

# THE NATURAL WORLD: SOME CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES

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## SYNOPSIS

### **i) Introduction** 2

The starting point for this dissertation is taken from Romans 1.20; 'ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made'. The essay begins with a brief historical survey of man's attitude to the natural world, and then seeks to explore the questions raised by this statement, looking successively at scripture, theology and spirituality. It concludes with a summary of my own personal experience and a brief discussion of the implications raised for Christian ministry today.

### **ii) Man and the natural world: a historical overview** 2

Man has adopted various stances towards the natural world at different times, but has tended to focus on one of two models, which may be defined the organic and mechanistic models respectively. This section offers a brief historical survey of these two models before outlining some elements of the contemporary Western attitude to the natural world.

### **iii) The natural world in the Bible** 5

Little emphasis has been placed on the scriptural view of the natural world, and this section of the essay attempts to redress this imbalance by focussing on some aspects of the treatment of nature in the Bible. In particular I look at the ways in which the natural world is used in simile and parable, at the stated significance of its creation by God, and at the possibility that the created world is in some sense an embodiment of spiritual reality. The role of Christ in creation is considered. In all these ways I aim to show how scripture as a whole substantiates the ideas expressed in Romans 1.20.

### **iv) The natural world in Christian theology** 9

This section looks at the various theological stances that have been taken towards the world of nature, linking these where appropriate to the general historical outline given in section (1). In particular I examine the doctrines of pantheism, theism and panentheism and the writings of their principal exponents.

### **v) The natural world in Christian spirituality** 11

Having set a theological framework for a discussion of the spirituality of the natural world, this section focusses on four distinct spiritual traditions, in approximately chronological order: Celtic spirituality, Franciscan spirituality, creation spirituality and feminist spirituality, looking at the attitude towards the natural world which characterises each of them.

### **vi) The natural world in Christian experience and ministry today** 16

The closing section reflects on some elements of my own Christian experience and looks at various ways in which an understanding of the relevance of the natural world to Christian spirituality may be helpful in ministry today.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

When I was very small, I saw my first stag beetle. My mother had asked me to fetch the garden stool so that I could sit on it while she cut my hair. I went to pick it up - perhaps I was about two, because it was very large - and on it was a stag beetle. My memory of the event is still vivid, for this thing was absolutely extraordinary. To start with, it was enormous, about a foot long (I remember it proportionate to my size, not to its own). It was clad in a hard, purplish, scaly shell and, most strikingly, it had these fearsome sharp-looking grabbing things coming out of its head. And, furthermore, I was sure that it hadn't been there yesterday. I refused to pick up the stool.

And so my conscious relationship with the natural world began. Since then many scenes have struck me with a similar force, initially in their own right, latterly as created by God and informed by him. There are of course many ways of relating to God; through Scripture, through the sacraments, through people, through art, through ascetic practices, and so on. But for me one of the primary ways has been through the natural world (which in good medieval fashion I define in terms of the earthly components of the scale of being, to include mineral, vegetable and animal elements, man being partly included and partly standing outside with the angels). And so for the purposes of this essay I take my starting point in the Christian life to be Romans 1.20: 'ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made'.

But it is not enough merely to repeat Paul's words and wave majestically at an oak tree. How has humankind, historically, related to the natural world? What is the perspective on the created world of scripture taken as a whole? How has nature been regarded in Christian theology and spirituality? And how might we take account of Paul's statement in our own spiritual journeys and in Christian ministry today? These are the areas covered by this essay, and they are linked by a common question which runs through them all: is the natural world in some sense a signpost to God, or is it merely a distraction from the essence of the Christian faith? In order to focus on this question, other perspectives on the natural world, such as those of ethics and ecology, and of the relationship between Christian viewpoints and those of other faiths, have been excluded.

## 2. MAN AND THE NATURAL WORLD: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

To chart the history of the relationship between humankind and the natural world is no easy task, for our view of nature is never neutral but always culture-bound, never seen through the eyes of a child but always scrutinised with the spectacles of philosophy or science or theology; and so has differed widely in different cultures and periods. And yet it is necessary, before we can seek a contemporary Christian perspective on the created world, to have arrived at some kind of understanding of where we are coming from, and of the background to some of the assumptions we hold.

Historians of nature (1) have recognised two principal models which have alternately dominated the relationship between man and nature. These can be defined as the organic and mechanistic models respectively, and I propose to frame my discussion of the changing relation between man and nature in these terms (2). It is significant that there is a growing consensus between historians, scientists and theologians that we currently stand at a point of changeover from one of these two models to the other (3), and it is with the implications of this for contemporary Christian spirituality that the present essay is concerned.

The earliest human societies were agricultural in their economy and took an organic view of the natural world; the characteristic controlling metaphor for nature was that of Mother Earth, and the natural world was regarded as an animate organism. The Canaanite cults of Palestine were of this type; the early Egyptian and Babylonian traditions and the mystery cults of ancient Greece also took an organic view of nature. In the north, the pagan Celtic and the native American traditions likewise viewed the natural world as animate. Such religions were characterised by fertility cults and the veneration of natural sites as sacred; they were animistic, pantheistic and often matriarchal in nature. (4)

This tradition persisted into the classical period. Both the Greek 'physis' and the Latin 'natura' are feminine nouns, and nature was idealised as mother throughout this time. Ovid celebrated the Golden Age of Mother Nature; Pliny lamented the violation of the womb of nature by mining; the pastoral poetry of Virgil and Juvenal presented an idealised natural world as a fertile place of peace and plenty; Seneca wrote of the earth's breath as the source of nourishment for the growth on her surface. Plato attributed a female world soul to the earth, an idea which was influential in organic models of nature throughout the following neoplatonic tradition down to the Renaissance; and

early medical writers such as Theophrastus and Dioscorides wrote long volumes on the natural provision of medicines through plants. (5)

Other strands of classical thought were however more mechanistic in their view of nature. The teaching of Leucippus, Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius show an attitude to the created world which was not animistic but deterministic, not pantheistic but rationalistic; instead of talk of Mother Nature we find talk of atoms and chance, and the foundation of the modern scientific view of the natural world is laid. (6) The two poles are best held together in the writings of Pythagoras, in which both organic and rationalistic elements are found.



Detail from the Chapter House, Southwell Cathedral, 13th century.

Despite the early presence of the mechanistic outlook, throughout the Middle Ages the predominant view of the natural world remained the organic. Literary neoplatonic writers of the twelfth century - Alan of Lille, Bernard Silvestris - continued to regard the world as animate and nature as a female personification of the divine life force. (7) Nature in art and literature became progressively less bookish and symbolic in character, relying more on a first-hand affinity between people and nature than on the Latin sources above and the old emblematic bestiaries; it has been said that 'the twelfth century featured an essentially religious discovery of the universe through a discovery of Nature'. (8) By the thirteenth century an unprecedented realism had appeared. The change can be charted in poetry (9), in cathedral sculpture (10), and in manuscript illumination (11). Encyclopaedias of natural history were compiled by Vincent of Beauvais, Gerard of Wales and Bartholomew of Glanville. (12) The philosophy of nature taught in the new universities was animistic, following Aristotle's attribution to all living things of a soul, vegetative (plants), sensitive (animals) or rational (humanity). Theologians such as Albert the Great took a renewed interest in the natural world (13). Spiritual thinkers too began to turn their attention towards a spirituality which took cognizance of nature; significant in this regard would be Hildegard of Bingen, Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure, Dante and Julian of Norwich (14).



Goshawk taking a duck; detail from the Alphonso Psalter, England, 13th century.

This attachment to the natural world reached a climax in the Renaissance. The Italian poet Petrarch is popularly said to have been the first European to have climbed a mountain purely in order to admire the view. Scenes from nature began to appear in Flemish and Italian art; the first formal gardens since those of the Roman emperors were laid out; pastoral poetry celebrated the mythical natural environment of Arcadia in the works of Sidney and Spenser. Herbals were written listing the medical and culinary properties of plants. Nature as (feminine) organism informed the practices of the alchemists, the thought of the neoplatonists, and the spirituality of the gnostic hermetics and kabbalists of this period; as Merchant puts it, 'in general, the Renaissance view was that all things were permeated by life, there being no adequate method by which to designate the inanimate from the animate' (15).

In the sixteenth century, however, the world view began to change. In 1543 Copernicus' work on the solar system was published and the theory of the natural world as an organism was destroyed, for now the universe had no centre and was known to be governed not by biological but by mathematical processes. (16) In 1605 the astronomer Kepler wrote: 'my aim is to show that the celestial machine is to be likened not to a divine organism but to clockwork'. (17) And so the mechanistic view of the natural world gained the ascendancy. Stripped of her life, nature became something to be tamed, a source of natural resources. Francis Bacon advocated the manipulation and exploitation of nature for the benefit of man (18). Erasmus emphasized the gulf between people and animals. (19). The impact of this new way of thinking was profound. The sports of cockfighting and bear or bull baiting gained in popularity, sanctioned by the new view; land use changed, with reclamation, deforestation and a new growth economy; woman, no longer honoured by her association with mother earth, found her economic and social status reduced, and in extremes found herself persecuted in the witchhunts of the period. (20) The protests of Agricola, who like Pliny objected to the rape of the earth, and Spinoza, whose advocacy of a pantheistic view is one of the best known writings in that tradition, were now a minority voice. (21) The theologians of the Reformation withdrew from the world of nature to concentrate on the inner spiritual life of the individual. (22) And so 'science and religion could now be separated: science taking the whole of nature for its province, including the human body; and religion the moral and spiritual aspects of the human soul'. Nature was now not cosmic organism but world machine. (23)

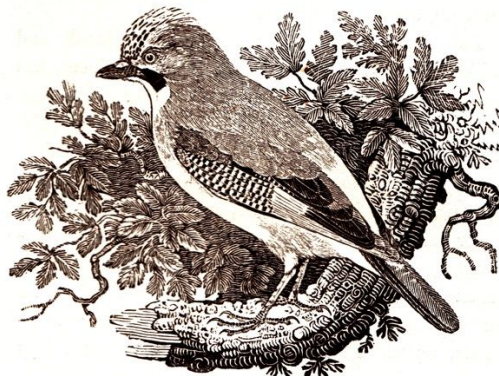


Picking cherries, from A Compendium of Medicinal Plants, Italy, fourteenth century.

The new view was consolidated in the seventeenth century. Galileo regarded nature as mechanistic and materialistic, to be discussed in the language not of poetry but of mathematics (24). Descartes saw even the human body as a machine, and stressed the primacy of human thinking over all other aspects of existence, hastening the conclusion that humankind was essentially separate from the natural world and different in kind. (25) The philosophies of the classical atomists were revived. Advancing technology ensured greater supremacy over the natural world by means of mills, pumps, cranes, clocks and other machines. Society itself was analysed by Hobbes in mechanistic terms, and God became not the source of the world soul or the sustaining force of the natural world but rather a divine clockmaker, who had created his universe in the beginning and now left it to tick on in accordance with its own internal and self-regulating laws - laws which were understood with increasing confidence thanks to the work of Isaac Newton. (26) The confidence of the Enlightenment was built on the success of the new mechanistic model, as man 'sought by cold clear reason to comprehend an objective world of determinate order'. (27)

By 1700, therefore, the old organic view was gone. And yet there were the beginnings of a rebellion against the pervasiveness and the coldness of the new mechanistic outlook. As in the thirteenth century, there was a renewed interest in natural history. The herbals of the sixteenth century gave way to the writings of the field naturalists of the seventeenth, best known of whom was John Ray, who also produced a work entitled *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*. Spiritual writer Jonathan Edwards suggested that the natural world reflected the reality of the spiritual world. (28) A philosophical movement called vitalism, which held that all matter is in some sense alive, and whose major exponents were Van Helmont and Anne Conway, influenced the philosopher Leibniz, who invented the idea of divinely created and synchronised monads, spiritual entities which give energy to material bodies (29).

The counter-movement continued in the eighteenth century. Appreciation of nature continued to develop; Gilbert White and, later, William Cobbett are still noted today for their observations on the natural world, and Thomas Bewick and George Stubbs for their realistic portrayal of birds and animals in art. (30) Landscape painting became a genre in its own right, flower cultivation became a widespread pastime, and formal gardens were superseded by wild ones, which were now felt to be more 'natural'. Linnaeus and other naturalists sought to name and classify all living things. In the nineteenth century all this reached its culmination in the Romantic movement, where the natural world became a focus for art, literature and music in the works of Constable, Blake, Wordsworth, Hardy, Emerson, Beethoven, Schubert and many others.



The Jay, by Thomas Bewick (1753-1828)

The Romantic counter-reaction remained however largely aesthetic, and by and large science and theology continued to plough their separate furrows, science making increasing advances in understanding the world by its mechanistic, empirical and reductionist outlook, theology for the most part sticking resolutely to its post-Reformation emphasis on man and God (although some theologians, such as Hegel, were influenced by the Romantic movement). (31) It was only in the late twentieth century that the three separate strands of science, theology and popular consciousness began to come together.

The stimulus was provided by changes in the scientific world. The certainties of the mechanistic view are now gone. The first mover was perhaps Darwin, whose theory of evolution shattered the anthropocentric tenets of the pre-eminent place of man and was felt to threaten the traditional theological argument of the existence of God from design. Then came Einstein and the theory of relativity, which abolished the distinction between time and space. Then, in 1927, quantum physics; far from offering greater understanding of the constituent parts of the atom, quantum physics describes a subatomic world of utter unpredictability in which the very existence of the observer appears to influence what happens. Then chaos theory, which recognizes an inherent spontaneity in the life of nature. More controversially, Lovelock's Gaia theory, essentially a reinvention of the organic view of Mother Nature, and Whitehead and Sheldrake's suggestions of morphogenetic and morphic fields, invisible fields said to account for the development and maintenance of organisms. (32) We now live in a shadowy world of uncertainty, in which physicists are concluding, in the words of John Polkinghorne, that 'there is more to the world than meets the eye'. (33) The major changes from the mechanistic to what Sheldrake defines the postmechanistic outlook are summarised by Arthur Peacocke (34), who suggests science has moved from simplicity to complexity, from determinism to unpredictability, from a static world to a dynamic one, from a reductionist view to a sense of mystery. Writers such as Polkinghorne and Paul Davies are now making the shadowy world of the new physics accessible to the layman, and our mechanistic view of science as the ultimate authority is foundering. (35) In addition a new concern for ecology is refocussing attention on the needs of the created world. (36)

The result is that we are approaching a return to an organic perception of the created world. Popular historian Cohn Wilson has remarked that 'biologists, psychologists and even physicists are cautiously trying to feel their way into new worlds. They are acknowledging at last that they are dealing with a living universe, a universe full of strange forces' (37).

This new 'postmodern' (38) science carries many implications for Christian theology. The way is open for the re-evaluation of organic spiritualities, both in traditional forms - Celtic and Franciscan spirituality - and in hitherto marginalised ones - feminist and creation spirituality. Science and theology may now, as Polkinghorne suggests (39), work in partnership; for 'there is an important feature which the scientific perspective inevitably reintroduces into [the Judaeo-Christian] idea of creation. It is the realization ... that the cosmos which is sustained and held in being by God ... is a cosmos which has always been in process of producing new emergent forms of matter - it is a creation continua, as it has long been called in Christian theology' (40). The way appears to be open for a complete re-

evaluation of the relationship between God and the world, already begun by the process theologians, in which science and theology, but also philosophy, spirituality, art and poetry will all have a part to play. (41)

### 3. THE NATURAL WORLD IN THE BIBLE

It has been remarked that the parameters of any theology of nature must be those set by the Bible (42); it has also been suggested that what we find in the Bible is governed largely by what we expect to find, and that in the main we do not at present expect to find a very great deal about the created world there at all (43). This is partly due to the emphases taken by modern theology, but partly also to the context in which the Old Testament was written, and the necessity therein of warning against the errors of the nature religions and fertility cults of the surrounding peoples. The Bible does however have much to say about the created world, and these pages represent an attempt to redress the balance.

Western theologians have over the past few hundred years paid very little attention to the natural world, preferring to concentrate on the human species, and there is a growing groundswell of opinion that this has been to the detriment of a mature Christian faith, both collective and individual. One of the earliest expressions of this point of view was given by Westermann, who wrote that 'once theology has imperceptibly become detached from Creator-creation, the necessary consequence is that it must gradually become an anthropology and begin to disintegrate from within'. (44) His views have since been echoed by writers as disparate as, to mention a few well-known examples, Moltmann, Fox and McFague, all of whom cite the current ecological crisis as the stimulus to refocus our attention as Christians on the created world. (45)

Despite this new desire for theology to show how nature is to be understood as God's creation (46), as yet there are few studies of the natural world as it appears in the Bible (47), and much of what follows is therefore my own personal observation.

It is to be expected that the religious literature of a largely agricultural society would abound in references to the natural world, and this is indeed what we find in both the Old and the New Testaments. From the mythical garden landscape of Eden to the harsh reality of a land dominated by thorn and thistle, we see man in the context of the natural environment, which forms an intimate part of his relationship with God. The promised land is 'a good land ... with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing' (Deuteronomy 8.7-9). It is given to a people who are instructed to build their religious festivals and thus their calendar around the three harvests of the year - Passover (the spring barley harvest), Pentecost (the summer wheat harvest), and Tabernacles (the autumn fruit harvest). (48) The backdrop of the life of the people of Israel is the harvest, the vineyard, the farm, the flock, and this is what we find as we read the scriptures - Jacob tending Laban's sheep, Ruth gleaning in the fields of Boaz, Ahab's coveting of Naboth's vineyard; and, in the New Testament, Jesus's birth in a stable, his call of Peter, James and John from their fishing, and his habit of framing his teaching in the form of parables, many of which drew on the world of agriculture for their material (49).

It is not surprising, in the context of this rural way of life, that there should be many references to the natural world in the Bible. Many birds, animals and plants are simply there, just as later they are there in the carvings of the medieval cathedral, as part of God's creation. Amongst the one hundred and ten species of plant mentioned are fruit-bearing ones, such as the olive, the fig, the almond; cultivated field crops, such as wheat, barley, and flax; trees, such as the cedar, the oak, the willow; water plants, such as the reed, the oleander; plants of the wilderness, such as the broom, the mallow; flowers such as the lily, the rose; plants used for their particular properties, such as the mandrake, cinnamon and myrrh; and various thorns, brambles, briars, and thistles. (50) Amongst birds are the ostrich, the sparrow, the swallow, the eagle, the raven, the rooster, the hawk, the owl, the crane, the dove, the stork, and the partridge (51). Animals include the lion, the ass, the jackal, the dog, the boar, the bear, the badger, the camel, the horse, the hedgehog, the goat, the rabbit and the antelope. (52) There are insects too; the spider, the caterpillar, the grasshopper, and the locust. (53)

The role played by all these plants and animals differs slightly in the Old and New Testaments, and within the Old Testament from book to book, or perhaps more accurately from genre to genre, but they are always there for a purpose, whether to illustrate a point or to make a broad statement about the relation of humankind within the created world to the creator.

At the simplest level, the creatures of the natural world are used in simile or metaphor to make a particular point. This occurs most notably within the psalms and the prophets. So for example the psalmist writes:

As a deer longs for flowing streams

so my soul longs for you, O God (Ps.42.1)

And again:

I am like an owl of the wilderness,  
like a little owl of the waste places. I lie awake;  
I am like a lonely bird on the housetop. (Ps.102.6-7)

Isaiah writes:

Like a swallow or a crane I clamour, I moan like a dove. (Is.38.14)

Sometimes the simile is extended:

My hand has found, like a nest,  
the wealth of the peoples;  
and as one gathers eggs that have been forsaken,  
so I have gathered all the earth;  
and there was none that moved a wing,  
or opened its mouth, or chirped. (Is.10.14)

And in the case of the Song of Songs, the whole poem weaves continuously between metaphor and simile to such an extent that it is by the associations of the images chosen that the atmosphere and the message of the totality is conveyed.

In other parts of the Old Testament the natural world provides the means by which God relates to humanity. Plagues are sent on Egypt. Manna is provided in the wilderness. The Red Sea and the Jordan are parted. It is however not just in exceptional experiences of God's intervention in history that the created world comes to the fore; it is also through nature that prophecy is given and fulfilled. From the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy onwards, man's destiny is often expressed in terms of his relationship with the natural world. There is the simple threat: Babylon is to be made 'a possession of the hedgehog' (Is.14.23). In extended form, Edom will be occupied not by people but by the hawk, the owl, the raven, the jackal, the ostrich, the wildcat, the hyena, the buzzard and, interestingly, the 'goat-demon', and only nettles, thorns and thistles will grow there (Is.34.5-15). And most famously of course, a time of future blessing will be characterised by harmony between the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the lion, the cow and the bear, the child and the wasp and the adder (Is. 11). Man too appeals to God for blessings expressed in terms of the natural world. Psalm 72 seeks abundance of grain and people blossoming like the grass of the field; Psalm 144 requests full barns and fertile sheep and cattle. Man does not relate to God on his own; he relates to him in the context of the created environment of which he is a part.

It is however in the wisdom literature and the related psalms that the natural world plays the most prominent part in the Old Testament. God is proclaimed creator of the natural world, whose hand created the world out of formless matter (Wisdom 11.17), by whose word the heavens were made (Ps.33.6), who divided the sea and cut openings for springs and torrents, who established the luminaries and the sun (Ps 74.13-17), who made the earth and shaped mountains and fields and soil (Proverbs 8.22-26). Furthermore, it is by his power that the world he created is sustained, a concept most powerfully expounded in God's closing speech to Job. It is he who gives prey to the lion and food to the young raven, he who guides the stars and begets the rain and the frost, he who commands the dawn, observes the calving of the deer, gives the horse its strength and the ostrich its foolishness (Job 38-39). The same theme is found in Psalm 104, where the psalmist praises the Lord who rides on the wings of the wind, who makes springs gush forth in the valleys, who causes grass to grow for the cattle and plants for people. All creatures

look to you  
to give them their food in due season;  
When you give to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.  
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath,  
they die and return to the dust.  
When you send for your spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground. (Ps. 104.27-30)

And again in Ecclesiasticus 43, where God is he who stretches out the rainbow, who gives the clouds their strength, who scatters the snow and pours frost over the earth, who burns up the wilderness; and by whose word all things hold together.

In its turn, the natural world is said to declare God in a number of passages which anticipate Paul's statement in Romans 1.20 that 'ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made'. Psalm 19 proclaims that the heavens tell the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork (19.1), Psalm 97 that the heavens proclaim his righteousness (97.6). David in Psalm 143 meditates on the works of God's hands (143.5). But perhaps the fullest statement of this belief is found in the book of Wisdom, chapter 13, where those ignorant of God are accused of failing to recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works, whereas they should have from the greatness and beauty of created things gained a corresponding perception of their Creator; Solomon cannot understand how when they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world they still failed to find the Lord of these things. (54)

Lastly, the natural world is itself said to praise God, most particularly in Psalm 148, where wild and domestic animals, reptiles and birds and even sea monsters are enjoined to praise him; and Isaiah 44.23, where heavens, mountains and forests are encouraged to break forth into singing, and 55.12, where mountains and hills are prophesied to burst into song and trees to clap their hands.

In the New Testament, the natural world is equally prominent but appears in a different way. Although parables from the natural world are not unknown in the Old Testament (55), they are especially characteristic of the teaching of Jesus. The parable is not unlike the extended simile of the Old Testament, but it contains a further level of meaning which becomes apparent only as one seeks to interpret it. This was pointed out as long ago as the seventeenth century by Jonathan Edwards, who

wanted to demonstrate that the world of nature not merely happens to contain phenomena which ... resemble spiritual realities, as a shape in a cloud may resemble a human face [ie as in simile], but that there is an ontological continuity, or congruity between the worlds of nature and of spirit, and that the resemblances between them are not accidental, or fanciful, but perceptions of a deep underlying affinity. (56)

More recently, C.H. Dodd has also read the parables of Jesus in this way. (57) According to this view, Jesus in for example the parable of the sower, or the wheat and the tares, or the good fish and the bad fish, or the mustard seed is not merely indicating a similarity but an affinity between the natural and the spiritual order; the natural world does not just provide a familiar source of illustrative material to explain the spiritual world, it is itself part of that same world, governed by the same spiritual laws and heading for the same spiritual destiny. Dodd believes that 'this sense of the divineness of the natural order is the major premise of all the parables'. (58) It is not therefore surprising that scripture contains the clear promise that it is not just humankind who will be redeemed, but the entire created world. (59) Moltmann goes so far as to suggest that the world itself is to be understood as a parable of its own future, which is the kingdom of God. (60)

In recent times we have seen the development of a discipline known as creation theology, which examines the theme of the created world in scripture and measures it against other themes. In 1936 Von Rad argued that the theme of creation is always linked with and subservient to the theme of liberation. Harner, Anderson, Moltmann and others have argued that creation faith is on the contrary central to the primary biblical theme of new creation, citing especially the interweaving between original creation, sustaining creation and new creation in II Isaiah; Schmid has indeed maintained against Von Rad (although I think he can perhaps be charged with making him more disparaging than he is about the importance of the theme of creation) that creation theology is 'the broad horizon of biblical theology', 'not a peripheral theme (..but..) plainly the fundamental theme'. (61) Landes also stresses the interweaving of the themes of creation and liberation in both Old and New Testaments. (62)

In the Old Testament, creation theology is most prominent in the wisdom literature, where the divine creative power is personified in the figure of wisdom, almost to the extent that she appears as a second person of the godhead, although she is created (see, for example, Proverbs 8, Eccles 1 and 24, Wisdom 7). (63) In the New Testament this creative power is attributed to Christ, who is also described in the language of wisdom (John 1, Col. 1.16, Heb. 1.2), and sophia becomes logos - an interesting move, in the light of what was said in the previous section, from female to male, and one which has been taken up, as we shall see later, by feminist theologians (64). In stating Christ to be the Word through whom all things were created, and also through whom all things are reconciled to God, we find the themes of creation and liberation to be inextricably linked, not this time in long passages about God and the creation of the world, but in the person of Christ himself. Thus Landes has argued that the post-Reformation tendency to ignore the doctrine of creation removes an essential feature of the biblical view of the relationship between the creator deity and the created world which stands in need of his liberating work. (65) The key passage in this regard is Romans 8, which speaks of the liberation of the whole created order. The purpose of New Testament creation theology thus becomes, in the view of Anne Clifford, to provide an interpretation of salvation that is so closely linked with creation that salvation is looked on as a renewal of the original creation through the saving presence of God. (66) The contextual purpose of isolated references to the natural world in the New Testament is not therefore of the essence; what is of the essence is to reflect on the primary Christian themes of creation and new



creation, fall and redemption, for God's redemptive action is related to his creative action. In Hendry's words, 'creation and incarnation are informed with one single thought ... and the Logos is the bearer of that meaning'. And so 'theology can no longer remain immured in the enclave of subjectivity; it must venture out into the world of nature'. (67)

It seems therefore that it is not possible to regard the created world in the Bible and in the life of the Christian as a minor theme, subsidiary to the main post-Reformation theme of the personal faith of the believer and his relationship with God. Through the created world we may perceive God, learn about God, praise God, and relate to God; the created world is an embodiment of spiritual truth which predates us and which will be redeemed with us. The created world matters.

## 4. THE NATURAL WORLD IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

The natural world is a subject which was left on the sidelines of most twentieth-century theology, and only recently have voices begun to call for its reinstatement. (68)

The idea that the world of nature in some way provides both evidence for the existence of God and also a means for approaching and understanding God falls within the scope of what has traditionally been known as natural theology. Strictly speaking this refers to inquiry carried out by the use of natural human faculties without appeal to a special source of (revealed) knowledge, and so it encompasses more than just a concentration on the created world; Polkinghorne defines it as the 'search for God through the exercise of reason and the inspection of the world' (69). Moltmann concentrates on the second part of this definition, and distinguishes between natural theology (what nature can contribute to our knowledge of God) and the theology of nature (what the concept of God contributes to our knowledge of nature). (70) For the purposes of this essay, however, I shall keep to the traditional terminology, and follow Hendry in referring to the theology of nature as encompassing that which the natural world may teach us about God, and shall regard it as a branch of natural theology. (71)

Both the importance and the limitations of natural theology were expounded by Aquinas and Calvin. Aquinas explained the variety of the natural world by postulating that it is created by God so as to manifest himself through its totality in a way that would not be possible through single creatures. (72) Calvin suggested that 'the most suitable way of seeking God is .. for us to contemplate him in his works, by which he makes himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself to us', remarking that 'God has revealed himself in such a beautiful and elegant construction of heaven and earth, showing and presenting himself there every day, that human beings cannot open their eyes without having to notice him'. At the same time, however, he is aware that God can be adequately known only through the revealed Word, in Christ and in scripture, for only through the Word is redemption added to creation. (73) In this he is echoed by modern writers. (74)

The first great flowering of natural theology came in the Middle Ages, not surprising in view of the fact that this was the period in which, as we have seen, the organic view of nature reached its full development. From the twelfth century onwards the natural world was imaged in poetry as a book to be read alongside that of scripture:

omnis mundi creatura  
quasi liber et pictura  
nobis est et speculum. (75)

Theologians adopted the metaphor. In the thirteenth century Bonaventure stressed the need to approach God through a study of the two books; 'duplex est liber, unus scilicet scriptus intus, qui est Dei aeterna ars et sapientia, et alius scriptus foris, scilicet mundus sensibilis'. (76) The poets, artists and theologians of the Middle Ages saw the world as 'a book written by the hand of God in which every creature is a word charged with meaning' (77) - and so the created world burst into the carvings of the Gothic cathedrals and the poetry of the Divine Comedy. (78) Bonaventure expressed the same idea, but using a different metaphor, when he described the world as manifesting the 'vestigia Dei' or footprints of God. (79) We shall return to his teaching in section five.

The second major flowering of natural theology occurred, in different guise, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The metaphor of the two books was revived; thus Sir Thomas Browne declared:

there are two Books from whence I collect my Divinity; besides that written one of God, another of His servant Nature, that universal and publick Manuscript, that lies expans'd unto the Eyes of all: those that never saw Him in the one, have discover'd Him in the other. (80)

Galileo, less poetically, declared the book of the universe to be written in the language of mathematics. (81) This was a mechanistic era, in which the relevance of the created world lay in the part it was seen to play in the argument from design, and by the eighteenth century a whole genre of literature had grown up on the subject of 'physico-theology' or the 'demonstration of the being and attributes of God from his works of creation' (82), the best known works being those by John Ray and William Paley, (83) and the most evocative the writings of Jonathan Edwards. (84)

I would like to suggest that we now stand poised for a further resurgence of natural theology, and that this time the stimulus comes from the changing world of science, which has abandoned the mechanistic view of the created world in favour of what Sheldrake calls the recognition of an inherent spontaneity in the life of nature. (85) Other scientists who have contributed to this thinking are John Polkinghorne and Paul Davies. The implications of the new science are being picked up by theologians. One of the first to do so was Teilhard de Chardin. More recently, under the respective stimuli of the Bampton and the Gifford lectures, studies have been published by Peacocke, Moltmann and MacQuarrie. (86) The metaphor of the two books has been recalled by Berry. (87) It seems that the changing relationship between theology and science may have brought us to the threshold of a new period of natural theology, where traditional theology, with its concepts of creation through the Word, and the *creatio continua* through the Spirit, may be at one with the new scientific gropings towards an organic and holistic view of the natural world in which recognised, but as yet poorly understood, non-material forces are all-important and replace the old reductionist and mechanistic principles. The new view is increasingly being flagged by scientists, theologians, ecologists and feminists, all of whom are anxious to break the boundaries between the old disciplines, and who hope by so doing to bring a new spiritual awakening to humankind and at the same time to save the threatened planet. (88)

Twentieth-century writings on the created world have pointed out that there are three possible approaches to the relationship between God and nature. None of course lead to a specifically Christian faith, as Calvin pointed out, but they may either provide a stimulus towards, or helpfully illuminate, such a faith.

The first position is pantheism. Pantheism, or animism, states that God and the natural world are one. In theological parlance, it emphasizes the immanence of God. It is common in ancient cultures, but is not generally held to be a Christian position. It generates an over-respect for nature, leading to the veneration of natural sites such as groves, trees and streams. The two best-known European exponents of a pantheistic world view have perhaps been Spinoza and Wordsworth. (89)

The second position is theism, with its narrower form deism, which states that God transcends the natural world, from which he is entirely separate. This has dominated the Judaeo-Christian view. It was embraced in Old Testament times in order to distinguish the Hebrew faith from the Canaanite fertility religions (90), and later in Europe because of the need to combat the pantheism of the classical religions on the one hand and the druidic faiths on the other. (91) Still later, of course, it commended itself to the mechanistic world view of the seventeenth to twentieth centuries on both a philosophical and a practical level; it has been widely blamed for allowing man to dominate and exploit nature in a destructive fashion, culminating in the ecological crisis which we now face. (92) The best summary of this view is perhaps to be found in the formulation of the First Vatican Council in 1890:

The Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church believes and confesses that there is one true and living God, Creator and Lord of Heaven and earth, almighty, eternal, immense, incomprehensible, infinite in intelligence, in will, and in all perfection, who, as being one, sole, absolutely simple and immutable spiritual substance, is to be declared really and essentially distinct from the world, of supreme beatitude in and from himself, and ineffably exalted above all things beside himself which exist or are conceivable. (93)

The major difficulty with this emphasis on the transcendence of God is that it is becoming increasingly inappropriate, on its own, in what has been described as an immanentist culture. (94) We are not combatting pantheistic tendencies, and we are abandoning the mechanistic world view in favour of a holistic one. Increasingly, therefore, theologians are turning to a third alternative, which stresses both the transcendence and the immanence of God. In the 19th century Krause coined the term panentheism to describe this balance, and this is the most commonly accepted word. Hartshorne preferred to refer to dipolar theism, and MacQuarrie calls it dialectical theism. (95) The panentheistic view is that God, having created the world, also dwells in it, and that conversely the world which he has created exists in him (Moltmann, 96); it asserts that the world is in God, but that his being is not exhausted by the world (Peacocke, 97); and it stresses that God is both wholly transcendent and wholly immanent (MacQuarrie, 98). Panentheism is not of course the first attempt within Christian theology to seek to marry transcendence with immanence; many biblical images carry both associations, and the doctrines of both word (*logos*) and spirit (*sophia*) are profoundly panentheistic. The God of panentheism is a firmly Trinitarian God. (99)

Although panentheism is a relatively new term within Christian theology, it has a long, if marginalised, history. Some of this has been traced by MacQuarrie, who outlines its developments in the thinking of Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius,

Erigena, Nicholas of Cusa, Leibniz, Hegel, Whitehead and Heidegger. (100) To this list Fox adds the spiritual writers Hildegard of Bingen, Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Meister Eckhart, Mechtild of Magdeburg, and Julian of Norwich. (101) Amongst the major exponents of the panentheistic view have been the process theologians Whitehead and Hartshorne and the spiritual writer Teilhard de Chardin, whose vision may as well be described poetry as theology. (102)

The panentheistic speculations of scientists and theologians alike are of deep interest to me because they seem to come from different angles at the same fundamental question: what is life, as manifested in the natural world, and how is it sustained? In the beginning was the Word - not the scriptures, but Christ, the living word, Christ the incarnation of Wisdom, the creative power of God. The Word is the totality of what God said and did; the Word is God's action in the universe. The whole world is the word of God. (103) The author can be glimpsed through her work, and her work is in two volumes, as the Middle Ages understood it.

But what sustains the natural world; what provides its life force? As they abandon the old mechanistic philosophies, scientists seem to become increasingly aware that there are unseen forces which constitute and sustain life. Leibniz first suggested the idea of monads, Whitehead proposed morphogenetic fields, Sheldrake prefers morphic fields, Polkinghorne merely states that the proportion of perplexity to insight he experiences in this matter is considerable, and Davies propounds God. (104) In so doing, of course, he returns to the familiar theological tenet that the universe was not only created but is sustained by God, who is present in it spiritually - that the Holy Spirit is the efficacious power of the Creator and the power that quickens created beings, as Moltmann puts it; that the whole creation is a fabric woven by the Spirit, and is therefore a reality to which the Spirit gives form. (105). Will the Grand Unified Theory which science continues to seek as the explanation for everything that is prove to be - the Holy Spirit? Will the worlds of science and theology, which Polkinghorne is so adamant must come together, unite in identifying the ground of all being as the immanent God, acting through the world as its creative agent? (106) Both science and theology so far emphasize the continuous creation of the universe and the mysterious sustaining forces behind it. If they come together in some way, we reach the most powerful natural theology that has yet been propounded.

## 5. THE NATURAL WORLD IN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

The natural world has been under stressed by Christians as a resource for the spiritual life for centuries at a time; but at certain periods and within certain traditions it has been celebrated and embraced as a primary way of drawing close to God. I think that now we may be ready to return to some of these traditions and make them our own. We stand at the changeover from a mechanistic to an organic view of the natural world; creation and process theologians (see below) are beginning to recover the biblical importance of the created world and to stress that we may go beyond a narrow emphasis on the individual and his/her salvation to find a broader spirituality; we have moved from pantheism through deism to panentheism. So the question we now come to is, what does this mean for the Christian in practical, spiritual terms? How does all this translate into a living spirituality? Many spiritual writers have focussed on the created world in their meditations, (107) but in this section I propose to limit our examination to four distinct spiritual traditions, none in themselves new, but all based on the recovery of ancient, if marginalised, traditions: Celtic, Franciscan, creation and feminist spirituality. All are different, yet in a sense all are the same; they are holistic, organic, immanentist and panentheistic. In the final section I will look at some of the implications of the insights of these spiritualities for our times.

### Celtic Spirituality

The origins of the Celtic peoples are obscure. They seem first to have been a tribal society based in central Europe, but by the fourth century BC they had crossed the Channel and entered both England and Ireland. (108) Their religion was pantheistic; they had a strong sense of the spiritual and the supernatural, worshipped many gods and saw certain places as sacred. They placed a high value on literary and musical arts. They had a priestly class, the druids. They were defeated in Britain by Julius Caesar in 52 BC, and his account of their beliefs in the Gallic War is the fullest and most reliable source of information concerning their pre-Christian beliefs. (109)

With the Roman Empire Christianity came to Britain, where it seems to have been readily assimilated by the Celtic peoples, and was guarded by them throughout the Dark Ages when the rest of Europe was overrun by pagan tribes. From their pantheistic background they retained a strong sense of the immanence of God in the world, and their Christian spirituality is characterised by an emphasis on God's all-pervading presence (110), such that a modern writer can claim that 'a rediscovery of the central values of Celtic Christianity ... can help us to find the immanent God who dwells in this world as well as above and beyond it'. (111) It is not surprising therefore that the psalms

featured Prominently in Celtic worship, or that the creation stories and he prophets were important in their spirituality. (112)

Spirituality has always been more important to the Celts than theology, and there have been few Celtic theologians. Exceptions were Pelagius (whose name I am pleased to discover was probably a Greek translation of Morgan) (113) and John Scotus Erigena. Pelagius was contemporary with Augustine, and championed what is now defined creation theology against the eventually dominant fall/redemption theology of Augustine, although it would be an oversimplification to label him a creation theologian. Erigena lived in the ninth century, and wrote a work called *On the Divisions of Nature* which advocated a pantheistic spirituality; he was subsequently condemned as a pantheist. (114)

Celtic spirituality has therefore been somewhat submerged beneath the dominant currents of the church, and only in the last few decades have its riches been re-emphasized. And it is precisely for its natural theology that the Celtic heritage is most valued; 'the Celts were prime exponents of what is technically called natural theology, the idea that the existence of God can be confirmed, if not actually proved, through a contemplation of the beauty and order of the natural world'; as Erigena wrote, 'God .. creates himself in creatures'. (115) Its tradition is poetic, and many of the most beautiful Celtic prayers are poems, intended to be spoken in the midst of the activities of daily life, lived not read. This is one:

There is no plant in the ground  
But is full of His virtue,  
There is no form in the strand  
but is full of His blessing.  
There is no life in the sea,  
There is no creature in the river,  
There is naught in the firmament,  
But proclaims His goodness.  
There is no bird on the wing,  
There is no star in the sky.  
There is nothing beneath the sun,  
But proclaims His goodness. (116)

This is another, entitled God.

I am the wind that breathes upon the sea,  
I am the wave on the ocean,  
I am the murmur of leaves rustling,  
I am the rays of the sun,  
I am the beam of the moon and stars,  
I am the power of trees growing,  
I am the bud breaking into blossom,  
I am the movement of the salmon swimming,  
I am the courage of the wild boar fighting,  
I am the speed of the stag running,  
I am the strength of the ox pulling the plough,  
I am the size of the mighty oak tree,  
And I am the thoughts of all people  
Who praise my beauty and grace. (117)

In addition to the corpus of prayers a great number of legends and writings concerning the early Celtic saints have come down to us. The Celtic faith was a monastic, ascetic and missionary faith, and its literature is rich in stories of the saints befriending animals, birds and insects as they prayed, travelled and founded monasteries. (118)

Celtic spirituality was born of a people who lived and struggled as part of the natural world, and who related to God primarily through the natural world. The fourth century saint Ninian wrote that the fruit of the study of scripture is to perceive the eternal Word of God reflected in every plant and insect, every bird and animal, and every man and woman' (119). Man and woman in turn were regarded as part of the natural order which God created and saw to be good, imprinted with the image of God, and full of potential. (120) Although born on the margins of these islands, where for every scene of pink thrift and white gannet against blue sea and sky there are weeks of rain and cold and storms, Celtic spirituality is a spirituality for our times, where an understanding of God as deeply involved in his creation can generate a new vision appropriate to new conditions. (121)

## Franciscan Spirituality

Francis of Assisi lived from 1181 to 1226 - that is, precisely at the time when the Middle Ages was awakening to the glories of the created world. He did not found a school of spirituality, nor is there such a thing as a systematic Franciscan spirituality. (122). Francis was however outstanding for two things: his love of Christ and his love of the created world, and Franciscan spirituality has accordingly been described (but not defined) as 'a way of believing, of experiencing, of living and sharing in the wonder of creation and in the fullness of the gospel'. (123)

Francis's early biographers were Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure, and it is primarily from their accounts of his life that we gain an impression of his relationship with the created world, as well as from famous artistic depictions of the saint such as the one by Giotto. Two elements are striking in the accounts of his life. The first is the strong continuity with the Celtic tradition. Francis, like the Celtic saints, is said to have been on familiar terms with all sorts of birds and beasts, and many stories of the relation between the saint and birds or animals recapitulate those associated with earlier Celtic saints. (124) It may be that the Celtic tradition directly influenced Francis, for there were monasteries of Irish foundation all over the Continent by his time; or it may be that his biographers drew on the Celtic literary tradition in their portrayal of him. In either event, the links are striking.

At the same time, it is evident that Francis had an unusually, perhaps even unprecedentedly, strong personal relationship with the natural world; literary tradition may have played its part in shaping the stories told about him, but there can be no doubt that those stories had their basis in fact. This is how Celano spoke of him:

when he considered the glory of the flowers, how happy he was to gaze at the beauty of their forms and to enjoy their marvellous fragrance! How easily his spirit would take wing and rise to meditation on the beauty of that unique flower that blossomed fair as the approaching spring ... and by its fragrance brought new life to countless men who were dead in their souls!

When he found many flowers growing together, it might happen that he would speak to them and encourage them, as though they could understand, to praise the Lord. It was the same with the fields of corn and the vineyards, the stones in the earth and in the woods, all the beautiful meadows, the tinkling brooks, the sprouting gardens, earth, fire, air and wind - all these he exhorted in his pure childlike spirit to love God and to serve Him joyfully.

He was wont to call all created things his brothers and sisters, and in a wonderful manner inaccessible to others he would enter into the secret of things as one to whom 'the glorious liberty of the children of God' had been given. (125)



Saint Francis preaches to the birds, Giotto, Basilica di S. Francesco, Assisi, late thirteenth century.

This is a panentheistic and sacramental attitude to the natural world; in creation Francis found God, and more particularly the Word of God who is Christ, through whom all things were made. In this he foreshadows the modern writer Teilhard de Chardin. (126) And like the biblical authors,

Francis never used the term nature as an abstract, intellectual concept, but kept before him the biblical picture of God's creation, all the particular parts and creatures in the natural order manifesting the divine harmony and love. He did not preach sermons or give lessons on the place of nature in the economy of God, but simply accepted and entered into the interrelated web of life that he found in the created world and among its creatures'. (127)

Brother Ramon suggests that this is a way of prayer which can be engaged in by any person with experiences of mystery and wonder in nature, and one which will enable the Holy Spirit to lift that person to a new awareness that there is another level of reality which will abide when this one has perished. (128)

Francis's spirituality was influential on the theology of his near-contemporary Bonaventure (1217-74), who taught that all things proceed from the Creator, resemble him as vestiges or footprints, and have as their ultimate goal to return to him. (129) Bonaventure's major work was *The Soul's Journey into God*, in which the spiritual life is said to begin with the contemplation of the natural world; to look at creatures is to look at God, but as if through a window or reflected in a mirror - creatures are exemplars of God:

we ... gather that all the creatures of the sense world lead the mind of the contemplative and wise man to the eternal God. For these creatures are shadows, echoes and pictures of that first, most powerful, most wise and most perfect Principle, of that eternal Source, Light and Fulness, of that efficient, exemplary and ordering Art. They are vestiges, representations, spectacles proposed to us and signs divinely given so that we can see God. These creatures, I say, are exemplars or rather exemplifications. (130)

He goes on to quote the verse from Paul with which we began: 'from the creation of the world the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made' (Romans 1.20). Bonaventure, like the Celts, is said to have drawn more on the creation theology of the Eastern Fathers than on the Augustinian orthodoxy. (131)

The most famous Franciscan prayer is the *Canticle of Brother Sun*, in which Francis praises God for, or through (the Italian is ambiguous) sun, moon, stars, wind, air, water, fire and finally mother earth with all her fruits and flowers and herbs. This is organic, nature spirituality at its best (132).

## Creation Spirituality

The major modern exponent of creation spirituality is Matthew Fox - although he is at great pains to emphasize the historicity of this tradition. Fox introduces creation spirituality as follows: 'the Creation-Centred spiritual tradition begins its spirituality with the theme of original blessing rather than original sin. Unlike the Fall/Redemption tradition [which he traces back to Augustine], it emphasizes cosmic grace and humanity's divinization [which is a strong theme in the Eastern theological tradition] more than psychological introspection [which as we have seen has dominated Western theology in particular since the Reformation]. It takes delight in the holiness of all being and avoids dualistic theisms by its images of pantheism - God in us and us in God'. (133) Creation spirituality traces its roots back to the Hebrew scriptures, and in particular to the Yahwist, wisdom and prophetic traditions. (134) It emphasizes the importance of an interdependent and not a dominating relationship with the natural world, and stresses the need for the partnership between theology and science advocated by Polkinghorne, remarking that in concentrating on sin and redemption we have left the natural world and our creative opportunities within it to secular thought and modern science. (135)

Creation spirituality takes its starting point from the natural world, the world begun 19 billion years before the appearance of humankind. (136) To be creation centred is to expect the divine to burst out of any place at any time (137); it is to regard the created world with awe and wonder, to see it as the book of God. One of the greatest exponents of creation spirituality was Meister Eckhart (1260-1329), a Dominican who taught and directed widely until eventually he like Erigena was accused of pantheism. Eckhart, following Bonaventure, declared:

God is in all things by essence, by virtue and by power ... All creatures are like the footprint of God.

And, adopting the book metaphor,

even he who knew nothing but the creatures would never need to think out any sermons, for every creature is full of God and is a book ... Every creature is God's word. (138)

His spirituality is characterised by thanks and praise and by an awareness of God's presence in all things. He anticipated the modern process theologians, who emphasize God's temporal involvement in a living, changing universe as well as his eternal relation to it as its supreme cause, when he wrote:

God is creating the entire universe fully and totally in this present now. Everything God created 6000 years ago - and even previous to that as God made the world - God creates now all at once. Everything which God created millions of years ago and everything which will be created by God after millions of years - if the world endures until then - God is creating all that in the innermost and deepest realms of the soul. (139)

And he anticipated feminist spirituality when he suggested that what God does all day long is give birth. (140)

Modern writers within the tradition of creation spirituality, in addition to tracing its roots from the Hebrew scriptures through the Middle Ages particularly (but not exclusively), have also focused on the current ecological crisis and the need to re-evaluate our attitude to the created world. Thomas Berry laments that whereas the cosmos used to be taken for granted as revelatory of the divine, now we have a planet undergoing progressive destruction; he sees this as due to the desacralisation of nature which has occurred as we have moved from what Merchant called the organic to the mechanistic view of the natural world. So creation spirituality aims not just at the spiritual restoration and renewal - the new creation - of the individual, but also at that of the planet, on which ultimately the continuing life of the individual depends. Thus it is intimately linked with recent Christian attempts to raise the profile of environmental ethics within theology, and to press for the adoption of worldwide ecological policies and initiatives for conservation. (141)

Perhaps the goal of creation spirituality is best portrayed in this prayer of Teilhard de Chardin:

when all things around me, while preserving their own individual contours, their own special savours, nevertheless appear to me as animated by a single secret spirit and therefore as diffused and intermingled within a single element, infinitely remote; and when, locked within the jealous intimacy of a divine sanctuary, I yet feel myself to be wandering at large in the empyrean of all created beings: then I shall know that I am approaching that central point where the heart of the world is caught in the descending radiance of the heart of God. (142)

## Feminist Christian Spirituality

Fox expresses the view that 'there can be no question that the creation tradition is the feminist tradition in the West', (143) and although the feminist tradition undoubtedly concerns itself with matters of theology wider than the created world, it can also be argued that it builds on all the approaches to nature which we have discussed so far; it is certainly the most recent of them all. Thus Mary Grey defines the goal of Christian feminism as 'the transformation of relationships between men and women within a renewed understanding of the whole of creation' (144); the natural world forms the context for feminist theology as it does for our very existence.

Feminist writers propound an organic view of the created world; the study by Merchant with which we began suggests that the mechanistic view of the world is essentially a male perspective, the organic a female one, and that the fortunes and influence of women in society have declined as the mechanistic view has gained ascendancy. She, like other feminist writers, points to the current ecological crisis as the result. (145) And yet what is propounded is not a return to idealised matriarchal goddess cultures of the far distant past, as championed by some secular feminists, nor yet a sentimentalised revelling in the countryside; Mary Grey is adamant that she is 'not advocating anything as simplistic and sentimental as merely talking to the tulips or relating to the rabbits - this is not another 'back to nature' movement. (146) Grey sounds a helpful warning to creation spirituality, which she feels is too anxious to get rid of redemption theology; for after all, it is apparent to all that 'nature, the whole created reality, also hungers for redemption; it is not just that we are estranged from nature ... but that nature is part of the whole creative/redemptive process, groaning in travail until the fulness of time'. (147)

Grey sees the key to this problem in terms of recovering a sense of connection with all living things; redemption 'means situating the complex web of interrelating on a much wider plane, including nature and the cosmos itself'. (148) Her call is taken up most effectively by Sallie McFague, who returns to the organic model and images the world as God's body:

what if we did not distance ourselves from and despise our own bodies or the bodies of other human beings or the bodies of other life-forms, but took the positive evaluation of bodies from Christianity, feminism, and ecology seriously? What if, with Christianity, we accepted the claim that the Word is made flesh and dwells in us; with feminism, that the natural world is in some sense sacred; with ecology, that the planet is a living organism that is our home and source of nurture? What if we dared to think of our planet and indeed the entire universe as the body of God? (149)

Such a model (although I think its helpfulness resides in the force of the metaphor rather than in any possible literal interpretation) would be in harmony with the view of postmodern science that the universe is a whole and that all things are interrelated and interdependent; such a model would express both God's transcendence and his immanence, showing us simultaneously that God exceeds creation and that God dwells in creation. It is interesting that this stimulating suggestion is not a new one; it goes back at least to the twelfth century, the age when the organic view of nature was approaching its fullest expression; Arnold, abbot of Bonneval, remarks in his commentary on Genesis 1 that 'God distributed the things of nature like the members of a great body, assigning to all their proper names and places, their fitting measures and offices'. (150)

Feminist writers have also focussed on the theme of creation and new creation in scripture and theology, noting that it is a specifically feminine one, and should be reclaimed as such. Mary Grey traces the theme as imaged by childbirth through both Old and New Testaments (151), and looks at the traditions of 'Sophia' and 'Logos' in an extended poetic discussion of the opposition between the female wisdom/creation/immanence pole and the male rational/dominant/transcendent pole. (152) Moltmann-Wendel remarks that the earliest Christology was sophiology. (153) Rosemary Ruether discusses the shifting of this tradition onto the figure of Mary, and calls for a recovery of the idea of Sophia as the agent of God in creation, providence, revelation and redemption, together with a consequent revitalisation of spirituality. She remarks that

despite certain efforts to integrate the God of history and the God of creation in the prophets, apocalyptic religion moves toward the annihilation of nature by a God of transcendent history,

and observes that

mother and nature religion traditionally have seen heaven and earth, gods and humans, as dialectical components within the primal matrix of being. Its spirituality was built on the cyclical ecology of nature, of death and rebirth. (154)

Her views are echoed by Halkes, while McFague proposes a revised Trinity with God the Father redescribed as God the Mother, mother of the created world, for which she finds plenty of scriptural warrant. (155)

In sum, feminist spirituality is a spirituality grounded in creation. God created the world; she sustains the world. God created us; she sustains us. We are part of the world and we are part of God; God, nature and humankind cannot be separated, for

the creative Spirit of God is present to the whole of creation, to the whole of bodily, organic, sexual and psychological life. The Spirit is both our life-breath (Ps. 51) and the renewing Life-energy of the cosmos (Ps. 104.30); the energizer of life and growth. (156)

If we cut ourselves off from the natural world, we cut ourselves off from God.

## 6. THE NATURAL WORLD IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND MINISTRY

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. (Romans 1.19-20)

It has recently been remarked that the theological potential of the Christian doctrine of creation has rarely been exploited, with the result that the quality of Christian apologetics has been impoverished. (157) The potential of the created world to stimulate faith in its Creator is clearly stated by Paul in his letter to the Romans. This of course is not sufficient to produce a response of faith in the saving act of Christ; but it is a signpost which can be followed towards that destination. Calvin wrote that 'the knowledge of God, which is clearly shown in the ordering of the world and in all creatures, is still more clearly and familiarly explained in the Word', and so we find a sort of cascade of witness; for creation points to scripture, scripture points to Christ, and Christ brings salvation. (158)

This is indeed my own experience. I grew up with a sense of wonder at the natural world, fostered not by my home environment, which was suburban London, but by holidays in Celtic Scotland and East Anglia. I tramped through bogs, pausing to examine the sundew and listening to the wild whistling of redshank and golden plover; I walked along paths above cliffs of screaming seabirds, watching white gannets plunge cigar-shape into the blue sea, where puffins swam with their striped-pyjama beaks; I gazed into caves made of hexagonal basalt columns and saw the



green iridescent plumage of shags staring out at me with their yellow eyes; I climbed mountains, collected raptor pellets, bird skulls, deer horns. In East Anglia I found a giant puffball the size of a rugby ball and followed flocks of bearded tits ping-ponging their way across beds of golden reed. Later I took up bird ringing, and wondered at the red eyebrows of long-tailed tits with their football rattle calls and gazed deep into the tawny eyes of owls. I spent nights with the mosquitoes in the fens and caught skylarks at dawn in the fields.

Then a friend died. I sought refuge in country walks, and as I watched the wind play across a sea of golden barley, I asked where does all this come from, who made it, can it really be an accident, the chance outcome of millions of possible outcomes - or is there a design behind it, a creator who made it? And so eventually I became a Christian.

Nature is perhaps one of the best ways to bring life to the spirits of children, and mystical experiences of nature in childhood seem not to be unusual. Wonder is a natural characteristic of a child, and Jesus urged us to become like little children. Writers on the religious education of children suggest we begin with simple thanks and praise (159); and where better to start than with the created world? I have watched my children as they observe a ladybird for the first time, as they encounter (once or twice at very close quarters!) a goat, as they examine a flower bed of summer blooms. I teach them that God made these things, and encourage them to thank him and to meditate on his greatness. I teach them to care for the created world - we take in injured crows, and tease parasites out of the eyes of hedgehogs (which uncurl to let us do it, with the trust the animal world showed to Francis). I buy them books about nature. I hope that they will never have to work out for themselves that the created world was made by God; I hope that they will have known it from toddlerhood.

And yet for the first ten years of my Christian life the created world remained no more than a signpost behind me, and my faith was built up by the word and by fellowship and prayer. Then I read Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, and it occurred to me that my childhood relationship with the natural world and my adult relationship with God could be one and the same; that as nature had spoken to me in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, so God could speak to me through nature wherever I was. And this it seems to me is where the created world offers untold possibilities for Christian ministry.

At the simplest level, to contemplate on some aspect of the natural world is a way of stilling the soul so that God may speak - a sort of natural equivalent of icons and candles. Iris Murdoch puts it like this:

I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, brooding perhaps on some damage done to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing but kestrel. And when I return to thinking of the other matter it seems less important. (160)

Murdoch stays with the kestrel; I would go from the kestrel to God, thank God for the kestrel and for its astonishing ability to hang almost motionless in the air, and ask for that steady perspective for my own situation. Others have of course sought God through nature more famously; Julian of Norwich's meditation on a walnut is well known (161), and for Teilhard de Chardin the whole world speaks of Christ. (162)

A way of extending the short meditation on some aspect of the natural world is to go for a prayer walk, and as I have done this and led others in the doing, I have invariably found a sense of peace, of perspective, of wonder crowd in on my mind. If God is immanent in nature, God speaks through nature - through the shapes of the clouds scudding across the sky, through the crocuses pushing their way up through soil, through the baby frogs in the ditch. And the natural world speaks not only of beauty but also of pain, and of conflict, and of redemption - through the parasites on the hedgehog, through the robins fighting in the hedge, through the beauty of the twisted shapes of weather-beaten trees on the skyline. Children too can go on prayer walks, with a sheet of questions to help them focus; adults can be given a sheet of scriptures concerning the natural world to use while out walking or on armchair prayer walks.

The natural world can also provide a focus for periodic reflection and prayer concerning the events and direction of one's life. A field of flowers and thistles may provide the starting point for a meditation on the flowers and thistles in one's own life. I became a Christian because a buzzard soaring over a patchwork pattern of fields and hedges in rural Devon spoke to me of God's perspective on the fields and hedges of my life, a perspective which it was useless for me to seek for myself. The strong scent of the mock orange in our garden spoke to one friend of the passage where Paul gives thanks to God that he 'through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing' (2 Corinthians 2.14-15); what an encouraging perspective on our lives and purpose together. For another friend God broke into her darkness as she walked prayerfully in a botanic garden, rounded the corner and encountered a rhododendron bush in a blaze of fire-red colour.

And so I come to the end of a long, but I am sure unfinished journey, from my earliest childhood memories through the pages of the Bible, the perspectives of history, and the great theological and spiritual writings of past and present. I end with the maple tree in my garden, given to me by a friend with the verses from Jeremiah:

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,  
whose trust is in the Lord.  
He is like a tree planted by water,  
that sends out its roots by the stream,  
and does not fear when heat comes,  
for its leaves remain green,  
and is not anxious in the year of drought,  
for it does not cease to bear fruit.  
(Jeremiah 17.7-8)

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# APPENDIX

The following texts are printed in order of their relevance to the text of the essay.

## 1. The natural world in the poetry of the Middle Ages

### i) Marie de France, 'Chevrefoil'

This poem was written in England in the twelfth century, and is an early example of the use of the natural world in simile in vernacular poetry.

Cume del chevrefoil esteit  
Ki a la codre se perneit  
Quant il s'i est lacies e pris  
E tut entour le fust s'est mis,  
Ensemble poent bien durer;  
Mes ki puis les volt desevrer  
Li codres muert hastivement  
E il chevrefoil ensement.  
'Bele amie, si est du nus:  
Ne vus sanz mei, ne mei sanz vus!

It was the same as for the honeysuckle which clings to the hazel: when it is firmly wrapped around it and has spread right round its trunk, the two may both live; but if someone then separates them, the hazel dies rapidly and the honeysuckle follows suit. 'Beautiful lady, it is the same for us: you cannot live without me, nor I without you!'

### ii) Dante, *Inferno* XXI 76-81

This passage shows the first nature imagery based on personal observation in European literature:

E come all'orlo dell'acqua d'un fosso  
stanno i ranocchi pur col muso fori,  
si che celano i piedi e l'altro grosso,  
Si stavan d'ogne parte i peccatori,  
ma come s'appressava Barbariccia,  
così si ritraen sotto i bollori.

And as frogs lie at the edge of the water in a ditch, with their feet and bodies hidden but their noses sticking out, so the sinners lay here; but as Barbariccia approached, like frogs they slipped back under the boiling liquid.

## 2. Book of Wisdom Chapter 13

The major biblical passages on the created world are Genesis 1-3, Psalm 104, Job 38-41 and others in the canonical psalms and wisdom literature; and the parables of Jesus in Matthew 13. I print this extract from the Book of Wisdom because it is less familiar to us.

For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works;  
But they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world.  
If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them.  
And if people were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is the one who formed them.  
For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these people are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him.  
For while they live among his works, they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful,  
Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could

investigate the world,  
How did they fail to find sooner the Lord of all these things?

### 3. Francis of Assisi: *The Canticle of Brother Sun*

This is written in Italian, in rhyming stanzas; I quote the prose translation given by Brother Ramon, *Franciscan Spirituality* p.139.

Most high, all-powerful, all good, Lord!  
All praise is yours, all glory, all honour and all blessing.  
To you alone, Most High, do they belong.  
No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made,  
And first my lord Brother Sun,  
Who brings the day; and light you give to us through him.  
How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendour!  
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,  
And fair and stormy, all the weather's moods,  
By which you cherish all that you have made.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
So useful, lowly, precious and pure.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
Through whom you brighten up the night.  
How beautiful is he, how gay! Full of power and strength.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother,  
Who feeds us in her sovereignty,  
And produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through those who grant pardon  
For love of you; through those who endure sickness and trial.  
Happy those who endure in peace,  
By you, Most High, they will be crowned.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death!  
From whose embrace no mortal can escape.  
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!  
Happy those she finds doing your will!  
The second death can do no harm to them  
Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks,  
And serve him with great humility.

### 4. Dante Alighieri, On the divine creation of the world

Ciò che non more e ciò che può morire  
non è se no splendor di quella idea  
che partorisce, amando, il nostro sire:  
che quella viva luce che si mea  
dal suo lucente, che non si disuna  
da lui né dall'amor ch'a lor s'intrea,  
per sua bontate il suo raggiare aduna,  
quasi specchiato, in nove sussistenze,  
etternalmente rimanendosi una.  
Quindi discende all'ultime potenze  
giù d'atto in atto, tanto divenendo,  
che piú non fa che brevi contingenze;  
e queste contingenze essere intendo  
le cose generate, che produce  
con seme e senza seme il ciel movendo.  
La cera di costor e chi la duce  
non sta d'un modo; e pero sotto 'l segno  
ideale piú e men traluce.

Ond'elli avvien ch'un medesimo legno,  
secondo specie, meglio e peggio frutta;  
e voi nascete con diverso ingegno. (Paradiso XIII 52-72)

What does not die, and that which can die,  
Is nothing but the reflection of that idea  
Which our father in his love generated;  
For that living light which so issues from  
Its shining source, as to remain one with it  
And with the love which makes a third with them,  
By its goodness gathers its rays together  
As if reflected in nine substances,  
Yet all eternally remaining one.  
Thence it goes down to the remotest powers  
From act to act, until it becomes such  
As make no more than brief contingencies;  
And by contingencies in this connection I mean  
The generated things which are produced,  
With or without seed, by the moving heavens.  
Neither the wax nor what acts on it  
Remains unchanged; so that live light more or less  
Shows through the idea stamped on it.  
So it happens that one and the same tree  
According to its kind, fruits better or worse;  
And men are born with varying powers of mind.

(Dante: *The Divine Comedy*, translated by C.H. Sisson, London 1980)

## 6. Julian of Norwich: *Showings*

(from chapter 5 of the long text in the edition cited in the bibliography, p. 183-84)

He showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed to me, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: What can this be? I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that because of its littleness it would suddenly have fallen into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: it lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third is that God preserves it. But what did I see in it? It is that God is the Creator and the protector and the lover. For until I am substantially united to him, I can never have perfect rest or true happiness, until, that is, I am so attached to him that there can be no created thing between my God and me.

## 7. Teilhard de Chardin: Hymn of the Universe

At every moment the vast and horrible Thing breaks in upon us, that Thing we try so hard to forget but which is always there, separated from us only by thin dividing walls: fire, pestilence, earthquake, storm, the unleashing of dark moral forces... Lord God, my dignity as a man forbids me to shut my eyes to this,.. therefore, lest I succumb to the temptation to curse the universe, and the Maker of the universe, teach me to adore it by seeing you hidden within it. Say once again to me, Lord, those great and liberating words, the words which are at once revealing light and effective power: hoc est Corpus meum. in very truth, if only we will it to be so, the immense and sombre Thing, the spectre, the Tempest, is you. Ego sum, nolite timere. (17)

The world is a-building. This is the basic truth which must first be understood so thoroughly that it becomes an habitual and as it were natural springboard for our thinking. At first sight, beings and their destinies might seem to us to be scattered haphazard or at least in an arbitrary fashion over the face of the earth... But the more one reflects, with the help of all that science, philosophy and religion can teach us, each in its own field, the more one comes to realize that the world should be likened not to a bundle of elements artificially held together but rather to some organic system animated by a broad movement of development which is proper to itself. As the centuries go by it seems that a comprehensive plan is indeed being slowly carried out around us. A process is at work in the universe, an issue is at stake, which can best

be compared to the processes of gestation and birth; the birth of that spiritual reality which is formed by souls and by such material reality as their existence involves. (20)

We are not like the cut flowers that make up a bouquet; we are like the leaves and buds of a great tree on which everything appears at its proper time and place as required and determined by the good of the whole. (20)

It would be surprising to find, in a bouquet, flowers which were ill-formed or sickly, since these flowers are picked one by one and artificially grouped together in a bunch. But on a tree which has had to struggle against inner accidents of its own development and external accidents of climate, the broken branches, the torn leaves, and the dried or sickly or wilted blossoms have their place: they reveal to us the greater or lesser difficulties encountered by the tree itself in its growth. Similarly in a universe where each creature formed a little enclosed unit, designed simply for its own sake .. we should find some difficulty in justifying in our own minds the presence of individuals whose potentialities and upward-soaring drives had been painfully impeded. (42)

To be pure of heart means to love God above all things and at the same time to see him everywhere in all things. (49)

God, who cannot in any way blend or be mingled with the creation which he sustains and animates and binds together, is nonetheless present in the birth, the growth and the consummation of all things. (71)

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

Full details of each work cited are given in the bibliography. Notes and comments pertaining to the works referred to, and additional to those contained in the text of the essay itself, are provided here rather than in the bibliography.

1. I quote from the much debated title of a book by L. F. Von Weizsacker, *The History of Nature*, published in Chicago in 1949.
2. These models are most clearly outlined by C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature*; see also R. Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature*, and R. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*. An alternative polarity is proposed by K Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, who traces the change from an anthropocentric world view to what he calls secular pantheism between the years 1500 and 1800.
3. See for example the recent writings listed in the bibliography of J. Moltmann, J. Polkinghorne, R. Sheldrake, P. Davies, G.S. Hendry, M. Fox.
4. See N. Anderson, *The World's Religions*, and G. Parrinder (ed), *An Illustrated History of the World's Religions*. For a feminist perspective see R. Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, ch.1, and E. Moltmann-Wendel, *A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey* ch.3.
5. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* - see Appendix 1. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*; Virgil, *Georgics* (in which 104 plant spp. are mentioned); Juvenal, *Satires*; Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturales*; Theophrastus, *De Historia Plantarum*; Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica*. Brief summaries of the works of these writers are given in P. Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. See also C Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, ch.1; R. Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature* ch. 1; and R. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* Part One, 'Greek Cosmology'; and E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* ch 10, 'The Ideal Landscape'
6. The works of Leucippus do not survive, and those of Democritus have come down to us only in fragments. Epicurus wrote a work *On Nature* of which fragments survive. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*. See also note 5.
7. Alan of Lille, *De Planctu Naturae* and *Anticlaudianus*; Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*.
8. M.D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* p.48.
9. See Appendix for examples of nature in the poetry of the 12th and 13th centuries.
10. Most notably by E. Male, *L'Art religieux du XIIe siècle en France* and *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the 13th Century*. A fine example from this country would be the carvings of the Chapter House in Southwell

Cathedral, for which see A. Clifton-Taylor, *The Cathedrals of England*, pp. 140-45 and N. Summers, *The Chapter House, Southwell Minster*.

11. See for example B. Yapp, *Birds in Medieval Manuscripts*. An example of the new realism would be the so-called Bird Psalter of the 14th century currently held in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

12. Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum maius*; Bartholomew of Glanville, *De Proprietatibus rerum*; Gerard of Wales *Topographia Hibernica*.

13. Aristotle, *De Anima*, expounded for example by Dante in his *Convivio* III iii and *Purgatorio* XXV. See Crombie, *Augustine to Galileo* vol I ch.3, 'Thirteenth-century biology'. Albert the Great wrote commentaries on Aristotle; *De vegetabilibus et plantis* and pseudo-Aristotle, *De plantis*; to him is also attributed *The Book of Secrets, of the virtues of herbs, stones and certain beasts*.

14. For Francis and Bonaventure see section 5. The visions and illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen have been edited by M. Fox, *The Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*; Hildegard referred to the power of God as 'viriditas' or greenness. For Julian see Appendix. Dante's *Comedy* is full of strikingly observed nature imagery; see for example L.O. Kuhns, *The Treatment of Nature in Dante's 'Divina Commedia'*.

14. Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p.27

15. For the change see Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, p.96-98; the old understanding is outlined by C S Lewis, *The Discarded Image* ch. 5, 'The Medieval Universe'

16. See R. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* p. 96-98.

17. Quoted Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p.128-29.

18. These ideas were expressed in his *New Atlantis*. See Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, ch. 7; also Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 35-40; and R. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* p. 100-101.

19. See Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* p. 38-39

20. The witchhunts of the 15th to 17th centuries are described by R. Ruether in *New Woman, New Earth* ch. 4; Ruether also charts the decline in the social status of women ch. 1.

21. For Spinoza see R. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* p. 105-6. Agricola's *De Re Metallica* is discussed by C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature* ch. 1.

22. See H.W. Montefiore (ed.), *Man and Nature*, 'The Scope of Salvation', p. 38-41; G.M. Landes, 'Creation and Liberation' in *Creation in the Old Testament* ed. B.W. Anderson, p. 135-51; also G.S. Hendry, *Theology of Nature* ch. 1, where Luther is cited as the principal mover in this regard.

23. R. Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature*, p.21.

24. See R. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* p.102-04.

25. See J. Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*, p. 3.

26. For Hobbes see C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature* ch. 8; for Newton see idem ch. 9, where the new technological developments are also discussed.

27. J. Polkinghorne, *One World - The Interaction of Science and Technology* p.3.

28. For John Ray and his contemporaries see C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature* ch. 10 and A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* ch. 1. For Jonathan Edwards see A.E. McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics* p. 22.

29. For Van Helmont and Conway, see Merchant, *The Death of Nature*. For Leibniz see J. MacQuarrie, *In Search of Deity: An Essay in Dialectical Theism* ch. 9 and R. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* p.110.

30. Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selbourne* (1788); William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (1830).

31. This process is charted by G.M. Landes, 'Creation and Liberation', in *Creation in the Old Testament*, edited by B.W. Anderson, pp. 135-51, and G.S. Hendry, *Theology of Nature*. See also C. Westermann, *Creation* p.1-4.
32. See J. Lovelock, *Gaia*, R. Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature*, P. Davies, *God and the New Physics*, J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*.
33. J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation* p. 15.
34. A. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* p.62; H.K. Schilling, *The New Consciousness in Science and Religion*.
35. J. Polkinghorne, *One World, Science and Creation, Science and Providence*; P. Davies, *God and the New Physics*.
36. See for example the report commissioned by the Church of England and edited by H.W. Montefiore, *Man and Nature*.
37. Cohn Wilson, *Man, Myth and Magic* p. 63.
38. S. McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* p. 92; the term is also used by H.K. Schilling, *The New Consciousness in Science and Religion*.
39. *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*
40. A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* p. 79
41. Suggested by, for example, G.S. Hendry, *Theology of Nature*, ch. 1.
42. A.E. McGrath, *Bridge-Building* p. 22.
43. C.E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p. 12.
44. C. Westermann, *Creation*, p.3.
45. J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, ch. 2 'In the Ecological Crisis'; S. McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* Part I, and *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* ch. 1 'The Ecological Crisis'; M. Fox, *Original Blessing*, Introduction, and *Creation Spirituality*, Preface and ch. 3 'Rules for Living in the Universe'.
46. The phrase is Moltmann's, *God in Creation* p.38.
47. Notable exceptions are B.W. Anderson, *Creation in the Old Testament*, and C.F.D. Moule, *Man and Nature in the New Testament*. See also J.A. Baker, 'Biblical Attitudes to Nature', in *Man and Nature*, Ed. H.W. Montefiore, p. 87-109.
48. Commands concerning the festivals are given in Leviticus 23. For the agricultural society of Israel see N. Zohary, *Plants of the Bible*, and J.A. Thompson, *Handbook of Life in Bible Times*, ch. 9 'Agriculture'.
49. Jacob: Genesis 29. Ruth: Book of Ruth ch. 2. Naboth: 1 Kings 21. Jesus' birth: Luke 2. His call of Peter, James, and John: Matthew 4. Parables: Matthew 13.
50. For all these see the detailed study *Plants of the Bible* by Zohary, who also draws attention to the very great difficulties of identification in some cases.
51. Ostrich, Job.39.13-18; sparrow, Ps 84; swallow, Ps 25; eagle, Proverbs 23; raven, Proverbs 30; rooster, Proverbs 30; hawk, Isaiah 34; owl, Isaiah 34; crane, Isaiah 38; dove, Isaiah 38; stork, Jeremiah 8.7; partridge, Jeremiah 17.11.
52. Lion, Job 4.10-11; ass, Job 6.5; jackal, Job 30.29; dog, Ps 22; boar, Ps. 80; bear, Proverbs 17; badger, Proverbs 30; camel, Isaiah 30; horse, Isaiah 31; hedgehog, Isaiah 34; goat, Song of Songs; rabbit, Ps 104; antelope, Isaiah 51.
53. Spider, Isaiah 59; caterpillar, Isaiah 33; grasshopper, Eccl. 12; locust, Ps. 105.
54. For the passage from Wisdom 13 see Appendix.



55. See for example Job 14.7-12
56. Quoted by G.S. Hendry, *Theology of Nature* p.62
57. C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 21-22.
58. Dodd p.21
59. See for example Isaiah 65.17, 66.22; Romans 8.21; Revelation 21-22.
60. J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p.62
61. H.H. Schmid, 'Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation - "Creation Theology" as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology', in B.W. Anderson, *Creation in the Old Testament*, p.102-117. The essay 'The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation'. by G. Von Rad is also printed in Anderson, p.53-64. See also Harrier, 'Creation Faith in Deutero-Isaiah', *Vetus Testamentum* 17, 1967, p.298-306, and Moltmann, *God in Creation*, ch.8 'The Evolution of Creation'.
62. G.M.Landes, 'Creation and Liberation', in Anderson, *Creation in the Old Testament*, p. 135-51.
63. For the personification of wisdom see for example A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* p. 560-62 and A. Clifford, 'Creation' in *Systematic Theology*, eds F. Schussler Fiorenza and J.P. Galvin. The classic formulation of the idea that wisdom theology is creation theology is given by Zimmerli, for whose thesis see H.J. Hermisson, 'Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom' in B.W. Anderson, *Creation in the Old Testament* p.118-34.
64. For the identification of Christ and God's creative power see C.E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 'Lecture 3: Incarnation, Kenosis and Divine Action' and J.G. Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption*. For feminist theological perspectives see section 5.
65. 'Creation and Redemption', in B.W. Anderson, *Creation in the Old Testament*.
66. 'Creation' in *Systematic Theology*, eds Schussler Fiorenza and Galvin, p.209.
67. G.S. Hendry, *Theology of Nature* p. 134, 116.
68. See for example G.S. Hendry, *Theology of Nature*, and T. Berry, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth*.
69. *Science and Creation: The Search for Understanding* p. xii.
70. *God in Creation* p.53. See also S. McFague, *The Body of God*, where natural theology is defined as the idea that God can be known through the creation, or the aim of finding harmony between scientific and theological knowledge, p.65.
71. G S Hendry, *Theology of Nature*.
72. S.T. 1 q.47 a.1. Quoted by T. Berry, *Befriending the Earth*, p.17.
73. Institutes 1v9; Iv; IxI. Quoted by A. McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics*, chapter 1, "The Theological Foundations of Effective Apologetics".
74. See for example J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 'natural knowledge of God certainly confers wisdom, but it does not confer salvation and blessedness. The knowledge of God that confers blessedness comes solely from the 'supernatural' revelation of God in Jesus Christ', p.56; J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation*, 'however valuable natural theology may be in pointing to the divine and affording insight into his creation, it will only at best be able by itself to bring us to the Cosmic Architect or Great Mathematician. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is to be sought by other means', p. 86.
75. Quoted by E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, "The Book as Symbol", p.319. In this essay Curtius gives an excellent summary of the development and persistence beyond the Middle Ages of the metaphor of the book of nature.
76. *Breviloquium* II, c.11, quoted Curtius p. 321. Bonaventure takes his metaphor from Ezekiel 2.9 and Revelation 5.1.

77. Hugh of St Victor, *Erudit. didasc.* VII iv, quoted by E. Male, *The Gothic Image* p.29.
78. Dante refers to the created world as the reflection of the idea (word) to which God gave birth through love, *Paradiso* XIII 42-54; he then changes metaphor and suggests that the light is received by the material world differently according to its qualities, like the imprint of a seal in wax (see Appendix). For the many images from nature which occur in Dante see L.O. Kuhns, *The Treatment of Nature in Dante's 'Comedy'*; M. Battiato, *Il fascino della natura in Dante*; P. Boyde, *Dante Philomythes*.
79. *The Soul's Journey into God*, tr. E. Cousins, section 1-2. For the doctrine of vestiges see also J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p.603-64.
80. Quoted by E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* p.323. Curtius also traces the metaphor in the works of Quarles, Donne, Milton, Vaughan, Herbert and Crashaw.
81. E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, p.324.
82. William Derham's work of this title was published in 1713; see A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* chapter 1, "The Two Books".
83. John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*, 1691; William Paley, *Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature*, 1802. See A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* ch.1.
84. 'The Son of God created the world ... to communicate himself in an image of his own excellency ... He communicates a sort of shadow ... of his excellencies ... so that when we are delighted with flowery meadows and gentle breezes ... we may consider that we see only the emanation of the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ', quoted A.E. McGrath, *Bridge Building*, p.22.
85. R. Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature* p.71.
86. A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Bampton Lectures 1978*; 3, Moltmann, *God in Creation: The Gifford Lectures 1984-85*; J. MacQuarrie, *In Search of Deity: An Essay in Dialectical Theism*, 1984.
87. T. Berry and T. Clarke, *Befriending the Earth*. Berry speaks of the need 'to recover the ancient Christian view that there are two Scriptures, the Scripture of the natural world and the Scripture of the Bible', p.76.
88. See for example R. Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature*; J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*; C.J.M. Halkes, *New Creation*; S. McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*.
89. For Spinoza see R. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* p.105-06. For Wordsworth see for example *The Prelude* book 8, 'Love of Nature leading to Love of Man', in *Wordsworth: Poetical Works* ed. T. Hutchinson, p.547-55.
90. See R. Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth*, ch.1 'The Descent of Woman'; E. Moltmann-Wendel, *A Land Flowing With Milk and Honey* ch 3 'The Forgotten Goddess'; J. Moltmann, *God in Creation* p.98.
91. Matthew Fox dubs this the 'paganophobic' reaction, *Creation Spirituality* p.101.
92. The classic statement of this position is L. White, 'On the Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis'. See also K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, ch. 1 'Human Ascendancy', and C.J.M. Halkes, *New Creation: Christian Feminism and the Renewal of the Earth*, ch.7, 'God's Good Creation', where she goes so far as to suggest that 'transcendence, once experienced as God's holiness, has now been interpreted as his being disconnected from nature and creation' p.86. This view is however challenged by Moltmann, *God in Creation*, ch. 2 'In the Ecological Crisis', where he points out that the exploitation of nature predates the Judaeo-Christian religion by 3000 years; and also by A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* p.278, and H.W. Montefiore (ed.), *Man and Nature*.
93. Quoted by S. McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* P. 136.
94. C.E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation* p.70.
95. For Krause, a contemporary of Hegel, see J. MacQuarrie, *In Search of Deity: An Essay in Dialectical Theism*, ch.1 'The Idea of Natural Theology'. For Hartshorne see *The New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds A. Richardson and J. Bowden, p.423.

96. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p.98.
97. A.R.Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*, p.45.
98. MacQuarrie, *In Search of Deity* ch.1 'The Idea of Natural Theology'.
99. Examples of such biblical images are given by H.W. Montefiore, *Man and Nature*, 'The God who creates' p.22-26, and by A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* ch.1 - creation as a garment worn by God, as a pot moulded by the potter, as the emanation of God's life-giving Spirit, as the manifestation of God's wisdom or word, as the body into which is breathed life. For a Trinitarian doctrine of creation see Moltmann, *God in Creation* ch.4 'God the Creator'.
100. *In Search of Deity: An Essay in Dialectical Theism*.
101. M. Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation*
102. For Whitehead see J.B. Cobb: *A Christian Natural Theology*. Of Teilhard de Chardin's works see particularly *Mass on the World* and *The Heart of Matter*.
103. Endless play is possible with the word 'word', which in English carries a fraction of the associations of the Hebrew 'dabar', Greek 'logos' and Latin 'verbum', all of which denote both speech and action.
104. For Leibniz see MacQuarrie, *In Search of Deity* ch.9 and R. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* p.110-12. For Whitehead see the exposition of his thought by J.B.Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology*; also the chapter in MacQuarrie. See also R. Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature* ch.5 'The Nature of Life'; J. Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation* p.69-70, and P. Davies, *God and the New Physics*.
105. Moltmann, *God in Creation* p. 96.
106. Polkinghorne, *One World: The interaction of Science and Theology*. See also A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*: 'God the Creator is immanent in a world that he is still creating. We conceived of God acting through the world as Creative agent, so that God is acting in and through its natural processes ... in a way analogous to the immanence involved in our acting in and expressing ourselves as personal agents through our bodies', p.295.
107. For example Julian of Norwich, St John of the Cross, Thomas Traherne, Richard Jefferies; see J. Dalby, *Christian Mysticism and the Natural World*.
108. A brief history of the Celtic race is given by I. Bradley, *The Celtic Way* ch.1, and J. Campbell, *Occidental Mythology: The Masks of God* p.291-306.
109. See J. Campbell, *The Masks of God*, p.293-96.
110. See J. MacQuarrie, 'Celtic Spirituality', in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* ed G.S. Wakefield p.83.
111. I. Bradley, *The Celtic Way* p.32.
112. See I. Bradley, *The Celtic Way* ch.3; D. O'Laoghaire, 'Celtic Spirituality' in *The Study of Spirituality* eds Jones, Wainwright and Arnold, p.219-20.
113. See M.A. Schmiel, 'The Finest Music in the World: Exploring Celtic Spiritual Legacies' in *Western Spirituality* ed. M. Fox p. 176.
114. His work is outlined by Schmiel, 'The Finest Music in the World', p.182-87.
115. I. Bradley, *The Celtic Way* p.59, 67.
116. *Carmina Cadelica* 1 39-41, quoted I. Bradley, *The Celtic Way*
117. R. Van de Weyer, *Celtic Fire: An Anthology of Celtic Christian Literature* p.92.
118. Examples are given by R. Van de Weyer, *Celtic Fire*, 'Saints and Beasts' p.59-64.
119. R. Van de Weyer, *Celtic Fire* p.96.

- L20. I. Bradley, *The Celtic Way* p. 60.
121. See J. MacQuarrie, 'Celtic Spirituality' p.84.
122. See E. Doyle, 'Franciscan Spirituality' in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* p.159.
123. Brother Ramon, *Franciscan Spirituality - Following Saint Francis Today*, p.1.
124. The links are explored by E.A. Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic - the Derivation and Significance of the Nature stories in the Franciscan legend*.
- L25. Celano *Vita Prima* 80-81, quoted E.A. Armstrong, *Saint Francis* p. 10.
26. For the sacramental view of nature see A. Peacocke, 'A Sacramental View of Nature' in *Man and Nature*, ed. H. Montefiore, p. 132-42.
127. Brother Ramon, *Franciscan Spirituality* p. 112.
128. p. 114.
129. E. Dreyer, 'Bonaventure' in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* p.54. A good introduction to Bonaventure's thought is provided by E. Cousins in his edition of *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God and Other Works*.
130. *The Soul's Journey into God*, ed. E. Cousins, p.78.
131. E. Cousins, *Bonaventure*, Introduction.
132. See Appendix.
133. M. Fox, 'Creation Spirituality', *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* p. 99-100. Fox's major works on this subject are *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* and *Creation spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth*. The Eastern idea of theosis is explored by N. Berdyaev, 'Salvation and Creativity: Two Understandings of Christianity', in *Western Spirituality* ed. N. Fox, p. 115-139.
34. See for example H.A. Henik, 'Toward a Biblical Basis for Creation Spirituality', in *Western Spirituality* ed. N. Fox, P. 7-75; and M. Fox, *Original Blessing*, p.11.
35. This point is made by V.J. Donovan, *The Church in the Midst of Creation*, p.113.
36. M. Fox, *Creation Spirituality* p. 13.
137. p.14.
138. Quoted M. Fox, 'Meister Eckhart on the Fourfold Path of a Creation-Centred Spiritual Journey', in *Western Spirituality* p. 220, 221.
139. Quoted M. Fox, *Creation Spirituality* p. 8-9. The process theologians are those who base their theological reflections on the philosophy of A.N. Whitehead and C. Hartshorne; see the study of John Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology*.
140. Quoted N. Fox, *Original Blessing* p. 220.
141. See T. Berry and T. Clarke, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth*. For a discussion of Christian environmental ethics see the writings reprinted in R. Gill, *A Textbook of Christian Ethics*. The growing Christian response to the problem of the current global ecological crisis was sparked by the 1967 article by Lynn White, 'On the Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis'; see also the essay of the same year by C.F.D. Moule, *Man and Nature in the New Testament: Some Reflections on Biblical Ecology*. More recent works are J. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, R. Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, and S.R.L. Clark, *How to Think About the Earth*.
142. *The Mass on the World* p.35-36; see also Appendix.

143. M. Fox, *Original Blessing* p.271.
144. N. Grey, *The Wisdom of Fools* p.58.
145. *The Death of Nature*.
146. M. Grey, *Redeeming the Dream* p. 39.
147. p. 39.
148. p. 39.
149. S. McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* p. 19.
150. De Operibus sex dierum, quoted M.D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* p.9.
151. N. Grey, *Redeeming the Dream* p. 138-45.
152. N. Grey, *The Wisdom of Fools? Seeking Revelation for Today*.
153. F. Moltmann-Wendel, *A Land of Milk and Honey*, p. 98, citing F. Christ, *Jesus Sophia*.
154. R. Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth* p. 195, 194.
155. C.J.M. Halkes, *New Creation: Christian Feminism and the Renewal of the Earth*; S. McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological. Nuclear Age*.
156. N. Grey, *The Wisdom of Fools* p. 130.
157. A.E. McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics*, Leicester 1992 P. 10.
158. Cited by McGrath p. 36.
159. L.W. Barber, *The Religious Education of Pre-School Children*, ch.4 'To Build Faith'; ch. 10 'Prayer'. For examples of mystical experiences of nature see E. Robinson, *The Original Vision* ch. 3.
160. Quoted by S. McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* p.82. McFague calls this phenomenon attention epistemology.
161. See Appendix.
162. Eg in *Hymn of the Universe* - see Appendix.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Detail from the Chapter House, Southwell Cathedral, thirteenth century.
2. Goshawk taking a duck; detail from the Alphonso Psalter, DL MS Add. 24686, f. 14v. England, thirteenth century.
3. Picking cherries, from 'A Compendium of Medicinal Plants', BL Sloane MS 4016, f.30. Italy, fourteenth century.
4. Saint Francis preaches to the birds, Giotto, Basilica di S. Francesco, Assisi, late thirteenth century.
5. Thomas Bewick, wood engraving of a European Jay, *History of British Birds*, published by Longman, 1797-1804

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