRODUCTION

The viability of this paper's proposal of the theoretical formulation of the Christian ecocentric ethics' principles can be addressed through the test of their practical application. The Roman Catholic nuns often referred to as the green sisters live and act to minimize human impact on nature, to protect the environment, raise awareness of nature's needs, and to demonstrate a deep interconnectedness between human and nature's well-being.

In this chapter, I show that the Christian tradition, as a confluence of organic cultural flows has developed the undercurrents that are not only environmentally friendly but serve as examples of practical applicability of Christian teachings to a "green" living and environmental protection. The Christian message in its application to the natural world is lived and practiced by the Catholic "Green nuns".

I will look into how their practices, activities, actions, and programs incorporate the above proposal of the all-inclusive ethics, and what incongruences with my proposal they may have.

2. THE GREEN SISTERS OF GENESIS FARM

When addressing women's special role in the transition from present situation of the environmental crisis to the "viable mode of existence for the planetary community" (Berry, 2009, 79), Berry notes that "the appeal of this larger dimension of Christian concern for Earth has led to a remarkable movement, namely, the founding of an association called "Sisters of Earth"" (2009, 78). Sisters of Earth, or the green sisters are dedicated to live in practice, through every-day's routine, the principles of the eco-ethic which are Christian and ecocentric, bringing the theoretical musing of Christian eco-feminists, environmental philosophers and theologians to the life test. The most visible theoretical influence on the green sisters movement has come from the works of Berry, among other multiple sources are eco-feminist Charlene Spretnak and Indian physicist-philosopher Vandana Shiva (S. Taylor, 2007, 8). The green sisters' practice is based on the large confluence of American Catholic liberalism, liberation theology, feminism, the women's spirituality movement, the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic back-to-the-land movement, the peace and social justice movement, the Catholic rural life movement, mystical and meditative practices from the Middle Ages (S. Taylor, 2007, 8-9). Leaving the work of purely theoretical ecological musings to the men, the green sisters stay on the land with the land, they garden, cook, supervise eco-friendly construction, clean and teach in a feminine, motherly, applied fashion.

Very little research was previously made on the work of the green sisters (a very significant study conducted by Sarah Taylor, S. Taylor, 2007, is the biggest work

done so far), and the outstanding work in healing the earth as well as healing the human split from nature conducted by the sisters is not widely known; however, the word is spreading and the movement is growing.

There are about fifty ecological learning centers, organic farms and other earth ministries run by green sisters in the United States and Canada. Because of the limitations set by the format of this paper, I concentrate here on the Genesis Farm, an organic farm and earth ministry located in Blairstown, New Jersey, cofounded and directed by Dominican Sister Miriam MacGillis and run by Dominican Sisters from Caldwell, NJ. The Genesis Farm's vision, based on the notion that the spiritual world pervades the world of matter (Miriam MacGillis, *Food as a Sacrament*, in S. Taylor, 2007, 200-2001), interweaves with some aspects of the mystic tradition in Christianity and is close to the interpretation of the early strand of the Christian tradition given in the second chapter. Genesis Farm also draws on the modern scientific story of the universe.

MacGillis sees her mission as a direct and evolving continuity of the Christian tradition of the Dominican order. In a video interview to the PlanetForward, she thus defined it: "The overall mission of Genesis Farm is trying to address the crisis that our Earth is going through... It is in dire straits at this moment of its own evolutionary process; and this mission stems from the Dominican order to which I belong in its search for truth, in its trying to find the key issues at any time in history... We try to provide education or understanding, that will bring everything forward"(PlanetForward. 2013). She accentuates education, raising human self-awareness as the citizens of Earth and the awareness of the living world of nature as

the organization's primary goal; this is achieved through many workshops, energy saving techniques, and allowing individuals to come together to learn a system of the diverse ways to maintain the health of the Earth.

However, the mere fact of its existence is educational: Genesis Farm does not only hold classes and actively advocates earth-friendly techniques and engages in active opposition to environmentally harmful enterprises. The nuns' simple mundane life-sustaining activities and practices are understood as an Earth liturgy in terms that they are done mindfully, meaningfully, prayerfully, reverently, with a concern for the collective "other", Earth's nature. It is possible to say that the whole Farm was designed and is maintained as an embodiment of practical take on Berry's interpretation of Christian faith as containing the ecocentric ethics.

When discussing different readings of the Fall narrative, Merchant relates one of the feminist interpretations, according to which "Eve was the one who questioned the established order of things and initiated change... As prototypic scientist, Eve could hold the key to recovering Eden through a new science" (Merchant, 2003, 21). The sisters of Genesis Farm do question the established order and are initiating the change. They live to bring about the New earth, the flourishing community of life in its spiritual and physical/biological aspects, to recover Eden. While the sisters' efforts are to live the Paradise now, today, in every day's doings, they recognize that there are plenty of problems in modern society that should be eliminated for them to establish an inner Eden; it is not about the expectations of everything to be perfect: "You can turn what you live now – into Eden, if there is acceptance, love, reverence, and humility. ... Eden is creating happiness in our life. Happiness is

different than perfection. It is now. Of course, there are things – like wars, racism, capital punishment; those interfere with me living Paradise now” (MacGillis, 2013).

In my analysis of Genesis Farms' daily activities, events, educational programs, social actions I try to see how my proposal of the principles of the theocentric-ecocentric Christian ethics is, or is not, incorporated and reflected and in their multidimensional, complex, and labor-intensive "green" work. In my study I analyzed the wealth of documents posted on Genesis Farm website, used other on-line sources on the sisters of the Farm, and conducted a telephone interview with Sr. Miriam MacGillis, the director, on October 4, 2013. I let the sisters speak for themselves.

(1) Reverence to the divine source of life as the archetypal source of love for the other, recognizing the numinous within all works of nature, including us, humans, valuing the other as the self.

The sisters' ethics can be said as starting at the recognition that all parts/entities of the world participate in the divine: "Genesis Farm is rooted in a belief that the Universe, Earth, and all reality are permeated by the presence and power of that ultimate Holy Mystery that has been so deeply and richly expressed in the world's spiritual traditions. We try to ground our ecological and agricultural work in this deep belief. This Sacred Mystery, known by so many religious names, is the common thread in our efforts." (Genesis Farm. 2013). Sister MacGillis considers one of the main focuses of Genesis Farm's work as "to change the Cosmology, just (seeing) that the Western society, especially United States, is operating out of the world perception that nature does not have a soul" (MacGillis, 2013).

The recognition that all natural entities and life forms, including humans, are parts of the divine Mystery, parts of Christ's body, is translated on the language of practical observing, through the year, of the planet's natural life cycles: "It has been a tradition here for over twenty-five years to mark the passages of Earth as our planet orbits the sun, giving rise to the marvelous diversity of temperatures, hours of daylight, and range of forms that are part of Earth's living garment of life. The seasonal changes have shaped humanity's understanding, its imagination, and its deepest realms of creativity over our short history on the planet, and call us to contemplate the meaning and purpose of our lives. We gather on this land, in the presence of all its communities of life, to express our gratitude and to deepen our covenant with the present and future. We welcome friends, neighbors and all people of good will to join us in these sacred seasonal moments"(PlanetForward. 2013).

Genesis Farm's vision that Earth's cyclical life plays an important role in shaping up human deepest emotional life, cognitive matrix and creative expressions echoes Berry's ideas of the earth as a spiritual being in the cosmic realm of God, and has a practical realization in Genesis Farm's many educational programs, such as the Earth Literacy. Sister MacGillis convinced that "everything is endowed with spirit" (MacGillis, 2013).

A recent event at Genesis Farm, held on Sunday, September 29 was in line with the ethical principle of the reverence to the divine source of life I propose. The Farm-to-Fork Anniversary Gala featured food raised at the Community Supported Garden at Genesis Farm and surrounding farms (Genesis Farm. 2013). The event was dedicated to "Honoring Local, Seasonal Food" understood by the sisters as a

Eucharist, appreciatively and reverently partaking a sacred nourishment that the Mystery within the universe provided us with to sustain our life. The Sacred Mystery, to the sisters, may be experienced in every-day's life, if we approach the so-called mundane affairs with appreciation and proper humility.

The sisters' recognition of the numinous within all works of nature can be seen in the creation of the Earth Meditation Trail made by the artist Sharon Brady some twenty years ago at Genesis Farm; it takes about an hour to walk through. This is how sister MacGillis explains how the Trail can be experienced: "It meant to suggest that if I go through it, it gives back to me many things about my own life. There is a booklet at the trail that navigates you. The trail is very interactive, there are mirrors you can look at yourself in... It's very sacred" (MacGillis, 2013).

To MacGillis, the sacredness of the place was only brought into a focus by human work, and is relieved in the act of human-nature interaction: "The artist who created it slept in a tent there for several months; she listened what the land says. She barely changed the land, everything there is very natural... It is a place where we come to be with nature. Nature is looking at you as much as you are looking at nature; the animals are present to you as much as you are present to them. The things you see there mean some things from your inner life" (MacGillis, 2013). The Trail is designed to (re)establish oneness of humans and nature: "There is a place with a writing that says, "Listen your Heartbeat", and there is a drum, you beat the drum to that rhythm, to tell the creatures you are one with them" (MacGillis, 2013).

(2) Human active role in reversing the condition of the ecological crisis and creating conditions to sustain life and well-being of all natural entities, including humans,

based on taking on personal responsibility for the destruction. An ecologically sound management consistent with the continued health of the earth community.

The sisters' active changing of the human imprint on the earth ecology starts within their own mentality and lifestyle, their personal *metanoia*: "We realize there are no easy or quick answers. We try to learn more and experiment with changing ourselves and our own behavior. We recognize the difficulty of this, and encourage each other to be creative and hopeful rather than discouraged or paralyzed into non-action" (Genesis Farm. 2013).

The deep inner change in human perception of the world leads, to the green sisters, to increasing sense of personal responsibility for the earth, and creativity in reversing the conditions of the present ecological crisis.

The sisters grow an extensive garden where no inorganic herbicides/chemical fertilizers are used, involving nearby residents in participation in growing heirloom, organic, non- GMO (genetically modified organism) vegetables and fruit.

An educational document posted on Genesis Farm website explains the sisters' no-herbicide choice: "As weeds adapt to Roundup, they have become resistant to chemical dousing. In effect, "super weeds" have evolved, which are attacked with higher concentrations of spray and lead to even further damage to the ecosystem" (Caldara 2012). The sisters strive to develop an ecologically sound management of the land they are responsible for.

The sisters actively speak out against the transgenic organisms; the term includes genetically modified organisms, GMO, as well as genetically engineered, GE, food. "Genesis Farm joined with 82 other plaintiffs who represent the organic seed

and food farming communities to file suit against the corporation Monsanto" (Genesis Farm. 2013). The Farm fights the production and commercial spread of the transgenic organisms as a threat to human and plant-fed domestic animals' health, as much as to the entire plant kingdom. "Seeds everywhere are in danger of being contaminated by the pollen released from transgenic plants that Monsanto has engineered with genes from another species. This invasion of the cell is antithetical to the careful breeding of food crops over the millennia and threatens not only cultivated plants but all plant life. The need to protect the integrity and viability of all living plants is now of utmost importance" (Genesis Farms 2013).

A document created by Liz Marshal of Genesis Farm expands on the sisters' legal fight against genetically engineered organisms production. "If a seed represents the deep mysteries of the Universe, then transgenic seed – those that are implanted with genes of another species – represents a violent desecration of that mystery. ...Our suit is seeking legal protection for those who are constantly threatened by contamination from Monsanto's seeds. ... (W)hen faced with the dire problems caused by transgenic seed, it is clear that the ethical and scientific framework for granting patents has been woefully deficient." (Marshal 2013)

In 1998, the Community Supported Garden at Genesis Farm has launched the apprenticeship program as an educational component of its work. The apprentices are provided with housing, a stipend, and plenty of vegetables to eat (Genesis Farm. 2012), as the Garden's newsletter of year 2012 states.

The sisters are actively involved in raising public awareness about the value of local foods and on helping farmers find more profitable and sustainable ways to

grow them, and teaching the community the responsibility for the land, as well as for human health and well being. "Since 1988, the Community Supported Garden at Genesis Farm has provided an opportunity for a community of people to take responsibility for supporting a farm. While sharing the abundance and the costs of cultivating our food in a healthy way, we are also increasing the fertility of the soil and enhancing the quality of our relationships to the land and to each other."

(Genesis Farm. 2013)

The actions that support human health and well being in an earth-mindful way include building construction. "The Strawbale House... demonstrates energy-efficient sustainable building that is also beautiful. Construction began in 1993 by teams of international volunteers; it provided an opportunity for local community members and builders to work and learn together. The house has a composting toilet and grey water waste system. A solar space heating panel was added on the roof in 2007" (Genesis Farm. 2013). The grey water system used by the green nuns is a system that recycles the water used in the motherhouse sinks and showers, funnels it through a constructed wetlands purification system, and then pumps it back into the motherhouse for flushing the toilets (S.Taylor. 2007, 80), which helps significantly reduce the use of water. Composting toilets are no-flush, they do not use water but recycle human waste (2007, 72).

The sisters have solar panels installed, knowing that the use of the devices come with multiple 'green' benefits: they help save natural resources (fossil fuel), which also means reduction in fracking; reduce air pollution (smog and carbon monoxide); help reduce the need in power plants construction (and so protect the landscape);

reduce the need in electric batteries (that create environmental disposal problems); have no effect on climate, landscape, and generate no waste. "The solar panels on the south side of the library were installed in 2005, providing electricity for the Farmhouse, Library, Office, and the Strawbale House. (Genesis Farm. 2013). The solar panels also help Genesis Farm save money, Sr.Miriam MacGillis shares in her interview with PlanetForward (PlanetForward 2013), which frees more resources to do more charitable work in protecting the environment.

The sisters are committed to reducing the use of fossil fuel: "We drive the hybrid vehicles, and we try to cut back very much on how much driving we do. I've stopped traveling by airplane about twenty years ago, I don't fly anymore, and if I do go somewhere I take as much public transportation as I can, and more recently I try very hard not to travel at all, and use Skype or to do telephone conferences" (MacGillis, 2013).

As a document posted on the PlanetForward website states, "Genesis Farm is committed to lessening the demand of peak oil to avoid climate change in order to reshape and rebuild the community. In time, it hopes that with the transition movement and their solar panels it will improve the quality of life, inspire others to incorporate themselves with their great programs, and become environmentally conscious" (PlanetForward. 2013; the transition movement is a sustainability movement).

Genesis Farm largely participate in recycling programs, accepting for recycling from the residents such items as Inkjet and laser cartridges, laptops, PDAs, iPods, cell phones, GPS systems, digital cameras, video game consoles; video games

(Genesis Farm. 2013), thus minimizing the environmental impact through reducing air and water pollution, toxic emission, need for mining, diverting waste from landfills, preventing habitat destruction, and also creating jobs, and saving money.

The sisters at Genesis Farm use every opportunity to be heard on the public arena. "... It is ... critically important to continue to engage in environmental advocacy using the tools currently available to us. While Genesis Farm is fundamentally an ecological learning center, rather than an advocacy organism, it nevertheless has supported and collaborated with many environmental groups over our decades" (Genesis Farm. 2013).

Sister MacGillis thus defines the main areas of the social activities of the sisters in protecting the earth: "We have a particular focus on genetic engineering, another focus on fracking, or (hydraulic) fracturing for the natural gas and the third focus on this belief that we can burn all fossil fuel we can get, all we want, that this is OK, so we are resisting that very strongly" (MacGillis, 2013).

The sisters of Genesis Farm developed a range of educational programs, targeted to raise awareness of the earth's sacred community and its needs. "Based on the insights of geologist Thomas Berry and mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme, Earth Literacy programs at Genesis Farm provide contemporary scientific understandings of the evolution of the Universe, Earth, life, and human consciousness as a single unfolding process. Through the perspective of this new cosmology, we can understand both why and how we must change direction to participate in the healing and flourishing of life" (Genesis Farm. 2013). Earth literacy programs are another facet of the sisters' diverse work towards healing the earth.

(3) Equity between all the members of the earth's community, human and nonhuman, of live and 'non-living' nature, based on inherent worth.

The sisters keep challenging themselves to address particularly urgent issues affecting the environment "with insights derived from Berry's Origins of Rights of Nature, and to move from democracy (human-based philosophy of law, or jurisprudence) to biocracy (Genesis Farm. 2013)".

Genesis Farm has developed the strategies that they hope will someday delegitimize the amalgamated power of the corporate and financial giants, make them recognize and prevent them from trampling the rights of individuals, communities and the nature world, called the "Five Smooth Stones" approach, - (Genesis Farm. 2013). Among the "Stones" are Earth Jurisprudence and the Rights of Nature. The dedicated to the rights of nature document, posted on Genesis Farm website states: "Though Western jurisprudence has made great strides in human rights and responsibilities toward one another, the rights of the rest of the Earth Community is largely ignored. As we move toward a wider understanding of rights, we are challenged to govern in a new way that respects the inherent rights of all members of a diverse and often unfamiliar Earth Community"(Genesis Farm. 2013).

Sisters' ethics of equity of human, plant and animal life on Earth is seen in their opposition to the transgenic food and seeds, discussed earlier. An educational document posted on the Genesis Farm website draws attention to their harmful effects. It brings the scale of the alteration into focus, helping to realize the extent of its harmful effects. The author states that "It ... scorns the rights of fauna, flora, and humanity. The encoding of species DNA supplies the identities that enable each

genus to flourish, in alliance with millions of years of selection... transgenic engineering has violated cell integrity" (Caldara 2012).

The sisters strive to use every opportunity to voice their deep belief in the impartial equality within the earth's sacred community, and protect these rights on the social arena.

(4) Moral consideration for both humans and other species, as well as so-called 'non-living' nature, based on love and recognition that we all are parts of the diverse family in a relationship of brother/sisterhood, in deep interconnectedness/intercommunion with each other.

Sister Miriam MacGillis sees the family interconnectedness as the foundation for moral considerations for humans as well as nature: "We all are related, we all are in a family community. The relationship within the community is very, very intimate; we are all one body... I think of Earth as a single living being. She is the Mother, the womb, our collective body and we all are parts of her" (MacGillis, 2013).

Lin Neil, a volunteer, who in July of 2008 attended two courses at Genesis Farms and stayed afterwards to donate her services, wrote about her experience at Genesis Farm: "Thomas Berry said: "To make ourselves worthy of the blessing by this continent is the task to which we dedicate ourselves... that all the children of Earth might walk serenely into the future as a single sacred community." I feel privileged to have experienced that sacred community at Genesis Farm. I hope the memory of it will help me to stay true to the Great Work" (Neil 2013).

The volunteer have witnessed, and also experienced herself, through her participation, that the simple work like weeding, sowing, staking, and harvesting

heirloom vegetables, done by the sisters was conducted with concern and respect for non-human forms of life, with recognition of the sacred interconnection.

Lin Neil wrote down her reflections on how the sisters recognize the moral responsibility toward non-human nature: "Another day I spent helping a young staff member to refurbish an old camper that would be used at the farm. It wasn't only about fixing the camper; at Genesis Farm, nature is taken into consideration in every project. How things are re-used and Earth is cared for was evident" (Neil 2013). The reflections go on to conclude that "When I consider this summary of my volunteer work, it is really very humble – no great deeds were done. On reflection, however, perhaps the greatest thing that can be done now in this time of ecological crises is to be a conscious human being living in harmony with the natural world. This is what happens at Genesis Farm"(Neil 2013).

The volunteer highlights the work at Genesis Farm as organized in a way that brings in focus human-nature intercommunion.

She found the educational programs at Genesis Farm to be very intense, enlightening and life-changing (Neil 2013);

"But", she continues, "what I found most powerful is the living out of the Universe Story and the Great Work in the thousand little details of our human lives. There are so many opportunities every day to live with an awareness of and respect for the whole web of life: how we eat, where we shop and what we buy, how we dispose of or recycle our trash, how we drive, how we inform ourselves and share this information and how we connect with others " (Neil 2013).

Such simple parts of the daily routine as driving, shopping, eating, communicating are done, by the sisters, with deep awareness of the impact on the natural environment.

The document dedicated to explanation of the wide range of harmful effect of the transgenic organisms expresses moral concern for the affected. According to "Wise Traditions" blogger and Green Pasture Products founder David Wetzel, the United States government field-tested a TE variety of corn circa 1996. This corn allegedly contained genes that regulated the manufacture of antibodies in women with "immune infertility" condition. Birth rates began falling shortly after this corn was marketed. Since 1999, U.S. birth rates have dropped even further" (Caldara 2012). The author speculates that eating this corn could correspond with the 20% rate of infertility occurring in our population today (Caldara 2012). The document shows deep concern for both human and other species and raises awareness of actual interconnectedness of all life forms, human and non-human, within the earth's community.

Sisters' considerations for humans and other species are the reason for their concern expressed for the engineering the genes that limit the amount of crops of a given culture to only one. "Monsanto's Terminator genes can be spliced into any plant, sterilizing its seeds. Plants will produce one crop only. Farmers who formerly saved and shared seeds will be required to buy TE (transgenically engineered) replacements from biotech conglomerates" (Caldara 2012).

Such "suicide seeds" that will not let the culture to reproduce may have tremendous negative impact on the afflicted in the developing countries: "In 2009,

empty seedpods were recovered in India, empty bean pods in Afghanistan, and eyeless potatoes in Ecuador. In Africa, huge harvests of three varieties of corn failed when all were found to be seedless (Caldara 2012). Genesis Farm's practical answer to transgenically engineered organisms is growing, propagating, and popularizing the unmolested heirloom varieties. Sisters plant, harvest, and collect and dry seeds for the next planting season (Genesis Farm 2013).

The awareness of the transgenically altered organisms and the necessity of protection and development of the heirloom varieties highlights sisters' understanding of the interdependence and interconnectedness of humans and non-human life-forms.

Another document, created by the sisters of Genesis Farm and found on their website, continues the subject of interconnectedness of all members of the earth's "sacred community" by reflecting on the notions of independence and interdependence. "It must be asked: how could any business assume and receive the "authority" to act without our public or democratic consent and thereby usurp our own inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Are not the air, soil, water, oceans, birds, fish, forests and all living beings in the web of life essential to the health of Earth? And is not the health of Earth essential to the human pursuit of human life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?... People and nature are being forced to conform to patterns of control deeply inconsistent with five billion years of evolution, with our basic human instincts, with our deepest spiritual values, and with rigorous and objective scientific observation...." (Genesis Farm. 2013).

Human pursuit of independence, if understood as independence from the world of nature, spells isolation. Moreover, such understanding of independence, which often translates into neglect of and destructive behaviors toward nature is a fake concept: "One of the most abiding of these (social) promises is our right to freedom and independence. ...But independence can also imply a false separation from the web of interdependence, which holds the Universe together.... The differences between independence and interdependence may at first seem small; it's just one small syllable, after all. But the distinction can be life altering. One ideal celebrates individual human endeavor but remains silent about how those endeavors are derived from or affect other life systems. Independence is a fiction, a mental fiction born of human consciousness. Interdependence, on the other hand, recognizes that human fate is inextricably linked to all the other life systems on the planet. When our individual actions are mutually enhancing, the web of life is supported. But when we ignore the scientific reality of an interdependent web of life, we do so at our own peril and at the peril of the web" (Genesis Farm. 2013).

Thus, respect for the well-being of the natural entities translates into well-being, flourishing, and health of the whole, of Earth, with humans also being the beneficiaries. Recognition of our interconnectedness within the earth community does not pose restrictions but benefits all members.

(5) Promotion of vegetarianism as both a practical way to halt the violence and a way to change the mentality of egocentrism toward the awareness of feelings in animals.

All sisters of Genesis Farm are vegetarians. The document posted on the website explains that the food sisters offer to their visitors are strictly vegetarian (not vegan) meals that “consist of fresh, organic (whenever possible) fruits and vegetables with a variety of grains, beans, seeds, and nuts. Eggs and small amounts of dairy foods, including cheese and yogurt, are used occasionally. We make every effort to use seasonal and locally grown foods” (Genesis Farm. 2013).

Miriam MacGillis confirms: “ all the meals we serve to the visitors are vegetarian; we cannot insist or convert others to be vegetarian, but we do not serve meat” (MacGillis, 2013). She asserts the relevance of vegetarianism for the sisters: “ ...it is very important to us. I’ve been a vegetarian for forty-something years. It is very sacred principle. It is a question of justice. People kill animals only to get their protein, why not think of protein that can be found in other sources... Humans are only one member of this community, we are not thinking about others” (MacGillis, 2013). For MacGillis, vegetarianism is part of the Earth Jurisprudence project: “We are doing a lot of work on the Earth Jurisprudence, it is part of our “Five Smooth Stones” project” (MacGillis, 2013). Vegetarianism of the sisters stands as lived through daily routine principles of equality within Earth’s sacred community, moral consideration for other species, human active role in creating conditions to sustain well-being of other species, and reverence to the numinous reflected in lives of other members of the community.

(6) Respect for cultural, religious diversity and biodiversity.

The sisters' deep reverence to the Sacred Mystery reflects in their deep respect of the diversity as an expression of the plentitude of the Divine. Miriam MacGillis

asserts the formative role of Berry's thought in the sisters' approach to diversity: "Thomas Berry thought that the essential nature of the Universe is diversity. Uniformity kills, it is a violation of God. It is very sacred, - intercultural, intro-ethnic, intro-racial diversity"(MacGillis, 2013). MacGillis highlights the sisters' work in applying Berry's vision in their practices: "We recognize that biodiversity is extremely important. We are working hard for the protection of biodiversity. We work on the Earth Jurisprudence; it is one of essential Thomas Berry's ideas that every being who exists has rights to exist. Every rock has rights to exist, to be where it is" (MacGillis, 2013).

Based on Berry's recognition of world's religions as facets that reflect the fullness of the Great Mystery, being connected as "dimensions of each other" (Berry, 2009, 5), and according to the interpretation of the early Christianity as a mentality of inclusion of diverse members in a communion of the earth's brother/sisterhood, Genesis Farm's educational programs incorporate the study of the earth's natural cycles from the points of view of different religious traditions. The Genesis Farm program guide reads: "In 2012, ... we are exploring the different traditions in the context of current ecological crises in order to bring new meaning to our rituals on the solstices, equinoxes and cross quarters" (Genesis Farm. 2013).

While touring the farm, a visitor can find a cairn, characteristic of Celtic culture but decorated with image of the Virgin Mary (Genesis Farm. 2013).

Along with celebrating our culture's European pre-Christian religious roots, the sisters pay tribute to the Native American spiritual traditions; among the activities offered by the 14-day residential program are Native American rituals at the tipi

(Genesis Farm. 2013). Nearby is located the Medicine Wheel, surrounded by animal-totem poles (Genesis Farm. 2013). Natural entities are included into honoring the native spirituality: "Standing at the center of Genesis Farm land just beyond the Memorial Garden, the Grandfather Tree was named and blessed by Chief Thundercloud, a Cherokee healer and tribal chief who lived in this region" (Genesis Farm. 2013).

The website states sisters' respect for cultural and religious diversity, their appreciation of traditional religious, as well as mystical or metaphysical beliefs. Themselves being Roman Catholic, the sisters do not expect their visitors to comply with the sisters' religious tradition: "Genesis Farm welcomes people of good will from all traditions and beliefs. There are no religious services at the Farm. For those in residential programs, we keep a list of nearby places of worship." (Genesis Farm. 2013).

(7) Inclusion of women, children, minorities, and non-human nature in the code of ethical accountability.

The green sisters have no doubts that women, working together with men, can make the world a "greener", better, healthier place. Sister MacGillis speaks of herself as a long-time feminist (de Boer, 2001). As many feminists, she emphasizes her egalitarianism: "I'm not a feminist (who is) against man, but I think that women are true. Women should not have less rights than men, same of children... I am for social justice" (MacGillis, 2013).

Children and families receive special attention at the Farm's social and educational events. Genesis Farm hosts an annual open house and harvest festivals,

like the Harvest Festival event held on Sun. October 21st. 2012, a special event for all generations, as a participant noted (Genesis Farm. 2013). The sisters work to connect children with older generations as well as with nature: Genesis Farm "is a place where individuals and/or families can come with their children and grandchildren as an antidote to some of the undesirable aspects of the modern world. It's a place to get grounded and be in touch with what's important" (Genesis Farm. 2013).

The sisters offer such children-friendly activities as cooking demonstrations, food tasting, a seed saving talk and workshop, a pancake breakfast, hula dancing lessons, films, pot luck suppers, and more" (Genesis Farm. 2013). The healing aspect of reconnection with the earth and its living communities is regarded by the sisters as a powerful means of making children flourish.

The Earth Day Celebration and Open House of 2013 was designed as a family/children-friendly event. As a participant writes in the Community Supported Garden newsletter, it was an experience of "how the land was truly celebrated, how it was filled with song, hoops and children, how it's plants and trees were spoken of and appreciated" (Genesis Farm. 2013).

The celebration of the Earth Day is the way to honor and appreciate the earth and humans of good will, in the sacred communion, and is another demonstration of the inclusion of women, children and non-human nature in the sphere of the sisters' moral accountability.

Most of the principles of the theocentric-ecocentric ethics I substantiate in the first part of this chapter are reflected in Genesis Farm's work to a greater or lesser

extent; such aspects of the theocentric-ecocentric Christian ethic proposal as inclusion of women and children in the code of ethical accountability, biodiversity, and love for the other was not extensively reflected in the Genesis Farm documents. The way the work is conducted and the positive reviews of educational programs and volunteers show that these indispensable aspects of a truly all-inclusive ethic are part of the Genesis Farm's mentality. The principle of the inclusion of the minorities was not reflected in the documents, however, there was not found any reference of the sisters being against such inclusion.

Catholic religious communities are known for their long commitment to social justice and peace, now, in the movement of "greening" of Catholic tradition, they have come to connect with new ethical challenges. There was not found any principle incongruence in the work of Genesis Farm with my offer of the ecocentric ethical principles.

I approached substantiating my ethical proposal found in the introduction to this paper through researching how such ethics can be applied in practice, analyzing the events, programs, and practices documented by the green sisters of Genesis Farm. The sisters work to promote human and ecological health by combining spirituality, sustainable agriculture, and education. Their knowledge of the modern scientific story of the universe is part of the New story, the story of the sustainable, healthy future for the planet and its living communities, which the sisters strive to live now.

The study of the documents created by the sisters reveal that their activities, programs, events, actions, and practices are generally in line with the Christian ecocentric ethical proposal formulated in the first part of the chapter and did not expose any significant incongruences between them.

CONCLUSION

As was noted by the environmental philosophers, one of the main problem with grounding of the environmental ethics can be seen as the theoretical locating of inherent worth in nature; the eco-feminists respond was a notion that the underlying reason for the current grave environmental situation on earth, which generated the very need of the environmental ethics, and the root of the problem of the grounding of inherent worth itself is the dualistic perception formula, "the self and the other".

Although a viable eco-feminism must not necessarily take spiritual form, a well-grounded secular theory of nature's inherent worth is still to be formulated, while the spirituality-based proposals seem to both answer the key question of the human-nature relationship as the self-other schism by healing it, and give sufficient theoretical grounding to nature's inherent worth.

While many religious traditions were offered by eco-feminists in order to ground egalitarian environmental ethics and were interpreted as reflecting, in their own specific way, the sanctity of nature as created/inhabited by the higher

spiritual/divine Beings, we saw that the bricolage construct of the Mother-Goddess, invented and endorsed by some eco-feminists, as a rationalistic creation of a deity/tradition without historical context, remains on the "the self" side of the opposition and, if visually grounds the intrinsic value of nature, is intrinsically divisive. As an absolutized pole of an opposition of male-female, humans-nature, such Goddess is devoid of her complimentary role in constituting the holistic worldview, is essentially materialistic, and thus is incapable to solve the underlying problem of the schism within our mentality.

At the early stages of the environmental movement, a harsh criticism was aimed at Christianity as the mentality responsible for the environmental crisis; however, such idea generated the discussion that also drew strong argumentation in favor of Christian tradition's potential to actually ground the environmental ethics. As it was shown, Christianity as a religious tradition of the Western world is a complex and multifaceted flow of external and internal, historical, cultural, social and personal world vision, and, within its temporal and spatial changes, it contains strands that can be seen as holistic and can provide theoretical grounding for inherent worth of nature. The general theme of early Christian thought could be interpreted as a human transformation in transcending ego and reuniting with the deeper self, understood as God within, through unconditional love. The love for the other can be seen as an outer projection that reflects in overcoming the split into the self and the other; such interpretation of the early Christian narrative supports an ecocentric ethic. Thus, Christian tradition as rooted in Western history and cultural paradigm,

can be considered as a source of holistic, nature-embracing spirituality for the West before we turn to the religious tradition generated by different cultures.

While there is no doubt that a spirituality rooted in Christianity may not serve well in grounding the environmental ethics within cultures other than Western, especially considering the fact that Christians are not the majority of the world's peoples of faith, the research gave significant consideration to the theme of Christian spirituality laying at the base of Western cultural and historical identity and having deep roots in the Western mentality.

It was possible to show the ways to disentangle certain strands of Judeo-Christian tradition from the hard core Western mentality with its rigid rationality, simplistic mechanicism and binary judgment based on 'either-or' postulate, which internalizes as the 'self versus other' outlook and translates into mentality of domination and exploitation.

The analysis of the Biblical texts of the New Testaments has shown that the interpretation of the Judeo-Christian tradition yielded the themes of the androgynous, immanent-transcended, holistic God, God-creator being love, participation in God through love for the other, the theme of social equality, and Christ's immersion into the earth's natural cycles and processes. Such interpretation of the Judeo-Christian tradition supports an all-inclusive ecocentric ethic.

In assessing the importance of this research a few aspects should be emphasized.

While, in looking into Christian tradition as a source of grounding of environmental ethics, the eco-feminists and environmental philosophers usually focus on Genesis, the texts of the New Testament were rarely considered, which can

be seen as the lingering L.White Jr.'s influence. This research shows that, within the interpretative framework of the early strand of historical Christianity, there could be allocated and elicited a sound foundation for such ethic, which could facilitate the way of a future research of the Christian spirituality in connection with the protection of our natural environment.

Second, is the aspect of the ethical holism of the Christian tradition. In the face of the grave threat of the current global ecological crisis with its unprecedented and unpredictable impact, imposed on nature by human civilization, in a big part by the West as the most technologically advanced, any ethical proposal but egalitarian all-inclusive seems to be palliative, as was noted by such commentators as Merchant, J.Baird Callicott, and T.Berry.

Although it was shown before that difficulties in ascribing inherent worth to nature can be solved through the spiritual grounding of such ethics and that before we looked for that into other religious traditions we may look at the ethical potential of our own Christian religious thought, as well as that Christian tradition can be interpreted to contain a basis for the environmental ethics, the commentators widely disagree on the scope of the direct moral standing in these ethics. This research follows T.Berry's vision of the early Christian ethics as holistic and being able to ground ecocentrism, and provides evidence of a viability of such interpretation.

Finally, even though many commentators wrote extensively on the subject, not many clear formulations of their environmental principles were made. This paper synthesizes the existing Christian environmental proposals and sketches an outline

of the principles of Christian ecocentric/holistic ethics, which can facilitate the future work of the environmentalist community, eco-feminists as well as environmental scientists and theologians, in working out the concise and clear formulation of the holistic ethics principles. After turning to a detailed analysis of the previous research in the area of formulation of the Christian ecocentric ethic, the conclusion was made that such ethic should be defined as distinctly spirituality-based, so it was formulated as "theocentric-ecocentric".

The theocentric-ecocentric ethics are based on:

1. Reverence to the divine source of life as the archetypal source of love for the other, recognizing the numinous within all works of nature, including us, humans, valuing the other as the self.

2. Human active role in reversing the condition of the ecological crisis and creating conditions to sustain life and well-being of all natural entities, including humans, based on taking on personal responsibility for the destruction. An ecologically sound management consistent with the continued health of the earth community.

3. Equity between all the members of the earth's community, human and nonhuman, of live and 'non-living' nature, based on inherent worth.

4. Moral consideration for both humans and other species, as well as so-called 'non-living' nature, based on love and recognition that we all are parts of the diverse family in a relationship of brother/sisterhood, in deep interconnectedness/intercommunion with each other.

5. Promotion of vegetarianism as both a practical way to halt the violence and a way to change the mentality of egocentrism toward the awareness of feelings in animals.

6. Respect for cultural, religious diversity and biodiversity.

7. Inclusion of women, children, minorities, and non-human nature in the code of ethical accountability.

Even though the interpretation of the early strand of Christianity I present in the paper may not be endorsed by the majority of the modern traditional Christians, such form of Christian tradition is not only accepted, but lived and practiced by some of the Christian "green avant-garde" of the modernity.

The other aspect of the relevancy of the research is in its practical focus, namely the possibility of practical living of Christian ecocentric ethics even before its theoretical foundation was strictly formulated. As it was shown, there exists and spreads a strong grassroots movement, organized and supported by the catholic women. The feminists' intuition that women may be especially attuned to earth's needs found its proof in the hard and humble everyday work of the green sisters, whose valuable experience in integration of the earth healing with providing humans with healthier environment through spiritual communion with creation, throughout the United States as well as in other countries, is still widely unknown or/and unrecognized in the society as well as in environmentalists' community. This paper accentuates the impact of such conscious creative dedication to "the other" as well as its potential in changing the societal mentality toward the earth's health in its interconnection with human physiological and psychological well-being, in

creating a better, healthier, more hopeful future. The relevancy of this research is its concentration on how Christian spirituality can be lived and practiced in everyday doings as a foundation of environmental awareness and earth-healing actions.

Given the power of Western civilization over the current world order, and the near universal presence of Christianity, the theoretical as well as practical strengthening and development of the ecocentric Christian ethics can have a tremendous positive impact on the health of the planet and human well-being.

The research completed in this paper has its distinct limitations. The first one I see in the paper's analysis and interpretation of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. The area of the interpretation of the tradition as a possible basis of the ecocentric ethics is relatively new, and the Christianity is a complex confluence of historically and culturally evolving believes and aspirations; the paper's attempt to synthesize the previous research in the area in order to allocate the viable foundation for the ecocentric ethics is only a step in this direction.

The other area of limitation is the formulation of the Christian ecocentric ethics. Their formulation as theocentric-ecocentric Christian and the particular formulation of their principles is but a sketch of a possible starting point in the future research.

I must also note that Genesis Farm's work, as well as the activities, programs, actions, and practices of the Christian grassroots ecological movement in general, are an evolving endeavor. My analysis of the sisters' work, even including the recent interview with Genesis Farm director, Miriam MacGillis, by any means is not complete for the moment, and will be less so as the sisters' practical work of translating Christian spirituality into care for the environment evolves and widens.

As was noted earlier, the interpretation of the early strand of Christianity presented in the paper may not be endorsed by the majority of the modern traditional Christians. This represents a practical limitation of the research's focus on applicability of the findings. However, such outstanding commitment to the cause as demonstrated by such sisters as Sr. Miriam MacGillis and many others across the United States and Canada, who operate within this interpretation of Christianity, the sisters' social involvement, educational programs, and environmental practices on the one hand, and deep commitment to the Catholic Christian tradition on the other, powerfully demonstrate the viability and vitality of such interpretation.

The approach to the grounding of the ecocentric ethics I developed aims at a certain grassroots transformation, in R.Ruether's words, a *metanoia* of public consciousness, which in time can trigger changes in public policies. I envision it as a necessary step in reversing the ecological crisis, healing the earth and creating the conditions for human flourishing on the flourishing earth. Such work to transform public consciousness, including the consciousness of the modern Christians of the traditional orientation is the work of the green sisters. The green nuns movement grows in number, while continuously expanding in its scope, and increasingly demonstrates the positive environmental changes in the area of their involvement with the land, as well as the positive impact on human well-being in the sphere of the human reconnection with nature, which the sisters see as a Holy Grail of the Sacred Mystery behind the creation of the universe. Such positive impact of the practical application of the Christian tradition lived by the green sisters slowly gain momentum and recognition among a wider audience.

From the perspective of the study conducted in this paper, the future research should be done in the area of the analysis and interpretation of the texts of the New Testament as the foundation of the ecocentric ethics, as well as in the sphere of defining the connection and continuity of the ecocentric themes in the Old Testament with those in the New Testament.

An extensive future research is needed in defining and formulating principles of the Christian ecocentric ethics and their practical applicability so that the theory would be tried in and strengthened by practice.

That also implies that a better study of the green sisters' important environmental work on the basis of Christian spirituality is needed. An extensive study that would concentrate on the green sisters' practical achievements in healing the earth and helping to develop a sustainable environment for the future generations would be especially important in bringing the work of the sisters into the focus of a larger audience, such the eco-feminist movement, a larger environmental community, and modern traditional Christians.

In spite of wide-spread among the scholars in the environmental field in general and the spiritually-minded eco-feminists in particular opinion that Christian tradition cannot be interpreted as viably supporting the ecocentric ethics, this research shows that turning to the early strands of the tradition, seen through the eyes of such scholars as Berry, yields a holistic egalitarian ethic, based on the vision of Christian tradition as a religion of love and equality. Such grounding better answers to the eco-feminists' cause of locating a spiritual foundation for such ethics than the artificial construct of the Mother-Goddess, as it escapes the Goddess'

divisive nature, while being historically and culturally congruent with the Western world-perception.

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