Ecological Praxis as Discipleship: Developing a Model of Praxis from Sallie McFague's Theological Call for Consumption Reduction

By

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Abstract

This thesis is a constructive and heuristic response to the challenge of changing human behaviour in the face of the ecological crisis. For the 20 percent of the world's population that consume approximately 90 percent of the Earth's resources, immediate and dramatic reduction in individual rates of consumption is imperative. The need for consumption reduction requires a theological response. Whether or not we reduce our levels of consumption has implications for the natural world and for our relationships with God. It is important theologically to promote an agenda of individual behaviour change in response to the ecological crisis and to a loving, incarnational God.

I bring this agenda forward in this thesis through an examination of the writings of Sallie McFague, a seasoned ecotheologian. She argues that in the middle-class North American context, a Christian ecological praxis of consumption reduction is ecologically and theologically necessary. Such praxis, for McFague, is understood as a form of Christian discipleship. However, while she calls for this praxis, McFague does not develop it. In my project I develop the methodology behind McFague's understanding of praxis so that an ecological praxis of consumption reduction can become more relevant in light of the ecological crisis and its theological dimensions highlighted. I also explore ecological literacy as a means by which an ecological praxis of consumption reduction, as a theological response, might be elicited.

When I interpret McFague's call for ecological praxis exclusively within the context of her ecotheology, her understanding of praxis seems rather simplistic: once a person changes her or his thinking, her or his behaviour will change. However, a detailed

reading of McFague's entire corpus, including the parabolic and metaphorical theologies that she develops before her turn to ecotheology, reveals a rich and complex, albeit implicit and unidentified, comprehension of human action in the context of belief. It is necessary, thus, to construct a model of praxis based upon McFague's early work to emphasize the richness of McFague's understanding. Such a model can then be developed with contributions from McFague's own ecotheology in order to create a methodology that more accurately reflects the insights from and demands of the ecological crisis to theology today.

McFague's call for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction emerges from her work in ecotheology which is in conversation with scholars, past and present, working in the same field. In Chapter One I situate McFague by providing a sketch of the significant developments and thinkers in the last fifty years of theological responses to the ecological crisis. I also show the variety and depth of engagement with McFague's thinking with an overview of scholarship about McFague's ideas. In doing so, I demonstrate that my dissertation fills a current lacuna in the scholarship regarding praxis.

While McFague's call for ecological praxis is situated within the field of ecotheology, the methodology behind such praxis emerges from her earlier scholarship, prior to the turn to ecology and theology. In the second chapter, I excavate McFague's comprehension of human action located in her parabolic and metaphorical theologies and construct it into a coherent model of praxis that undergirds McFague's later call for ecological praxis. Based upon her concern for discipleship as Christian belief lived out in the world, McFague focuses on the function of metaphor in the relationship among belief, language and action in people's lives. I assemble a working definition of the model centered upon component parts of the model: self, God, world, and experience.

The model of praxis that I construct from elements in McFague's theological corpus constitutes a rich, complex framework for interpreting an ecological praxis of consumption reduction. However, since it is based upon McFague's parabolic and metaphorical theologies, the model as it stands does not factor in insights made in ecotheology. These insights illustrate the unique demands and opportunities the ecological crisis affords human beings in terms of their behaviour and relationships with God. Given the richness of McFague's ecotheology and her call for ecological praxis, the model needs to be further developed using contributions from her work. In Chapter Three, I analyze McFague's ecotheology and identify four main ideas that collectively form the body of her thinking, and which can serve as material for developing the model of praxis.

In Chapter Four, I develop the model of praxis using the material uncovered in Chapter Three. I return to central aspects of the model – self, God, world, and experience – and examine what perception is provided into each aspect. Through this, I expand the model so that it encompasses the magnitude and scope of the ecological crisis and the valuable theological insights that McFague offers for understanding. I also examine the praxis language that appears for the first time in McFague's ecotheology. I note changes in her use of the term and analyze the changes for what they suggest about McFague's growing understanding of Christian discipleship.

Finally, I turn to the question of how to elicit a theologically based ecological praxis of consumption reduction. While McFague's understanding of human action – constructed and developed into a model of praxis that can respond to the specific needs of the ecological crisis and discipleship – is indispensable, the question still remains as to how to actually impel people to change their behaviour. In the final chapter, I begin a heuristic

inquiry into the possibilities of ecological literacy as a tool for engaging in the kind of praxis McFague advocates. I provide an overview of ecological literacy and apply some of its central principles to the aspects of self, God, world, and experience in the model of praxis.

The primary finding in this thesis is that the methodology behind McFague's call for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction is based upon an early and enduring concern for Christian discipleship, understood as Christian belief lived out in the world. For McFague, the base of human action in the context of belief is found in the function of metaphor in the relationship among belief, language and action. This is the foundation, developed in McFague's early scholarship, for her interest in and call for ecological praxis in her ecotheology.

This foundation is complex and highly nuanced. However, at no point does McFague construct or develop her ideas regarding praxis into a coherent model. Through my own construction and a further development of a model of praxis based upon McFague's ideas, I am able to present from McFague's theological scholarship a cogent and indispensable framework for understanding human action in light of belief and the ecological crisis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction **1**

Chapter One
The Question of Change in Ecology and Theology **14**
1.1 Introduction 14
1.2 The Question of Change in Ecotheology 15
1.2.1 1960s: The Cry of Alarm 16
1.2.2 1970s: Defining the Problem 18
1.2.3 1980s: The Big Picture in Ecotheology 21
1.2.4 1990s: Ethical Questions 26
1.2.5 The 21st Century: Deepening Dialogue 34
1.2.6 More Recently: A Turn to the Pragmatic 37
1.2.7 Summary 39
1.3 Situating Sallie McFague 40
1.4 Scholarly Engagements with Sallie McFague's Work 42
1.4.1 McFague's Parabolic Theology 42
1.4.2 McFague's Metaphorical Theology 44
1.4.3 McFague's Ecotheology 46
1.4.4 Summary 53
1.5 Theories of Change: Searching for a Dialogue Partner 54
1.5.1 Transformative Learning 55
1.5.2 Paulo Freire 57
1.5.3 Social Marketing 60
1.5.4 Social Ecology: Chaia Heller 62
1.5.5 Ecological Literacy 65
1.6 Conclusion 66

Chapter Two
Concern for Christian Discipleship: Developing a Model of Praxis from McFague's Early Scholarship **68**
2.1 Introduction 66
2.2 The Importance of the World in Christian Discipleship 69
2.3 Belief and Action in Christian Discipleship 71
2.3.1 The Concept of 'Belief' in McFague's Theology 72
2.3.2 McFague's Understanding of Action 71
2.3.3 The Relationship Between Belief and Action 74
2.4 The Importance of Language in Christian Discipleship 74
2.4.1 Defining Metaphor 76
2.4.2 Metaphor in the Parables 77
2.4.3 The Role of Metaphor in Theological Language 78
2.5 The Relationship Among Belief, Language and Action 81

2.6 Christian Discipleship in Religious Autobiography 82
2.6.1 The Function of Religious Autobiography 83
2.6.2 Convincing Through Conduct: John Woolman 85
2.6.3 Love for the People: Dorothy Day 89
2.7 Christian Discipleship and the Parabolic 92
2.7.1 Parabolic Shifts: Disorientation and Reorientation 93
2.7.2 A Parabolic Understanding of Discipleship 95
2.7.2.1 Self 96
2.7.2.2 World 99
2.7.2.3 God 101
2.7.2.4 Experience 104
2.7.2.5 Summary 106
2.8 Conclusion 106

Chapter Three
Sallie McFague's Ecotheology: Discipleship Toward the Natural World 108
3.1 Introduction 108
3.2 Christian Discipleship in Light of the Ecological Crisis: Influences on McFague's Thinking 110
3.2.1 Constructing God: Gordon Kaufman 111
3.2.2 Theocentric Ethics: James Gustafson 116
3.2.3 The Universe as Story: Thomas Berry 120
3.2.4 The Influence of Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry on McFague's Understanding of Christian Discipleship 126
3.2.4.1 Distinctions from Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry 131
3.3 A New Path for Christian Discipleship: McFague's Ecotheology 133
3.3.1 A Theology of Nature 134
3.3.2 The Universe as the Body of God 136
3.4 Reinterpreting Discipleship: Key Insights in McFague's Ecotheology 141
3.4.1 Earth-Based Starting Point 142
3.4.2 Centrality of Embodiment 150
3.4.3 Need to Know and Love Nature 156
3.4.4 Ethic of Care 162
3.5 Assessment of McFague's Ecotheology: Implications for the Model of Praxis 165
3.5.1 Implications for McFague's Understanding of Praxis and Its Development 172
3.6 Conclusion 176

Chapter Four
Discipleship in Response to the Ecological Crisis: Developing the Model of Praxis

Model of Praxis ... 177
4.1 Introduction ... 177
4.2 Developing the Model of Praxis with Insights from McFague's Ecotheology ... 179
4.2.1 Self ... 180
4.2.1.1 Implications ... 181
4.2.2 World ... 184
4.2.2.1 First Dimension: The World as a Concrete Place ... 184
4.2.2.2 Second Dimension: The Place Where We Live and Strive to Make Meaning ... 186
4.2.2.3 Third Dimension: The Secular Existence of People in Relationship ... 186
4.2.2.4 Implications ... 187
4.2.3 God ... 189
4.2.3.1 God of All Creation ... 191
4.2.3.2 God as Embodied ... 191
4.2.3.3 Implications ... 193
4.2.4 Experience ... 194
4.2.4.1 Experience as Embodied ... 194
4.2.4.2 Relationship between Knowing and Experience ... 196
4.2.4.3 Implications ... 197
4.2.5 The Model of Praxis and the Ecological Crisis ... 199
4.2.5.1 Disorientation and Reorientation in Light of the Ecological Crisis ... 200
4.2.5.2 Belief, Language and Action ... 202
4.3 Praxis in McFague's Ecotheology: A Shift in Language ... 204
4.3.1 Choosing to Talk about Praxis ... 205
4.3.2 Praxis: Changing Meaning ... 207
4.3.2.1 Praxis as Right Action ... 208
4.3.2.2 Praxis as Loving Nature as Neighbour ... 210
4.3.2.3 Ecological Praxis as Consumption Reduction ... 212
4.4 Interpreting Ecological Praxis Through a Parabolic Understanding of Christian Discipleship ... 214
4.4.1 The Purpose of Ecological Praxis: Christian Discipleship ... 215
4.4.2 Discipleship as Right Action ... 217
4.4.3 Discipleship as Cruciform Living: Consumption Reduction ... 220
4.5 Dramatic and Enduring Lifestyle Changes: A Parabolic Understanding of Christian Discipleship and Ecological Praxis ... 221
4.6 Conclusion ... 223

Chapter Five
Educating Discipleship: Ecological Literacy as a Tool for Eliciting Ecological Praxis 225
5.1 Introduction 225
5.1.1 Outline of the Chapter 226
5.2 Overview of Ecological Literacy 228
5.2.1 Ecological Literacy and Environmental Education 229
5.2.2 Ecological Literacy and Related Terms 233
5.2.3 Ecological Design 235
5.3 Main Principles of Ecological Literacy 237
5.4 Ecological Literacy and the Model of Praxis 243
5.4.1 Self and Ecological Literacy 244
5.4.2 World and Ecological Literacy 252
5.4.3 God and Ecological Literacy 258
5.4.4 Experience and Ecological Literacy 263
5.5 Ecological Literacy and Ecological Praxis: Toward Transformation 266
5.5.1 Disorientation, Reorientation and Ecological Literacy 266
5.6 Conclusion: Ecological Literacy, Ecological Praxis and Christian Discipleship 272

Conclusion 274

Bibliography 282

Introduction

The defining context for my dissertation is the global ecological crisis and the need for individual behaviour change in response. There is broad worldwide consensus that the Earth is in the midst of an ecological crisis, the scope and magnitude of which threatens life and the ability for life to regenerate.[1] It is also widely accepted that this crisis has been caused by human behaviour.

While there have been crises that have faced the human community in the past, none have been at the level we are now facing. The details of the ecological crisis are complex and graphic and need to be read and studied in detail for a real appreciation of the extent of the problem. The magnitude and extent of ecological degradation can be readily accessed through many online and print sources.[2]

I will comment briefly on two aspects of the problem in order to illustrate the magnitude of what we are considering. Of the many aspects of the ecological crisis, including habitat loss, loss of clean water, nuclear contamination, and the rise in environmental refugees, two stand out as illustrative of what we are dealing with. The first aspect is the climate crisis, the rising of global temperatures due to an increase in

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[1] Heather Eaton, "The Revolution of Evolution," *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 11, no. 1 (2007): 20-22.

[2] One of the most comprehensive sources available is the *State of the World Reports* issued annually by the Worldwatch Institute. See http://www.worldwatch.org (accessed September 26, 2012). Also see United Nations Environment Programme, www.unep.org (accessed September 26, 2012); World Wildlife Fund Canada, http://www.wwf.ca (accessed September 26, 2012); and Union of Concerned Scientists, http://www.ucsusa.org (accessed September 26, 2012).

greenhouse gases. Here is what Christopher Flavin and Robert Engleman have to say in the Worldwatch Institute's 2009 *State of the World* Report:

> For several decades now, Earth's heat balance has been severely out of equilibrium. Earth is absorbing more heat than it is emitting, and across the planet ecological systems are responding. The changes so far have been almost imperceptible, and even now they appear from the human viewpoint gradual.
>
> But don't be fooled: the changes represented by melting glaciers, acidifying oceans, and migrating species are – on a planetary timescale – breaking all known speed limits. The planet that humans have known for 150,000 years…is changing irrevocably thanks to human actions. . . . [T]hese changes are so profound that the world has entered a new geological epoch . . . the Anthropocene.[3]

Along with, and related to, the new epoch of the climate crisis is the current rate of species extinction, which scientists have termed the sixth extinction period. We are currently losing animal species at a rate of one every 20 minutes; by the end of our lifetime, half of all living species will have disappeared from the Earth.[4] The last extinction period of this magnitude was that of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. The difference between now and all other extinction periods is that this period is human-caused.[5] Given human interdependence upon the Earth's ecosystems, such loss will have devastating effects for the human community, as well as for the other-than-human world in which we are immersed.

Given these two cases and other aspects of the ecological crisis, it is clear that many changes must happen on the part of humans, including changes to social, political, and

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[3] Christopher Flavin and Robert Engelman, "The Perfect Storm," in *2009 State of the World: Into a Warming World*, Worldwatch Institute (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 2009), 5.

[4] Jeff Corwin, "The Sixth Extinction," *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 2009.

[5] A good overview of the sixth extinction period is provided by palaeontologist Niles Eldredge. "The Sixth Extinction," American Institute of Biological Sciences, http://www.actionbioscience.org/newfrontiers/eldredge2.html (accessed September 12, 2012).

economic institutions; more equitable distribution of resources among peoples; technological innovations in energy use; good global and national governance; economic and political stability; and a shift in worldviews and ethics around the world, such as that advocated by the Earth Charter.[6] One unavoidable aspect is the need for dramatic changes to individual lifestyles if there is to be any hope of mitigating the worst of the ruin and preventing some future damage. Deep and permanent changes to individual human behaviour, particularly among the 20 percent of the world's population that consumes 90 percent of the world's resources, are essential and unavoidable if the worst of the consequences of the ecological crisis for humans and the nonhuman world are to be mitigated.[7]

It is fairly easy to discuss issues of the ecological crisis and the changes that need to occur in human behaviour in objective terms, using the theoretical tools of our individual professions (in my case, theology). Usually, though, issues of environmental degradation begin to affect one most deeply when felt in a personal way. For me, an interest in environmental issues that began as a teenager translated into a particular preoccupation with individual behaviour change when I became a mother for the first time a little more

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[6] The Earth Charter is a civil society document that was written in response to the global ecological crisis. It is a concise, five-page set of ethical principles that orient human beings firmly within the life processes of the Earth and demonstrate that the goals of ecological sustainability, human rights, democracy, peace, and the ending of poverty are interrelated. The Charter was composed over ten years with contributions from thousands of individuals, hundreds of non-governmental, community, and professional organizations and international experts, many countries, a multitude of cultures, and a wide range of sectors of society. It was released on March 20, 2000, and continues to be used as a tool for education and inspiration. See Earth Charter Initiative, *The Earth Charter*, Earth Charter Commission, http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/echarter_english.pdf (accessed September 14, 2012).

[7] UNEP Global Environment Outlook Team, "Global Environment Outlook 3: Synthesis; Past, Present and Future Perspectives," United Nations Environment Programme http://www.unep.org/geo/GEO3/english/pdfs/synthesis.pdf (accessed September 12, 2012), 9.

than ten years ago. Although I had been concerned about ecological issues for many years by that point, I realized that my own personal behaviour, the changes I was making to live a more environmentally responsible lifestyle, could be rated as slightly better than average in comparison to other Canadians in my demographic, and outright insufficient in the face of the changes required. Eight years ago, as a single parent of one child living in a small apartment, my ecological footprint[8] equalled 2.15 Earths, the number of Earths required if everyone on the planet were to consume to the level that I did. Today, married with four children, my footprint equals 3.22 Earths.[9]

In addition to the vast amount of scientific data now available regarding the ecological crisis, there exist possible technological and other solutions to the problem. Many theories, from a range of disciplines, have been developed about how to instigate change. Yet, while all of this information exists, the ecological footprints of individuals and countries around the world continue to rise. While there has been extensive rethinking over the last decades regarding human behaviour and the fate of the Earth, individual and collective praxes have not changed in any significant, measurable way.

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[8] The concept of the ecological footprint is the brainchild of William Rees, an ecologist and professor at the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning. The ecological footprint is defined as the land and water area required to support indefinitely an individual's or a given human population's consumption and waste disposal requirements. It is an analytical tool designed to help individuals and communities, as well as experts in economics, planning and sustainability work, understand how consumption and waste disposal choices are related to the ecological and social carrying capacity. The idea that we need to reduce our Ecological Footprint has also been adopted as a metaphor to visualize our dependence on the Earth and address the need to reduce our consumption levels. See Wathis Wackernagel and William Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1996).

[9] World Wildlife Federation, "Living Planet 2012: Biodiversity, Biocapacity and Better Choices, World Wildlife Federation, http://awsassets.wwf.ca/downloads/lpr_2012_1.pdf (accessed September 19, 2012).

It is within this context, then, that I was led to explore what would be required for me to radically change my behaviour. What would be needed for me to make the difficult changes needed to reduce my consumption, so that there would be the possibility of my children inheriting a more sustainable world?[10]

The other piece to my personal, spiritual and professional interest is the role of theology. My own spirituality has long been rooted in two streams: nature and social justice. So in endeavouring to find some answers to my question about behaviour change, I turned to ecotheology, with its religious questions regarding the ecological crisis and the role of humanity. The fit made sense with the strong social justice orientation in my faith, which is well represented in certain streams of ecotheology.

To move my personal questions into a larger domain for exploration, the guiding questions for this dissertation are these: What is necessary to shift people's behaviour to the

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[10] I have chosen to focus on consumption for two primary reasons. First, in the North American context in which I live, the consumption (and waste) habits of privileged citizens are among the most prevailing ecological issues. Our rates of consumption are highly unsustainable and directly contribute to the ecological crisis. Second, while human consumption is embedded in social, political, and economic structures, it is an aspect of the ecological crisis that requires deep change at the individual level, among other levels. My question is about enabling praxis individually.

In this dissertation, the issue of consumption has been problematized within the broader challenge of consumerism, which theologian Laura Hartman defines as

> an overvaluing of the process and results of consumption, to the degree that the act of consumption defines fundamental human realities, such as the parameters of the good life and the ultimate goals of the human; and a concomitant undervaluing of, or lack of attention to, the moral dimension of consumption. Laura Marie Hartman, "An Ethics of Consumption: Christianity, Economy, and Ecology" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2008), 6.

This is the context within which McFague advocates for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction. However, as Hartman rightly points out, since human beings do consume, there is a need to construct a viable alternative for consuming that avoids the pitfalls of consumerism. While such construction is beyond the parameters of this dissertation, Hartman offers a cogent consideration, asking, "What is consumption, and how can it be done in a way that is authentically Christian and ethical?" Hartman's work considers the ecological crisis and the question of consumption itself within Christian theology. See Hartman, "An Ethics of Consumption."

dramatic, radical, and permanent reduction in consumption that is needed in the face of the ecological crisis? What resources exist within theology to assist in this regard?

In exploring the terrain of ecotheology to see what contributions that field might offer in answering these questions, I discovered that Sallie McFague, a leading ecotheologian, has grappled with the very question of behaviour change in response to the ecological crisis. In her book *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (2001), McFague advocates for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction as a Christian response, within the North American middle-class context, to the ecological crisis.[11] I decided to explore McFague's call for ecological praxis and see what it had to offer, so that it might help me and others like me change our behaviour.

McFague does not offer a structured model of praxis; she rarely defines the term or explains the methodology behind her understanding of praxis.[12] I initially assumed, therefore, that McFague's comprehension of praxis was based upon a social scientific model of reflection and action, commonly predicated on the work of Paulo Freire.[13] The basis of this assumption was rooted in the context in which McFague writes her ecotheology. In *Life Abundant* McFague advocates ecological praxis as a liberation theology for privileged Christians in North America. McFague has developed her thinking regarding models of God, the universe as God's body, and the need for ecological praxis

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[11] Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

[12] Specific examples of this will be detailed in Chapter Four.

[13] Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian educator who advocated a praxis of reflection and action upon the world in order to change the world. An outline of his thinking is presented in Chapter One.

within the streams of feminist and liberationist theologies, both of which have trajectories of social scientific understandings of praxis.[14] It made sense to consider that her use of the word praxis reflects a similar understanding.

What I discovered, however, through a fortuitous conversation with McFague and a thorough review of her entire corpus of scholarship, is that McFague's understanding of praxis is quite different from that of most liberation and feminist theologies. McFague, in a meeting with me in November 2007, stated that the main influence on her ideas about praxis is "not the social sciences, which might surprise you."[15] Instead, she is influenced by religious autobiography and the role of linguistics in human behaviour. McFague's remarks sent me on a track that helped me discover something in her work that, to date, other scholars have not identified.

With the information provided by McFague, I reread her early work, prior to her ecotheology. I began with her dissertation, published as *Literature and the Christian Life* (1966), and moved through her parabolic and metaphorical theologies.[16] What I discovered led to a complete change of direction in my research. McFague's ideas about praxis are not located in her ecotheology, but in a whole trajectory of thinking regarding the nature of language, belief and action in the lives of Christians.

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[14] Resources on praxis in feminist and liberation theologies include Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986); Linda Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); and Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Praxis as Method in Latin American Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology* (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1997).

[15] Sallie McFague, personal interview, November 17, 2007.

[16] Sallie McFague, *Literature and the Christian Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

In McFague's early scholarship lies an understanding of action that forms the basis of McFague's comprehension and call for praxis. It is an understanding that is implicit throughout McFague's work. Although McFague is influenced by linguistics and religious autobiography, she does not write about praxis within that context in her early work. What is present in her early scholarship is insufficient to serve as a model for interpreting the ecological praxis that McFague calls for at a later date. At no point in her work does McFague define or develop her ideas regarding praxis to an extent that they can function as a methodology, or model, for understanding how praxis occurs.

While McFague's thinking on ecological praxis is situated within her ecotheology, I needed to begin with constructing the methodology that undergirds it. This requires a starting point in her early work where few, if any, scholars of McFague's ecotheology have begun. I decided to construct McFague's understanding into what I call a *model of praxis*[17] that can serve as the methodology at the base of McFague's call for ecological praxis.

As I began to put the pieces of McFague's understanding of praxis together into a coherent model, I discovered that it still needed further development in order to help engage the ecological praxis McFague is calling for. While the emergence of McFague's *call* for ecological praxis comes from the considerable insights she develops in her ecotheology, the understanding of action upon which ecological praxis is predicated does not factor in those same insights. Given the distinctiveness of the ecological crisis, and the size of the shift required in behaviour change in response, it seemed necessary to consider

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[17] My use of the word 'model' here comes from the work of theologian Stephen Bevans, who writes: "To summarize, a model – in the sense that it is most often used in theology – is what is called a theoretical model. It is a 'case' that is useful in simplifying a complex reality, and, although such simplification does not fully capture that reality, it does yield true knowledge of it." Stephan B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 26.

how the model of praxis could be developed using the very insights that McFague contributes in her ecotheology. My hypothesis is that behind McFague's call for ecological praxis is an understanding of action that is rooted in her earlier work before her turn to ecotheology. Located in her parabolic and metaphorical theologies is an implicit and undeveloped trajectory of thinking regarding praxis. This understanding needs to be constructed into a model of praxis so that the methodology at the base of McFague's ecological praxis can be identified. The model then needs to be further developed in order to make the model more relevant in light of the ecological crisis.

At the same time, to develop the model is not enough. Theologians are not in the business of behaviour change *per se*, at least not in relation to ecological degradation. We make assumptions and assessments about how change can come about, and the role that religion and theology can play in such change. We are not in the business of creating programs for change. Yet, how to actually *induce* the ecological praxis McFague advocates is my driving concern. For this, I searched for a theory of change[18] that could help me to consider how McFague's model of praxis can move from understanding the mechanism of action at the base of ecological praxis to contemplating how to trigger that mechanism into concrete lifestyle changes. The theory of change that I chose is ecological literacy, a form of environmental education that factors in behaviour change in individuals as a result of knowledge gained about the Earth and its processes. While theology and environmental education are distinct disciplines, the work of McFague and the field of ecological literacy

[18] By 'theory of change' I am referring to various disciplinary frameworks for understanding how to change human behaviour. There is also a large body of literature, in theology and elsewhere, that deals with action theory; the literature on theory and action is vast and beyond the scope of this thesis.

share three convictions. The first is the explicit concern for change in light of the ecological crisis. Second, within ecological literacy is the recognition that a complex, dialectical relationship exists between knowledge and action. As I will show in this thesis, McFague's understanding of praxis also reflects this dialectic. Third, behaviour change based upon knowledge or experience gained is privileged. The emphasis for both McFague and for proponents of ecological literacy is the change in outward behaviour as a result of inward insights.

Therefore, this thesis brings into conversation three areas of thought. The first is the understanding of praxis that is implicit in McFague's early work. I will construct a model of praxis based upon her parabolic and metaphorical theologies. The second area comprises the major insights that emerge from McFague's own ecotheology. They will form the material with which I develop the model further. The third area of thought is ecological literacy, in which I explore the question of how an ecological praxis of consumption reduction, advocated by McFague as a theological response to the ecological crisis, can be activated.

The thesis proceeds as follows. In Chapter One, I present an overview of the trajectory of ecotheology, in order to situate McFague. She is a major voice in the field of ecology and theology, contributing to many aspects of theological response to the ecological crisis. Further, McFague's call for ecological praxis emerges from her work in ecotheology. For these two reasons her work must be situated within the larger terrain in which it is in conversation. I then explore what other scholars have done with McFague's scholarship, early and recent, to highlight the depth to which her thinking has been engaged and to note the absence of other scholarly examination of her thinking regarding praxis.

Finally, I demonstrate the theoretical trajectory my own research took, to arrive at ecological literacy as an interlocutor with McFague. Ecological literacy is one theory of change among many; presenting how I arrived at that choice will highlight the appropriateness of ecological literacy as a dialogue partner.

In Chapter Two, I begin with McFague's early work, defined as her scholarship prior to her turn to ecology and theology. In this chapter, I uncover the elements that ground McFague's understanding of praxis and construct those elements into a coherent model that can later be developed further. McFague's comprehension is based upon the role of metaphor in human thought and language and the complex interplay among belief, language and action in people's lives. Interpreted theologically, McFague is drawn to what I term a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship: a complex way of understanding how Christian belief moves into action. As a framework for further discussion, I create a definition of the model by identifying some key aspects: how concepts of the self, world, God, and experience are interpreted according to McFague.

In Chapter Three, I set aside the model of praxis to analyze and present the key insights in McFague's ecotheology. McFague's scholarship is rich and substantive. To appreciate this richness I examine the methodological influences on the shift to ecology in her scholarship and delineate her insights into several categories. The key insights that offer a basis for developing the model of praxis are an Earth-based starting point, the centrality of embodiment to her ecotheology, the need to know and love nature, and the value of an ethic of care. I also provide a critical assessment of McFague's ecotheology in order to highlight potential gaps or weaknesses that could be relevant to developing the model of praxis.

In Chapter Four, I use the insights from Chapter Three to develop the model I constructed in Chapter Two. Returning to the aspects of the self, world, God, and experience, I examine how they can be further understood or expanded in light of McFague's ecotheology. Then, I analyze how McFague has discussed and used the idea of praxis within her ecotheology. I note where she has declined to provide much, if any, definition of the term, and how she has worked with the idea over the course of her scholarship. There is a progression from McFague calling for people to "think and act as if bodies matter" in *The Body of God* (1993)[19] to calling for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction in *Life Abundant*. I draw out the theological implications of McFague's ecological praxis and highlight its complexity as a model of discipleship.

In Chapter Five, I turn to an exploration of how an ecological praxis of consumption reduction might be put into effect. How can we trigger the model of praxis at its base, so that people actually change their behaviour in this way? To explore this question, I engage ecological literacy as a tool. As stated earlier, ecological literacy is an area of environmental education that considers it morally and scientifically necessary for people to change their behaviour in response to the ecological crisis and the knowledge they gain about the Earth and how it works. I present ecological literacy primarily as it is presented by David Orr, one of its foremost proponents. I provide a fairly detailed overview of the field so as to have a clear appreciation of what is involved in becoming ecologically literate. I then return to the component aspects of the model of praxis and use them as a

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[19] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), viii.

framework for querying how ecological literacy could help to elicit a praxis of consumption reduction.

This dissertation is situated within the field of theology. Ultimately, theology is about discipleship. While theology is called "faith seeking understanding," I will suggest, along with others such as McFague, that theology is meant to help each of us who calls himself or herself Christian toward discipleship.[20] McFague's comprehension of praxis is based upon a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. While this will be explained in detail in the following pages, the key is this: how is Christian belief translated into action in the world? This, I have come to realize, is what my early questions, the questions that led me to start this academic process, were about. How can I live out my belief in the world? As we turn to the trajectory of ecotheology within which McFague's own work is situated, this is the question that, implicitly or explicitly, informs many of the scholars who have risen to the challenge of responding theologically to the ecological crisis.

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[20] I concur with McFague when she writes, "So, thinking theologically is not an end in itself; it is for the purpose of right action, for discipleship." McFague, *Life Abundant*, 15.

Chapter 1

The Question of Change in Theology and Ecology

1.1 Introduction

Sallie McFague's call for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction is situated within the field of ecotheology, which comprises a range of theological responses to the ecological crisis over a period of nearly fifty years. In diverse ways, ecotheologians have been exploring the question of change as a theological demand issued forth by the ecological crisis. By the question of change, I am referring to the many forms of adjustment that are considered; in addition to behaviour modification, the question of change can regard gradual or dramatic shifts in doctrine, worldviews, or ethics, for example. In any case, a shift is being evoked regarding ecological decline, and theological responses (among others) are demanded.

Sallie McFague's work emerges from, and is firmly situated within, this fifty-year trajectory. In order to understand McFague's call for ecological praxis in its theological dimensions, it is necessary to locate her within the larger body of theological thought on ecology. For that purpose, I provide a sketch of the development of ecotheology in the first half of this chapter.

In understanding the question of change as it appears in McFague's theology, it is not enough to simply locate her work within the larger body of ecotheology. It is also helpful to examine the significant amount of scholarship that engages with her ideas. A prodigious number of scholars have critically engaged central themes in McFague's theology, most extensively with her ecotheology, but with her earlier work, too. A survey

of this will provide readers with an overview of how McFague's ideas have been received and interpreted. Such a survey will also serve to locate my own analysis of McFague's ideas regarding praxis. I present this material in the second section of this chapter.

My interest in this thesis is in constructing and developing the understanding of praxis that undergirds McFague's call for ecological praxis. In the course of doing so, I identify the need for a dialogue partner that might offer insight into how to invoke the ecological praxis she advocates. McFague's question regarding praxis is, after all, located within a broader interdisciplinary track that develops various theories of change based upon social and ecological need. While I have chosen ecological literacy to be the dialogue partner in this project, it is helpful to identify the range of ideas that I explored in the process of choosing ecological literacy. There are specific aspects to the question of change that are unique to the ecological crisis and the changes in human behaviour that are required. An overview of the trajectory my own research took helps to highlight these aspects. This overview comprises the final section of this chapter.

1.2 The Question of Change in Ecotheology

The question of change in the field of ecotheology emerges from an initial cry of alarm raised in the early 1960s and continues forward to today. While there are exceptions at every turn, in my survey of the field I have denoted general themes and concerns that

have a chronological lineage and can be roughly organized by decade.[21] By examining key authors and developments, I present an outline of that chronology.

1.2.1 1960s: The Cry of Alarm

It is in the 1960s that the cry of alarm is raised in theology regarding the ecological crisis, which was becoming increasingly apparent to the general public. Lynn White Jr. is credited with this, stemming from his criticism of Christianity in his 1967 article, "The Historical Roots of the Ecologic Crisis."[22] White argues that the roots of the ecological crisis lie within the Jewish and Christian traditions: "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen."[23] He suggests that at the root of the problem is a Christian worldview of dominance over the natural world. Therefore, ecological degradation cannot be resolved merely with science and technology. According to White, we need to rethink the human-nature relationship.

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[21]My efforts here join the other schemes and typologies that have introduced readers to and organized the vast amount of scholarship in the field of theology and ecology. For others, see Peter W. Bakken, Joan Gibb Engel, and J. Ronald Engel, *Ecology Justice and Christian Faith: A Critical Guide to the Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995); Ernst M. Conradie, ed., "Towards an Agenda for Ecological Theology: An Intercontinental Dialogue," *Ecotheology* 10, no.3 (2005): 281-343; Anne Marie Dalton and Henry C. Simmons, *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010); Sally Noland MacNichol, "Reclaiming, Revisioning, Recreating in Theo-Ecological Discourse," in *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996): 67-76; Stephen Bede Scharper, "Christian Theological Responses to the Ecological Crisis: An Overview," in *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment* (New York: Continuum, 1997): 23-52; and Peter Scott, "Types of Ecotheology," *Ecotheology* 4 (1998): 8-19.

[22] Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

[23] Ibid., 1205.

His argument caused a firestorm within Christian theology. Many scholars stepped forward to defend the Christian tradition against the charges. Others readily agreed, and still others chose to examine the challenge more closely.

One scholar who chose to observe the issue more carefully was Joseph Sittler, who had been quietly expressing concern for the Earth in Christian thought since 1962. He argues that the dualism between nature and grace is a false one. It is necessary theologically, christologically and ethically to bring them back together:

> The care of the earth, the realm of nature as a theatre of grace, the ordering of the thick, material procedures that make available to or deprive men [sic] of bread and peace – these are Christological obediences before they are practical necessities.[24]

Like White, Sittler critiques Christianity for the division between nature and grace, and history and the material world. However, he is more nuanced in his challenge and presents theological grounds for remedying the problem that are comprehensive and incisive. In Sittler's work are themes that are developed later in ecotheology by other scholars.[25]

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[24] Joseph A. Sittler, "Called to Unity," *Ecumenical Review* 14, no. 2 (January 1962): 186.

[25] These themes include nature, grace, history, and the shift in human-nature relations that occurred during the Enlightenment. Sittler also discusses the crucial insights that science has to offer to religion regarding the nature of the universe and evolutionary history. See Joseph A. Sittler, "Ecological Commitment as Theological Responsibility," *Zygon* 5, no. 2 (June 1970): 172-181.

Until recently, Sittler's contributions to the field of ecotheology have been underplayed. Yet he was one of the first scholars to take seriously the ecological crisis and its religious dimensions. Sittler developed a theology of nature and contributed environmental ethics throughout his career until his death in 1987. For a volume dedicated to Sittler's ecotheology, see Steven Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken, eds., *Evocations of Grace: Writings on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

1.2.2 1970s: Defining the Problem

Ecotheology as a self-aware discipline began to develop in the 1970s, with most of the scholars who wrote during this time becoming leading ecotheologians in later years. What is recognized at this early juncture is the complexity of the challenge of responding theologically to the problem of ecological degradation. Scholars tackle this complexity in various ways, including an apologetic approach, revisionism, the use of process thought, and the engagement of science with religion.

One of the first responses to White's charge against Christianity was to defend the religious tradition and suggest that there are ample resources within Christianity for responsible management of the Earth's resources. Thomas Sieger Derr, a proponent of a Christian apologetics, argues that White had misread the Christian traditions and that the roots of the ecological crisis are far more complex than White allows.[26] Derr promotes the biblical notion of stewardship and a sense of a "responsible Christian anthropocentrism."[27] He also recognizes the relationship of ecology to social justice and addresses specific environmentally related concerns such as equitable sharing of resources, international conflict and the relationship between population and power.[28]

Another response to White's thesis in the 1970s was to suggest ways in which theology can be reinterpreted to answer the challenge of ecological degradation.

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[26] Thomas Sieger Derr, *Ecology and Human Liberation: A Theological Critique of the Use and Abuse of our Birthright* (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation Books, 1973), 18.

[27] Stephen B. Scharper, *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment* (New York: Continuum, 1998): 33.

[28] Thomas Sieger Derr, *Barriers to Ecumenism: The Holy See and the World Council of Churches on Social Questions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983); and Derr, *Ecology and Human Liberation.*

Revisionists work within classical Christian thought and biblical texts to find more nuanced interpretations of humanity, God and nature that can respond to the ecological crisis.[29] Paul Santmire, for example, suggests that theologians have inadvertently contributed to the charge of Christian anthropocentrism by ignoring nature, and that in the American context there is a warring relationship with nature that swings back and forth between adoration and exploitation. To restore human relationship with the natural world, Santmire works with the doctrine of the Kingdom of God to develop a theology of nature based upon three motifs that human beings can employ: overlord, caretaker and wondering onlooker.[30]

Not all theologians in the 1970s disagreed with White. John Cobb is one of the first theologians to concur with White's charge of Christian anthropocentrism and to offer a corrective. He is also one of the first to recognize that it is not sufficient to gloss over the harsh details of the ecological crisis with a blithe comment such as "we all know what the problems are." Cobb defines the problem of the ecological crisis in its specificity, range and diversity, and notes the relationships among science, technology, religion, and nature in the West. For Cobb, what is required is more than stewardship; a new commitment to the other-than-human world is necessary.[31]

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[29] Paul Santmire defines the task of revisionists: "The revisionists work within the milieu of classical Christian thought as defined by the ecumenical creeds. . . . [They] have given the highest priority to biblical interpretation. At the same time, however, the dynamics of the classical tradition call for a re-forming of the tradition itself. The revisionists tend to see themselves as reformers." H. Paul Santmire, "In God's Ecology: A Revisionist Theology of Nature," *Christian Century* 117, no. 35 (Dec. 13, 2000): 1301.

[30] H. Paul Santmire, *Brother Earth: Nature, God and Ecology in Time of Crisis* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1970).

[31] John B. Cobb Jr., *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*, rev. ed. (Denton, TX: Environmental Ethics Books, 1995), 70. It was first published in 1972 by Benzinger, Bruce & Glencoe.

Cobb is a process theologian, credited with bringing the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne to theology. Cobb suggests that Whitehead offers an "ecological philosophy" and proceeds to propose a process view to solving the ecological crisis. Cobb's work is remarkable in that he foreshadows many of the themes that emerge in later years in ecotheology: the relationship between ecology and social justice, the need for consumption reduction in the West and the role of worldview in both the problem and the solution.[32]

Ian Barbour also agrees with White that there are biblical roots to the ecological crisis in the doctrine of creation; he also notes that there are technological roots, based in the historic split between science and religion, and in prevailing beliefs into the innocence and necessity of unbridled technology.[33] As a trained physicist and theologian, Barbour's work is focused on bringing science and religion back together in conversation, for he believes that each discipline is essential for understanding the human person, the natural world and reality. This work, along with his development of an ethics of technology, provides Barbour with a solid base from which to explore ecological issues. Barbour calls

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[32] Cobb writes, "Now, however, it is important for us to extend the range of respect and concern to nonhuman forms of life. But we cannot simply do this as an act of will. We can do it only as our vision, our sense of reality, changes. This will change only as we become vividly aware of kinship with other living things. We must come to experience ourselves as a part of that whole community of living things to which we point by speaking of the evolutionary process." Cobb, *Is It Too Late?,* 51.

[33] Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966); Ian G. Barbour, *Science and Secularity: The Ethics of Technology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); and Ian G. Barbour, "Science, Religion, and the Counterculture," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 10, no. 4 (Dec. 1975): 380-397.

for an "ecological ethic" and a corresponding ecological theology that provide theological and technological correctives to the problem of ecological degradation.[34]

1.2.3 1980s: The Big Picture in Ecotheology

In the decade of the eighties, the bulk of attention within ecotheology turns to large-scale questions regarding theologies of nature and the role of worldview in both contributing to the ecological crisis and responding to that crisis. The 1980s can be considered a middle time between the early scholars examining the role of Christianity in relation to the ecological crisis and the 1990s, when there is a virtual explosion of thought in the field, as discussed in the next section. The eighties are the time of exploring the big picture in ecotheology, asking questions that frame later ones regarding ethics and praxis in ecotheology.

Several theologians begin to systematically explore what a theology of nature might look like in direct response to the ecological crisis. Theologies of nature can be defined as interpretation and sometimes reformulation of doctrine based upon insights received from science. In ecotheology, information on ecological degradation is the focus of the work.[35]

Paul Santmire has devoted significant attention to developing a theology of nature in this vein. His intention is to present a middle way between the position of critics who suggest that Christianity is ecologically bankrupt and those who suggest that the Christian

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[34] Ian G. Barbour, "An Ecological Ethic," *Christian Century* 87, no. 40 (Oct. 7, 1970): 1180-1184.

[35] There are theologies of nature that are part of the science-religion conversation but not necessarily concerned with the ecological crisis. See Robert Farley, *Wind and Sea Obey Him: Approaches to a Theology of Nature* (London: SCM Press, 1982); and Stephen Toulmin, *The Return of Cosmology: Postmodern Science and the Theology of Nature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

traditions are meant for people, not nature. In his work, Santmire recognizes that Christian theology has tended to lean toward the otherworldly and personal, rather than to a cosmic scope for God's redemption. Santmire draws on three motifs to develop an ecologically responsible theology of nature: ascent, fecundity and the journey to the promised land.[36]

Another theology of nature is developed by Jürgen Moltmann, who suggests that the ecological crisis represents a deep spiritual anxiety within humanity toward the natural world. This is caused, in Moltmann's opinion, by a misconception of who God is in relation to the natural world.[37]

Moltmann develops certain key themes in his theology of nature. The idea of 'home' that is implied in the word 'ecology' leads him to the indwelling of God at the heart of the Trinity. He also explores time and space vis-à-vis the natural world. Moltmann addresses the Christian anthropology of *imago dei*, emphasizing through Jesus Christ its messianic demand for the future. He develops the importance of the Sabbath in an ecotheology which emphasizes 'God's rest' and is the "feast of creation."[38] Ultimately, Moltmann is firmly convinced that the natural world is of value to God entirely independent of human beings. In this, he refuses any spirit-matter dualism.[39]

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[36] H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

[37] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

[38] Ibid., 283n.

[39] Celia Deane-Drummond writes, "Moltmann's discussion of the natural world dwells not so much on an appreciation of nature *as such*, but rather on how it relates to God and humankind. He is, however, thoroughly convinced of creation's value independent of humans. For him this value comes from God's love for creation, which finds expression in the extension of Christ's solidarity to include nature and humankind. God as cosmic Spirit pervades every aspect of earthly creation in a way which refuses to separate the spiritual from the
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Early in the field of ecotheology, scholars recognized a relationship between the ecological crisis and how human beings view the natural world and its relationship to themselves and to God. The role of worldview, defined as "the basic interpretive stories of who we are, what nature is, where we have come from, and where we are going,"[40] is considered to be increasingly, and for many theologians, centrally important to the problem of human destruction of the Earth, for worldview informs the actions that we take. Many ecotheologians have suggested that the ecological crisis is at its root a spiritual crisis for human beings. The spiritual crisis has emerged from a disordered worldview, wherein human beings see themselves as divorced from and superior to the rest of the natural world.

A scholar who has devoted time to thinking about the relevance of worldview to the ecological crisis is process theologian David Ray Griffin. Griffin, among others, believes that the ecological crisis and other major social challenges are a result of a modern worldview developed from the sciences of René Descartes, Frances Bacon, Isaac Newton, and others. This worldview suggests a linear trajectory of knowledge and progress and a "mechanistic, deterministic, materialist and reductionist approach" that separates different areas of study into separate specialized domains.[41] Griffin's alternative is to suggest a "constructive postmodernism" that

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material." Celia Deane-Drummond, *Ecology in Jürgen Moltmann's Theology* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 1997), 298-99.

[40] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "Series Foreword," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Press for the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), xvi.

[41] Heather Eaton, "A Critical Inquiry into an Ecofeminist Cosmology," (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael's College, 1996), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/304307488/abstract/136B2731DFF46C5AB9B/1?accountid=14701 (accessed May 14, 2012), 18.

> seeks to overcome the modern worldview not by eliminating the possibility of worldviews as such, but by constructing a postmodern worldview through a revision of modern premises and traditional concepts. This constructive or revisionary postmodernism involves a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious institutions. It rejects not science as such but only that scientism in which the data of the modern natural sciences are alone allowed to contribute to the construction of our worldview.[42]

Griffin suggests that this constructive postmodernism must replace the modern worldview in theology, literary theory, philosophy, science, and other disciplines, in order to adequately address the challenges of the ecological crisis. He believes that the alternative framework he suggests can reorient the human person in relation to the natural world in a more constructive, ecological worldview.

As ecotheology has developed, the terms *worldview* and *cosmology* have often been used interchangeably. 'Cosmology' is a term traditionally identified with the science of studying the universe and humanity's place within it. There has been a return to cosmology in the conversation between science and religion, including many theologians responding to the ecological crisis. There exists the idea of a new cosmology in light of the emergent universe, which in ecotheology is about a return to a more comprehensive worldview than was promoted in the science of modernity.

While cosmology and worldview are often interchangeable in ecotheological literature, there are distinctions between them. Worldview can include a thick understanding of humanity and the nature of reality, or it may not.[43] Cosmology and

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[42] David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), x.

[43] Willis Jenkins notes the interchangeability of the terms 'worldview' and 'cosmology' in ecotheology and accepts it for the purposes of his work. He does suggest this distinction, however: "'cosmology' connotes more thickly storied patterns of perceiving; 'worldview' might indicate only a few assumptions about the

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worldview are thus not identical. The idea of cosmology as worldview[44] emerges from the importance that insights into the emergent universe are given by many ecotheologians.

One such scholar who works with the notion of cosmology as worldview is cultural historian Thomas Berry. Berry's work on the new cosmology presents a richly layered understanding of humanity and our place in the universe, and the central importance of worldview to our being and acting on the Earth. He argues that humanity requires a functional cosmology:

> A cosmology that will provide the mystique needed for this integral earth-human presence. Such a mystique is available once we consider that the universe, the earth, the sequence of living forms, and the human mode of consciousness have from the beginning had a psychic-spiritual as well as a physical-material aspect.[45]

This description of a functional cosmology, and Berry's argument that this cosmology is necessary if humans are going to develop "mutually enhancing" relations with the rest of the natural world,[46] comes from his decades of work as a cultural historian and his studies of the emergent universe as interpreted in postmodern science. He believes that the ecological crisis has come about in part because humans have lost a guiding story that helps them understand themselves in the scheme of things. The prevalent cosmology is one of radical discontinuity from the rest of the natural world, where humans see themselves as

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character of reality." Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 246n17.

[44] Heather Eaton points out that not all who are engaged in work on the new cosmology agree with equating cosmology with worldview, including Carl Sagan, Stephen Jay Gould and Stephen Weinburg. Eaton, "Critical Inquiry," 34-50.

[45] Thomas Berry, *Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 66.

[46] The term 'mutually enhancing earth-human relations' is used everywhere in Berry's work. See Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 212.

somehow separate from the life systems of the planet, with all rights given to them.[47] Berry's remedy is to present the postmodern understanding of the emergent universe, which locates the Earth and humanity within an eleven-billion-year history of becoming, as a *story* by which humans can reorient themselves, find a sense of home on the Earth and begin to create new ethics and institutions that are enhancing to both the natural world and humanity.

1.2.4 1990s: Ethical Questions

As ecotheology moves into the 1990s, there is a veritable explosion of thought on all aspects of the ecological crisis and its theological implications. With some scholars of Christian thought firmly committed to responding to ecological concerns, and with theologies of nature and worldview as the larger context, theologians begin to address specific ethical questions and to consider contextual perspectives in ecotheology. In many ways, this era of ethical questions and contexts leads the way for future questions about praxis in response to the ecological crisis.

Various ethical themes emerge in ecotheology in the nineties. One of them is eco-justice (alternatively spelled 'ecojustice'), which refers to the ecological crisis as a matter of justice and twins it with concerns for social justice. This perspective reflects a growing

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[47] Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 4.

chorus of concern that social justice matters not be overlooked in the need to take the ecological crisis seriously.[48]

The central organizing principle of eco-justice is economics, emphasizing the need for economic justice for poor people around the globe and for economic models that are ecologically sustainable. There is the belief that Christian theology must bring economics and ecology together. As Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether state, "Sound Christian environmental thought and practice builds on the reenvisioning of theology by social justice movements and it deepens them by placing them in the context of ecological crisis."[49]

Hessel is a predominant voice in the eco-justice conversation. His work has focused on the role of the churches in effecting eco-justice. In this way, he is foreshadowing later calls for more pragmatic religious responses to social and ecological injustice. Working out of the United States context, Hessel has observed that while there have been church responses to ecological issues, they have not institutionalized or created strategy around ecological concerns in a way that might be expected given their early concern in the 1970s and the general social emphases of church missions.[50]

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[48] The term 'eco-justice' was coined by Dieter Hessel in 1979 in response to the energy crisis of the 1970s. He writes, "The norms of sufficiency and sustainability are integrally related, even causally connected. To put it another way, justice to the deprived and care for nature are two sides of the same ethic of eco-justice." Dieter T. Hessel, "Eco-Justice in the Eighties," in *Energy Ethics: A Christian Response*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (New York: Friendship Press, 1979), 8.

[49] Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Introduction," in Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, xxxvi.

[50] Dieter T. Hessel, "Where Were/Are the U.S. Churches in the Environmental Movement?" in *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 199-207.

Hessel is joined in his concern for eco-justice and the church by Larry Rasmussen, a Christian ethicist. Rasmussen emphasizes the moral disorder that is the ecological crisis.[51] He develops an ethics based upon an Earth faith that is oriented toward the Earth and its healing. Rasmussen, while arguing for a new worldview such as that promoted by Griffin and Berry, points out that human relationship to the Earth is more than worldview; it is an actual relationship with ecological and social consequences. Our current relationship is one in which the human power to destroy the Earth outweighs the Earth's ability to restore itself.[52]

Rasmussen's work is a Christian eco-justice ethic that takes the entire web of life on the Earth into account. He makes it clear that of great concern in society is the problem of massive power differentials among the world's peoples. Rasmussen favours "a downward distribution of economic and social power and heightened status for all forms of life, human and other."[53] His scholarship illustrates how social and ecological concerns can be woven into a single stream of discourse, recognizing that one cannot be addressed without the other, and that the Earth is the source from which all human endeavours emerge and develop.

Another ethical theme that emerges in the 1990s is that of ecofeminism. As the twinned concern for ecological and social justice continues in ecotheology, specific aspects of social justice begin to be engaged. A deliberate conversation with dialogue partners

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[51] Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoldl, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 227.

[52] Daniel C. Maguire, *The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity: Reclaiming the Revolution* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 5.

[53] Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, 16.

beyond theology (and philosophy, the most traditional dialogue partner) is sparked. Conversations in feminist theory, in addition to creating a dynamic area of feminist theology, also lead to an ecological feminist, or ecofeminist, engagement with the ecological crisis.

Ecofeminism is based on the premise that the degradation of the Earth and oppression of women are related.[54] First articulated as a concept by Rosemary Radford Ruether in 1975,[55] ecofeminist theology is not systematically developed until 1991, with the work of Anne Primavesi. Primavesi suggests an ecological paradigm based upon the world as interconnected and interdependent parts and a feminist critique that refuses the patriarchal method of fragmentation and domination.[56] This paradigm and critique are applied to Christian thought to suggest an "ecological way of doing theology" as opposed to a hierarchical method of theology and ethics.[57]

While ecofeminist theory is based upon the relationship between ecological devastation and women's oppression, how that relationship is understood varies among scholars. The nature of the connection between gender oppression and the ecological crisis

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[54] For ecofeminist theory, see Greta Gaard, ed., *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood, 1993); and Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[55] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

[56] Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: Burns & Oates, 1991).

[57] Ibid., 195. Rosemary Radford Ruether has also written a significant volume of work in ecofeminist theology, whereby she explores the history of patriarchal and ecological domination in Christianity and examines the traditions for resources to heal the oppression of women and the Earth. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

is not singularly agreed upon.[58] It is thus more accurate to discuss ecofeminism*s* and ecofeminist theolog*ies* in the plural.[59]

Among the diversity of ecofeminist theologies, several levels or approaches in ecofeminist analysis can be identified. The first level is the cultural-symbolic, whereby, according to Ruether, "one charts the way in which patriarchal culture has defined women as being 'closer to nature,' as being on the nature side of a nature-culture hierarchical split."[60] This is the level at which many ecofeminist theologians in the West have entered the conversation. The second level of ecofeminist analysis, according to Ruether, "goes beneath the cultural-symbolic level and explores the socio-economic underpinnings of how the domination of women's bodies and women's work interconnects with the exploitation of land and animals as sources of labor and wealth."[61] This level of the relationship between exploitation of women and the Earth has been made most prominent by ecofeminist scholars working within or in relation to the global South. The third level, identified by Heather Eaton, is a combination of the first two, whereby the weaknesses of working within only one approach are lessened.[62]

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[58] Ecofeminist philosopher Karen Warren explains it well: "The varieties of ecofeminism reflect not only the differences in the analysis of the woman/nature connection, but also differences on such fundamental matters as the nature of and the solutions to women's oppression, the theory of human nature, and the conceptions of freedom, equality, epistemology in which various feminist theories depend." Karen Warren, "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections," *Environmental Ethics* 9 (Spring 1987): 4.

[59] This insight is made by Lois K. Daly and Heather Eaton. See Lois K. Daly, "Ecofeminism and Ethics," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1994): 285-290; and Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies*.

[60] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Introduction," in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 2-3.

[61] Ibid., 3.

[62] Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies*, 33.

A third theme in the 1990s is that of liberation theology. Leonardo Boff is a liberation theologian who brings the issue of ecology to an audience of Latin American and liberation theologians. He counters arguments that ecology and concern for the natural world is the preserve of a privileged, upper-class Western elite with the reality of the global and social reach of the ecological crisis:

> But today the problem is global and no longer regional. In a sense, ecological awareness is a luxury of the rich, for they have managed to avoid the injurious effects of their kind to society and of the developments that it has given rise to. But that does not mean that the problem does not exist. The solutions suggested in such societies are indeed short-sighted (conservationism, environmentalism), and they do not critically scrutinize the actual model of society and the paradigms of development and consumption (social ecology, deep ecology, holistic ecology) that are the main causes of the worldwide ecological crisis, especially the bad health and premature death of the poor.[63]

Boff's main concern is for how the ecological crisis has impacted upon the poor, and includes the natural world as damaged under the same logic of power and control. The ecological crisis adds a further dimension to liberation theology's reach and concern.

As ethical themes develop in the nineties, the need to address specific aspects of the ecological crisis becomes apparent to some scholars. Economics, population and climate change are a few dimensions of the crisis that are given sustained ecological attention.

Ecotheologians recognize the relationship between economic models of exchange and the ecological crisis. Scholars such as John Cobb study and critique, on ecological and theological grounds, such ideas as unlimited progress, economies of scale, unrestricted free

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[63] Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 13.

trade, and other central ideas in modern day economics.[64] Alternative models of economics are promoted that are ecologically sustainable and socially just.

The troubling issue of population is also tackled by ecotheologians. Daniel Maguire argues for religions to employ their prophetic voices to challenge issues of power and consumerism and advocate reverence for life in relation to the ecological crisis and population.[65] James Martin-Schramm suggests that incentives can be employed to curb consumption and limit population.[66] Both Maguire and Martin-Schramm are sensitive to the fact that population is growing fastest in poor communities in the South while the consumption habits that have led to the ecological crisis are primarily occurring among the affluent in the North.

Climate change is increasingly being recognized as one of the most urgent ecological issues. According to David Hallman the issue of climate change functions in several important ways in ecotheology. First, it has moved out of debates on whether it is real to concrete questions on what to do about the problem.[67] Second, climate change functions, Hallman says, as "a metaphor of the fractured relationship between human

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[64] John B. Cobb Jr. and Herman E. Daly, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990); John B. Cobb Jr., *Sustainability: Economics, Ecology, and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992); and John B. Cobb Jr., *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994).

[65] Daniel C. Maguire, "Population, Consumption, Ecology: The Triple Problematic," in Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, 403-423.

[66] James B. Martin-Schramm, "Incentives, Consumption Patterns, and Population Policies: A Christian Ethical Perspective," in Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, 439-452.

[67] David G. Hallman, "Climate Change: Ethics, Justice, and Sustainable Community," in Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, 453.

societies and God's creation, the broader earth system of which we are a part."[68] Third, climate change serves as an excellent illustration of the complexity of the relationship between science and economics. Recognition of this complexity aids in determining what ethical questions are raised by the issue of climate change and how they might be answered.[69]

As ethical concerns in ecotheology continue to develop and expand in the 1990s, the importance of varying perspectives and particular contexts to religious reflection on the ecological crisis become more apparent. For example, scholars started giving attention to theology responding to the ecological crisis out of the global south. Two edited collections from that time highlight the range of issues that are addressed. In *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (1994), biblical stories are used to bear witness to ecological disaster in the Philippines, the ecofeminist vision of women fighting the loss of forests in India is discussed, and a Native American theology of place is presented.[70] In *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion* (1996), feminism and ecology are brought into conversation in a Third World context.[71]

Ivone Gebara brings a more sustained attention to the question of feminism and ecology within a Southern context during this time.[72] Her work is distinctive in that it joins

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[68] Ibid., 453-454.

[69] Ibid., 456-457.

[70] David G. Hallman, ed., *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994). See essays by Jose Pepz M. Cunanan, Aruna Gnanadason and George Tinker.

[71] Ruether, *Women Healing Earth*.

[72] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999).

ecofeminist theory with liberation theology. Writing from the urban barrios of Brazil where she resides, Gebara develops a trinitarian theology that begins from human experience and recognizes the multi-religious reality of many people of the South.

During the nineties a distinct contextual ecotheology develops in African contexts. Marthinus Daneel, whose research focuses on the African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe, has coined the term *earthkeeping* to denote the care and responsibility religious leaders believe they have toward the land.[73] Ernst Conradie writes in the tradition of Daneel's earthkeeping, and focuses on ecotheological themes from the South African context.[74]

1.2.5 The 21st Century: Deepening Dialogue

As ecotheology has continued to develop into the 21st century, there has been a deepening of dialogue with multiple disciplines and multi-religious perspectives. More complex and specific questions are being asked by ecotheologians, especially in the realm of science. One of the most distinctive features of ecotheology in the new millennium is its increasing interdisciplinary nature. Scholars are discovering that by bringing several disciplines into conversation with theology and ecology, insights emerge that would otherwise be unattainable. An example of engaging multiple disciplines is the work of

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[73] Marthinus L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Environmental Mission and Liberation in Christian Perspective* (Pretoria: UNISA, 1998). Daneel's work is considered foundational to contemporary African theology as a whole, not just to ecotheology. See Greg Cuthbertson, H.L. Pretorius, and Dana L. Robert, ed., *Frontiers of African Christianity: Essays in Honour of Inus Daneel* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2003); and Ernst Conradie, "Inus Daneel's Contribution to Earthkeeping in an African Context," *Missionalia* 30, no. 2 (Aug. 2002): 304-312.

[74] Ernst M. Conradie, "Reconstructing an Ecological Cosmology: A South African Contribution," *Scriptura* no. 61 (1997): 213-230.

Mary Grey. She is an ecofeminist theologian who joins ecofeminist theology in conversation with globalization and the work she has done with Dalit women in India. For Grey, an ecotheological lens highlights a spirituality of consumerism that is promoted in economic globalization and suggests theological themes that can assist in the resistance against the negative effects of globalization.[75]

The religious pluralism that is a characteristic of human cultures, and an aspect of the particularities of global ecological consequences, has become an increasingly important factor to reflect upon within ecotheology. Many are recognizing that religious diversity is an aspect of ecological diversity.[76] With publications such as the Harvard Series on World Religions and Ecology, it has become apparent that religious responses to the ecological crisis are a multi-religious and inter-religious effort. Out of a range of international meetings and conferences came an awareness of the need for multi-religious cooperation and collaboration in response to problems of ecology. One result of this is a series of books published by the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions. This book series is the most extensive multi-religious contribution to the challenge of religion and ecology to date. So far, volumes have been published on Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Christianity,

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[75] Mary C. Grey, *Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

[76] Jay McDaniel's earlier testimony to this is now being realized. In 1995 he wrote: "To be open to other religions is also a way of being richly connected with other members of the Earth community, specifically with people of other faiths. We affirm our kinship with them by honoring the truths they have discovered, from which they can learn." Jay B. McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 10.

Daoism, Indigenous Traditions, Jainism, Judaism, and Islam.[77] Each book covers a wide range of theological and religious dimensions of the ecological crisis, using the methodologies and perspectives that are most appropriate to each religious tradition.

As ecotheology moves into the 21st century, the influence of science and science-religion dialogues continues. What can be identified now is a querying of more science questions. Some of these questions are delving into various areas of science, such as evolution and earth systems science. Others are engaging scientific issues that are new to the human community as a whole, such as bioethics and the new genetics. For ecotheologians, these questions form an extension of their work in ecotheology as they grapple with various ecological dimensions of the problem.

John Haught is an ecotheologian who has brought attention to issues in science and religion since the 1980s.[78] As his work enters the third millennium, Haught focuses on evolution and its implications for theology. He is interested in the discoveries of Darwin and how evolutionary science can transform the idea of God. This has important

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[77] The series published by the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions (Cambridge: Harvard Press) includes the following books: Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (1997); Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong, eds., *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans* (1998); Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds., *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water* (2000); N.J. Giradot, James Miller and Liu Xiaogan, eds., *Daoism and Ecology: Ways Within a Cosmic Landscape* (2001): John A. Grim, ed., *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community* (2001); Christopher Key Chapple, ed. *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life* (2002); Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, ed., *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed World* (2002); and Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin, eds., *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (2003). See also Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*.

[78] John F. Haught, *The Cosmic Adventure: Science, Religion and the Quest for Purpose* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984); and Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

implications for understanding the ecological crisis from a theological perspective.[79] Anne Primavesi immerses herself in the earth systems science of James Lovelock, Lynn Margulis and others to suggest an integration of the Gaia theory, that everything is interrelated in a co-evolutionary manner, with ecofeminist thought to develop themes of freedom, justice and life as gift event.[80]

1.2.6 More Recently: A Turn to the Pragmatic

More recently, there has been a movement within ecotheology toward asking questions of a more pragmatic nature. A new set of questions is emerging about how to transform the insights from five decades of ecotheology into concrete change on behalf of the Earth community.[81] These questions are being asked in a range of ways, in both ecotheology and in the broader discipline of religion and ecology.[82]

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[79] John F. Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); and Haught, *Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003).

[80] Anne Primavesi, *Sacred Gaia: Holistic Theology and Earth System Science* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Primavesi, *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[81] It is recognized that the questions being asked in recent years in the turn to the pragmatic in ecotheology, as in religion and ecology more generally, could not be asked without the important contributions of those who helped build the field of ecology and theology (and religion). Thus, this more recent turn, like the previous developments, emerges from the foundation built by earlier scholars. For more on this, see Whitney Bauman, Richard Bohannon and Kevin O'Brien, who write, "The work of this book could not take place without the fertile ground prepared by scholars who have come before us, and our emphasis on this fact is more than an attempt to be polite. We owe a genuine debt to previous scholars who have established the reality of environmental degradation and the relevance of religion in responding to it." Bauman, Bohannon, and O'Brien, "The Tensions and Promises of Religion and Ecology's Past, Present, and Future," in *Inherited Land: The Changing Grounds of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Whitney A. Bauman, Richard R. Bohannon II, and Kevin J. O'Brien (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 13.

[82] The realm of religion and ecology includes theological reflection and religious studies scholarship on the ecological crisis. It reflects a wide array of religious traditions and intellectual perspectives on the phenomenon of religion and problem of ecological deterioration. While my dissertation is in ecotheology, I
- Note continues on next page. -

Anna Peterson and John O'Keefe share my concern for ecologically sustainable practices that cohere with one's stated values. Peterson argues that when one's actions contradict one's beliefs, there are underlying values that are operating at cross purposes with environmental concerns.[83] She examines the complexity of the relationship between values and action and suggests that "we need to change our talk and our walk together."[84] Action is the first step, rather than theory, and "our ethical practice is not a result of our knowledge of the world but rather is the way we learn about, and in, the world."[85] O'Keefe recognizes how difficult ecologically sustainable living is, "and for us to be willing to adopt sustainable practices, we need to have some conviction about why we should be doing them at all."[86] He suggests that the lifestyle changes needed for ecological sustainability can be interpreted as Christian spiritual practices by reflecting upon them in light of Christian monasticism. O'Keefe writes, "The many practices recommended by the sustainability movement are a form of asceticism, and, it seems to me, we can receive them as such and think about them precisely as a form of spiritual training."[87] Such practices can

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am cognizant of the mutual insight, collaboration and challenge that occur between theology and religion and ecology.

[83] Anna L. Peterson, "Talking the Walk: A Practice-Based Environmental Ethic as Grounds for Hope," in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, ed. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 45-62.

[84] Ibid., 54.

[85] Ibid., 58.

[86] John O'Keefe, "Spiritual Practice and Sustainability: Resources from Early Christian Monasticism," in *Spirit and Nature: The Study of Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Urgency*, ed. Timothy Hessel-Robinson and Ray Maria McNamara, R.S.M. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 63.

[87] Ibid., 67.

help reveal an eschatological hope and help those who engage in the practice become more aware of God's presence.[88]

Other scholars are drawing on new dialogue partners and environmental practices to ask questions about the ecological crisis and human response. Lucas Johnston and Samuel Snyder discuss the mutual contributions and challenges that are offered to the study of religion and environmental pragmatism when they are brought into conversation with each other.[89] Brian Campbell explores the attention being given to social theories of practice and place as ways to overcome the gap between belief and behaviour in theology, religion and ecology.[90] Daniel Spencer explores the theological and philosophical implications of ecological restoration for configuring human place in the world. He writes:

> A theologically grounded restoration ethic retains the restoration of integrity in both human-divine and human social relationships, but expands these to include the earth and reframes them ecologically. Restoration now is grounded in ecological integrity: restoring and living *within* the earth's ecological communities and processes.[91]

Spencer is careful to note that such an ethic is not to suggest a mythical, edenic return to an earlier time, but to a restoration that incorporates an eco-justice and multi-religious

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[88] Ibid., 66.

[89] Lucas F. Johnston and Samuel Snyder, "Practically Natural: Religious Resources for Environmental Pragmatism," in Bauman, Bohannon, and O'Brien, *Inherited Land*, 125-147.

[90] Brian G. Campbell, "Religion and Ecology on the Ground: 'Practice' and 'Place' as Key Concepts," in Bauman, Bohannon, and O'Brien, *Inherited Land*, 188-210.

[91] Daniel T. Spencer, "Restoring Earth, Restored to Earth: Toward an Ethic for Reinhabiting Place," in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, ed. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 428.

outlook.[92] Such an ethic begins from and returns to practices of restoration, similar to Peterson's position, above.

1.2.7 Summary

As this sketch of the history of ecotheology demonstrates, the question of change has been asked—and answered—in myriad ways over the last fifty years. In general, the work of each generation of theologians has been built in part on the insights of previous scholars, as well as on contributions from other disciplines. Some of the developments in ecotheology have been in response to new and emerging dimensions of the ecological crisis. It is within this diverse and complex trajectory that McFague's work is situated.

1.3 Situating Sallie McFague

Sallie McFague is a major participant in various conversations in ecotheology. More than that, she has helped to shape the field with her emphases on the role of metaphor, theology as construction, importance of worldview, and contributions from science, feminist thought and the role of the body. A brief *précis* of McFague's works in ecotheology will help to situate her within the ecotheology conversation as I have sketched it here. The overview I provide here is brief because I will be dealing with McFague's ecotheology in depth in Chapter Three.

McFague's ecotheology is constructed in *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (1993). She develops the model of the universe as God's body into a systematic ecological

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[92] Ibid., 429.

theology. Using a constructive methodology, McFague explores the role that worldviews play in the destruction of the natural world. McFague draws on insights from contemporary science and feminist and liberation theology. The theme of embodiment is developed, based on the premise that "bodies matter." This premise is consistent with McFague's conviction in her earlier scholarship that human knowledge, including knowledge of God, is rooted in the mundane, ordinary world within which we live.

McFague's concern for the ecological crisis and the way human beings treat the natural world is continued in *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (1997).[93] It is the first place in which McFague specifically addresses the question of Christian practice with regard to the natural world. She argues that Christians are called to love nature as subject in a similar way to how they are called to love God and neighbour. McFague expands the theme of embodiment to look at relating to others as embodied subjects and begins to develop an ecological model of care. She also turns to nature literature to explore its insights into relating to nature as subject.

Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril (2001) introduces the theme of economics. Continuing her conviction that theology, if it is to be relevant, must respond to the demands of the world, McFague explores how dominant economic models are destructive to human and earth communities. She examines how the worldviews that such models perpetuate relate to religious models of God. She then develops an ecological economic model and examines what a corresponding 'planetary

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[93]Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

theology' would look like. It is in this book that McFague advocates for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction as a theological response to the ecological crisis.

McFague's latest book is *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (2008).[94] Using the issue of climate change as a lens, McFague revisits some of the central themes in her ecotheology, such as economics, the model of the world as God's body and the function of metaphor, and introduces new ideas, such as how to do theology within an urban context and the role of praise and compassion in fighting ecological despair.

McFague's ecotheology influenced the field of ecotheology and has been influenced by other ecotheologians. In turn, her ideas have aroused another generation of scholars who have engaged various themes in McFague's scholarship. In the following section, I will explore a selection of scholarly engagements with McFague's work in order to highlight the large body of work that has been devoted to McFague's thinking. Doing so will also highlight that, to date, no one else has picked up on the praxis element in McFague's scholarship.

1.4 Scholarly Engagements with Sallie McFague's Work

As indicated, the theology of Sallie McFague is rich and substantive–as a significant amount of scholarship on McFague's work can attest.[95] Relevant to this project is scholarship that examines McFague's ecotheology, as well as contributions that engage

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[94] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate For Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

[95] I surveyed approximately fifty dissertations that substantively address McFague's theological contributions.

her earlier ideas in parabolic and metaphorical theology within practical or pragmatic contexts.[96] Understood very broadly, the scholars presented below are engaging various questions of change with McFague's ideas.

1.4.1 McFague's Parabolic Theology

Scholars of McFague's parabolic theology are drawn to how she understands the parables and human experience in theology.[97] Don Aycock devotes his attention to exploring the role of religious imagination in the work of four twentieth-century theologians, of which Sallie McFague is one.[98] He analyzes her parabolic and metaphorical theology for her understanding of imagination and the role that it does or should play in theology. Aycock's focus on religious imagination highlights the role of this aspect of human experience in McFague's early work. He identifies the following understandings of imagination in her scholarship: an epistemological comprehension of imagination, that "imagination is the power of the human mind both to understand truth and to communicate

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[96] I have focused primarily on dissertations and books that focus on McFague's work, either singularly or in comparison with other theologians, because they offer more sustained analysis and engagement than articles and essays do.

[97] See also Lawrence L. Van Heusen, "The Embodiment of Religious Meaning in the Works of James Baldwin" (Ph.D. diss. State University of New York at Albany, 1980), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/docview/303087547/abstract/137FB5FF99622257405/1?accountid=14701 (accessed July 16, 2012). Van Heusen is drawn to how the structure of the parables, not just their subject matter, mediates religious meaning.

[98] Don M. Aycock, "Religious Imagination in Twentieth Century American Theology: A Study of Four Selected Figures" (Ph.D. diss. New Orleans Baptist Seminary, 1986), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/303445130/abstract/137F68778C349275014/2?accountid=14701 (accessed July 16, 2012).

that understanding."[99] Through imagination, the hermeneutical task is undertaken in parabolic theology.[100] This leads to its mediative and normative aspects, whereby imagination, in McFague's theology, helps to carry meaning as well as "to help the theologian sift theological reality from cultural accouterments."[101] For McFague imagination helps to shift meaning from theological reality to human symbols and metaphors.[102]

1.4.2 McFague's Metaphorical Theology

McFague is widely known for her metaphorical theology. Scholars have explored its methodology to develop a range of interests in theology.[103] Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang

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[99] Ibid., 229.

[100] Ibid., 230.

[101] Ibid., 230-232.

[102] Ibid., 230.

[103] Nancy Lynn Cocks, "Metaphors and Models in John Calvin's 'Institutes of the Christian Religion': A Feminist Critique" (Ph.D. diss. Toronto School of Theology, 1989), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/docview/303786913/abstract/137FB6E0A956E31B46F/1?accountid=14701 (accessed July 17, 2012); Charles Gerald Conway, "A Study in the Metaphysics of Metaphorical Theology: C. S. Peirce's Conception of the 'Continuum' as a Model for the 'Spiritual Presence' of Paul Tillich" (Ph.D. diss. Graduate Theological Union, 2005), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/docview/305000903/abstract/137FB6F8E953A1B2DE9/1?accountid=14701 (accessed July 17, 2012); S. Edgar, "Metaphor, Models and Methodology: A Comparative Study of Sallie McFague and Clark Pinnock on Religious Language and Theological Method" (Ph.D. diss. Queen's University Belfast, 2006, http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/docview/304946318/abstract/137FB7128515E5B45D5/2?accountid=14701 (accessed July 17, 2012); and Claire Rhea Helgeson, "A Metaphorical Model of Sacrament: Toward Broader Discourses in the Teaching of Science" (Ph.D. diss. University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1988, http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/docview/303702351/abstract/137FB72FCD1303EE559/1?accountid=14701 (accessed July 17, 2012).

uses the early work of McFague to understand the role of metaphor in contextual theology and the development of a contextual approach to religious education.[104]

Hutabarat-Lebang is drawn to McFague because "one of the central themes of [McFague's] proposal regarding metaphorical theology is that theology is inherently contextual"[105] and because metaphors have the power to shape a person's view of reality. Hutabarat-Lebang notes the prophetic role of metaphorical theology in social change.[106] What Hutabarat-Lebang likes about McFague is that she "underlines the power of language particularly metaphor in shaping people's views of reality, and therefore, inherently [sic] potential to enhance the transformation."[107] The author notes that while McFague's concern is for social transformation in light of a gospel interpreted contextually, her understanding of the function of metaphor in human language is comprehended by McFague in its more individual dimensions. [108] McFague's interpretation of metaphor does not identify a communal base for the intuition and adoption of new metaphors in theology.[109] What McFague's metaphorical theology offers to the role of contextualization in religious education is to recognize the function of human language, particularly metaphor, in shifts

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[104] Henriette T. Hutabarat-Lebang, "Contextualization and the Role of Metaphor: Robert J. Schreiter's and Sallie McFague's Understanding of Metaphor and the Implications for Contextual Religious Education" (Ph.D. diss. Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 1991), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/303978932/abstract/137FB4291027E345B1A/1?accountid=14701 (accessed July 16, 2012).

[105] Ibid., 100.

[106] Ibid., 140.

[107] Ibid., 13.

[108] Ibid., 231.

[109] Ibid., 153-155.

in human consciousness, thereby leading to change.[110] Hutabarat-Lebang recognizes a very concrete implication of McFague's theology for religious education: "Applying this principle . . . the very aim of Christian religious education then is to assist the learners to be the preservers and caretakers of all forms of life."[111]

1.4.3 McFague's Ecotheology

There has been a wide range of scholarship engaging various aspects of McFague's ecotheology in diverse ways. To give readers an appreciation for the diversity of engagement, I offer an overview here.

Two theologians who treat McFague's ecotheology as a whole are Suzanne Franck and Joanne Buckman. Franck utilizes McFague's ecotheology to examine Episcopal documents regarding ecology.[112] Buckman uses the work of McFague and others in developing a method of ecotheology that ties together politics, ethics, spirituality, and mysticism.[113]

Others utilize McFague's ecological model of the world as God's body differently. Kirk Wegter-McNelly employs the concept of 'entanglement' from quantum physics to

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[110] Ibid., 203.

[111] Ibid., 202.

[112] Suzanne E. Franck, "Humanity and Nature in Light of Recent Bishops' Pastoral Letters and Trends in Ecological Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 2006), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/305333205/abstract/138C49236AF416E99E4/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

[113] Joanne Therese Buckman, "When the River Meets the Sea: Essays Toward Ecological Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Union Institute, 1998), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/304477985/abstract/138C498112445CBE8FC/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

overcome any echoes of mechanism in McFague's model.[114] Terry Hiebert suggests that this same model can assist in solving the soteriological problem of redemption for those injured by "evil in creation."[115]

McFague's ecotheological method is critically compared by Byron Bangert and L. Lang Brownlee, both of whom do so in the context of contemporary Protestant theology. Bangert, whose work I use in Chapter Three, compares McFague's method with that of James Gustafson and David Ray Griffin to suggest that each contributes essential elements to a Protestant ethics that is sufficiently responsive to today's concerns.[116] Brownlee examines McFague along with William Dean and Gordon Kaufman to suggest that each is moving toward a contemporary theological naturalism.[117]

McFague's scholarship has also been useful in developing ecofeminist theory. David Kronlid examines the work of McFague and others to the conclusion that there are foundational advantages to ecofeminist ethical theory versus nonfeminist environmental

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[114] Kirk Matthew Wegter-McNelly, "The World, Entanglement, and God: Quantum Theory and the Christian Doctrine of Creation" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2003), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/305331203/abstract/138C49AEF4A77D29D56/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

[115] Terry Grant Hiebert, "The Redemption of Creation in Twentieth-Century Eco-Theologies" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1994), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/304114195/abstract/138C49CF74F5D1EEFFE/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

[116] Bryon C. Bangert, "Toward a Naturalistic, Theocentric, Theological Ethics: An Examination, Critique, and Appropriation of Three Contemporary Protestant Approaches" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2004), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/305202727/abstract/1366A356A713F19B1D6/1?accountid=14701 (accessed April 30, 2012).

[117] L. Lang Brownlee, "Naturalism in Contemporary Protestant Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Illiff School of Theology and University of Denver, 1992), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/304020166/abstract/138C49F6C08D7E04A7/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

ethics.[118] Sung Yong Park brings McFague into conversation with Joanna Macy to suggest an ecofeminist reconstruction of Christian and Buddhist interreligious dialogue.[119] Hyun-Shik Jun develops a Tonghak ecofeminist theology using the ecotheology of McFague and others.[120] Rita Lester argues that the ecofeminist theologies of scholars like McFague have not been fully taken into account in Christian theology and highlights their contributions through an investigation of ecofeminism within their writings.[121]

McFague's ecological ethics are discussed in the dissertations by Bangert and Kronlid. James Martin-Schramm tackles the specific ecological problems of population growth and overconsumption and examines the contributions of McFague and other ecotheologians to respond to the ethical dimensions of the problems.[122] Emily Askew offers a unique contribution by exploring McFague's understanding of place in her ecotheology

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[118] David Olof Kronlid, "Ecofeminism and Environmental Ethics: An Analysis of Ecofeminist Ethical Theory" (Ph.D. diss., Upssala University [Sweden], 2003), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/305241830/abstract/138C4A0AB5938B7900F/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

[119] Sung Yong Park, "The Greening of Interreligious Dialogue Between Christianity and Buddhism for Flourishing of the Oppressed Others: Particularly Focusing on Sallie McFague's Embodiment Theology and Joanna Macy's Engaged Buddhology" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 2002), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/275709379/abstract/138C4A299A163E5246E/4?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

[120] Hyun-Shik Jun, "Tonghak Ecofeminist Reinterpretation of Sin, Evil and Spirituality in Relation to the Ecological Crisis" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2001), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/276005746/abstract/138C4A41C41666B72AC/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

[121] Rita Marie Lester, "Ecofeminism in a Postmodern Landscape: The Body of God, Gaia, and the Cyborg" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1997), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/304390438/abstract/138C4A624E65EC0B399/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

[122] James B. Martin-Schramm, "Population, Consumption, and Ecojustice: Challenges for Christian Conceptions of Environmental Ethics" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1996), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/304293954/abstract/138C4A7A9856FFE7AD7/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

for its theological potential in social and ecological justice.[123] Barbara Krug uses insights from McFague to examine how the notion of Earth literacy might lead to eco-justice within university pedagogy.[124]

It is within this large corpus of scholarship on McFague that my project enters the conversation. Since my thesis concerns McFague's call for ecological praxis as a theological response to the ecological crisis, I am particularly interested in the work of theologians who are embracing similar concerns for the practical dimensions of McFague's ecotheology. In this vein, I will examine Lisa Bernal's dissertation and a collection of essays edited by Darby Kathleen Ray.

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[123] Emily Askew, "Toward a Just Landscape: The Possibilities of Theology and Place Theory" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2004), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/305104291/abstract/138C4A8F79886F1FFD/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

[124] Barbara C. Krug, "Raising Cosmic Consciousness and Consciences" (D.Min. diss., Drew University, 2000), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/304588273/abstract/1393AA5CB4A6A81579F/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

On the surface, Krug's dissertation appears to have direct relevance to my project, given her use of McFague and concern for the role of Earth literacy in eco-justice. However, a reading of Krug's study demonstrates that such relevance is illusory. This is so for two reasons. First, Krug's use of the term 'Earth literacy' is not the same as the 'ecological literacy' that I refer to in Chapter Five of this thesis. According to Krug:

> The term 'Earth literacy' goes beyond given academic criteria for critical thinking and good communication skills to include knowledge of the Earth. To be Earth literate is to be conscious of the wisdom of the Earth and to allow that knowledge, that consciousness, to move us to reweave ourselves into the relational fabric of the community of creation. (4)

Although Krug refers to the importance of knowledge of the Earth, at no point does she discuss the value of studying ecology, biology or other hard sciences to gain such knowledge. While she presents a symbolic, evocative understanding, Krug's use of the term 'Earth literacy' lacks the disciplinary grounding needed for real literacy. Further, Krug's usage lacks recognition of the deeply dialectical relationship that exists between knowledge and action. Ecological literacy is, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, knowledge of ecology and the ecological crisis in such a manner that it causes changes in the behaviour of those who have gained that knowledge. A dialectic of knowledge and action is intrinsic to this definition and intrinsic to my choice of ecological literacy as a dialogue partner with the work of McFague.

Second, Krug's use of McFague is superficial and uncritical. She refers to McFague's cosmology inaccurately, conflating "cosmos, Universe, and world" into the "Earth as the Body of God" (47). She also ascribes language to McFague that is not her own, such as the language of grace (48). If this is Krug's own interpretation of McFague's thought, that is not made apparent.

Lisa Bernal uses McFague's model of the world as God's body as a source for setting criteria for an eco-justice ethic.[125] She is interested in the theological grounds for combining social and ecological justice issues into a single ethic. Using the work of McFague regarding embodiment and space (as well as Karl Barth's doctrine of the *imago dei*), Bernal establishes four criteria: an ethic of faith, an ethic of creation, an ethic of relations, and an ethic of good human action. These four criteria are interrelated, and the more practical dimensions of McFague's ecotheology highlight their interrelatedness. There are two ways that this is so.

The first way is McFague's contribution of the material world as a model for the body of God. In addition to emphasizing the materiality and goodness of creation for Christian faith, Bernal suggests that "McFague's emphasis on human beings' *fundamental relations* with the rest of nature changes our theological conceptualization of the human-nature relation."[126] Thus, an ethic of relation for social and ecological justice emphasizes the "fundamental relational structure of creation."[127]

In turn, Bernal notes that McFague's sense of human action advances from this comprehension of creation and relationality.[128] Bernal identifies this from McFague's work

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[125] Lisa Villanueva Bernal, "Embodied Relations and Good Human Action: Bases for a Christian Eco-Justice Ethic of Creation" (Ph.D. diss. Princeton Theologial Seminary, 2001), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/276325496/abstract/1393AA838E6D4AF025/1?accountid=14701 (accessed August 25, 2012).

[126] Ibid., 208. Original emphasis.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., 210.

on "embodied space," her term for McFague's dual emphasis on the importance of embodiment and space (via the common creation story).[129] Bernal writes:

> If we further extend McFague's argument to its practical correlate, two criteria can be predicated. First, the unmediated personal encounter supplies us with non-dominating, non-exploitative and non-destructive patterns for embodied relationships. Second, this 'knowing through touch' (as metaphorical for dialectical mediated-unmediated knowing) can constitute a form of 'material practice' that is emancipatory. . . . The second predicate is really an extension of McFague's initial argument, together with my own perception of a possible consequential end. Embodied knowing has its own by-products that are not limited to psycho-personal knowing.[130]

Embodied knowing, in McFague's ecotheology, thus implies the need for ethical action. In this way, McFague's insights bring together social and ecological justice into a single ethic because "body relations and the extensions of those relations can become orderings of just relations whenever the entire and interconnected parts are recognized as the proper context for human action."[131]

In addition to the work of Bernal and others, theologians have been exploring the models of God, ecology and economics that McFague advocates as part of a religious response to ecological and social injustice. In a collection of essays edited by Darby Kathleen Ray, the authors agree with McFague that if the ecological crisis is going to be addressed in any effective way, economics must become a central matter for theology. The book is a collection of new and established scholars responding to McFague's call for an

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[129] Ibid., 149.

[130] Ibid., 165-167.

[131] Ibid., 167-168.

ecological model of economics.[132] With this collection, there is a turn to exploring the specific vision of McFague's economics. It is, in a certain way, recognition that the practical aspects of McFague's theology need to be explored.

For example, to McFague's call for a gentle touch and loving eye that sees others as subjects, Jay McDaniel adds an emphasis on a listening heart. "Just as we might learn to see the world with eyes informed by touch, so perhaps we can see the world with eyes informed by listening."[133] The listening heart, McDaniel avers, "is a way of acting in the world that is patient, that can wait until the other speaks before acting in response."[134] Mark Wallace uses the Crum Creek watershed in Pennsylvania as a place upon which to consider McFague's panentheistic model of God and to consider the role of pneumatology. He writes:

> Crum Creek spirituality envisions God as present in all things and the source of our attempt to develop caring relationships with other life-forms. This perspective signals a biophilic revaluation *and* continuation of characteristic Christian themes.[135]

Rooting his theological reflection in a physical location, Wallace is engaging in the kind of work that McFague advocates: considering, within our individual context, how God speaks to us and how we can move toward healing change toward the Earth. Expanding upon McFague's concept of space in her ecotheology, Ray reflects upon the aspect of time and

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[132] Darby Kathleen Ray, ed., *Theology That Matters: Ecology, Economy, and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

[133] Jay B. McDaniel, "In the Beginning is the Listening," in Ray, *Theology That Matters*, 40.

[134] Ibid., 41.

[135] Mark I. Wallace, "Crum Creek Spirituality: Earth as a Living Sacrament," in Ray, *Theology That Matters*, 137.

busyness in the dominant model of economics and how the value of rest can be considered theologically as part of a healthier model of economics.[136] Referring to the concept of Sabbath, she writes, “A sabbath practice is any act of ‘sacred rest,’ anything that gives us refuge from the dehumanizing pace and aims of consumer culture.”[137] Ray recognizes the necessary implications of deep rest for creating the kind of change needed in the face of the ecological crisis and social injustice.[138] Eleazar Fernandez notes the strength of McFague’s economic vision and challenges the church to become “an entity that embodies and advocates [such] an alternative economy – an economy of life abundant for all members of God’s household.”[139]

1.4.4 Summary

There is a wide diversity of questions raised and approaches taken with McFague’s thought, as identified in this selected sample of theologians exploring more pragmatic aspects of her work (or their own). What is interesting to note, however, is that, to my knowledge, no one has specifically engaged the question of praxis in McFague’s theology (either in her ecotheology or in her earlier scholarship). This is a lacuna that this dissertation fills.

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[136] Darby Kathleen Ray, “It’s About Time: Reflections on a Theology of Rest,” in Ray, *Theology That Matters*, 154-171.

[137] Ibid., 160.

[138] Ibid., 170-171.

[139] Eleazar S. Fernandez, “The Church as a Household of Life Abundant: Reimagining the Church in the Context of Global Economics,” in Ray, *Theology That Matters*, 172.

In the course of exploring the question of praxis in McFague's ecotheology and discovering the need to construct and develop a model of praxis upon which it is based, I came to the realization that another dialogue partner is needed to address the issue of how an ecological praxis of consumption reduction is likely to be elicited. To move beyond theological prescriptions for praxis to concrete ways of comprehending how such praxis can be engaged, a theory of change in human behaviour is needed. The following section provides an overview of the research I undertook in my search for an appropriate dialogue partner.

1.5 Theories of Change: Searching for a Dialogue Partner

In exploring the question of change, numerous theories exist, in every academic discipline, of how human beings change their behaviour. The theory of change embedded in ecological literacy is my choice for this dissertation; it is examined in detail in Chapter Five. To gain an understanding of why ecological literacy is an appropriate choice for engaging McFague's ecological praxis, it is helpful to look at the theoretical path that my own research took in searching for a dialogue partner that could provide insight into how to induce an ecological praxis of consumption reduction. The following is a general survey of the major theories of change I examined; for those interested in a more detailed understanding of each theory, I have provided a number of reference texts in the footnotes.

In beginning my research into the question of behaviour change in response to the ecological crisis, I performed many database searches, exploring such topics as environmental conversion, environment and activism, ecological consciousness, ecopsychology, and action theory. I surveyed the work of such thinkers as Wendell Berry,

Alan Durning and Susan Griffin.[140] I also read material by Joanna Macy and Starhawk, ecological thinkers working, respectively, in the religious traditions of Buddhism and Wicca.[141] At the base of these diverse works were many different ideas of how behaviour change is effected. I then narrowed my search and turned to a number of theories of change that focus on how the shift from thinking to acting happens. I began with transformative learning.

1.5.1 Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is a theory initially developed by Jack Mezirow, who emphasizes the function of 'perspective transformation' in the adult learning process. He explains that perspective transformation is about a dramatic shift in one's "meaning perspective," which "refers to the structure of cultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated to—and transformed by—one's past experience."[142] In contrast to other forms of learning, transformative learning has inherently social and political dimensions to it.[143] The key to transformative learning is becoming critically aware of our

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[140] Wendell Berry is a farmer, poet, novelist, and essayist who offers scathing economic and ecological critiques of current Western culture. Alan Durning, a former researcher at the Worldwatch Institute, writes on the problem of consumerism and the ecological crisis. Susan Griffin is a poet, essayist and playwright who focuses on the connections between the destruction of the natural world, the oppression of women and the culture of war.

[141] Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1998); and Starhawk, *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004).

[142] Jack Mezirow, "Perspective Transformation," *Adult Education* 28, no. 2 (January 1978): 101. See also Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

[143] Mezirow is influenced by the consciousness raising of the feminist movement, conscientization in the work of Paulo Freire and the process of transformation that occurs in everyday life. What is central to each of
- Note continues on next page. -

perspectives and how they are informed and changing them when they are no longer helpful to our development as persons. For Mezirow, the centrality of personal experience, critical reflection and rational discourse with others are keys to transformative learning.

Since the founding of transformative learning theory by Mezirow, there has been an explosion of thought in the area, as many scholars work critically with his ideas. Robert Boyd is one such figure; he is known for his critique of Mezirow's emphasis on rationality. Boyd appreciates the role of discernment, imagination and intuition.[144] Despite such differences in approach and method, a common theme in transformative learning is the shift in consciousness that occurs as a result of this form of adult pedagogy. Edmund O'Sullivan offers this comprehensive understanding of transformative learning:

> Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.[145]

The emphasis on consciousness shifts in this theory of change is significant. In many ways, transformative learning reflects the value that ecotheologians have placed on the importance of worldview transformation, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Yet what I

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these is how the results of transformation are lived out in social and political ways. See Mezirow, "Perspective Transformation."

[144] Boyd and Gordon Myers write, "To define transformation as rational only, that is to say ego-based, contrasts fundamentally with our conceptualization of transformations. We do not see the ego as the only structure within the individual's psyche. There are other dynamics occurring in the psychic life of the individual in addition to the rational, reflective and conscious activities of the ego." Boyd and Myers, "Transformative Education," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 7, no. 4 (Oct-Dec 1988): 268.

[145] Edmund O'Sullivan, Amish Morrell and Mary Ann O'Connor, eds., *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2002), 18.

discovered is that while the concern is there for subsequent changes in behaviour as a result of perspective transformations, less attention is paid within transformative learning theory to how the mechanism of behaviour change occurs.[146] While the nature of transformation in the self is explored in great depth, transformative learning does not focus specifically on resultant or concurrent changes in human behaviour. Therefore, I decided that I needed to explore a theory of change that could assist in this. My readings led me to the seminal work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.

1.5.2 Paulo Freire

For Freire, there is a dialectical relationship between theory and praxis, reflection and action, consciousness and change. Conscientization, the development of critical consciousness in both the oppressed and the oppressor, is not authentic unless it leads to transformation of the oppressive material reality of the world. Freire argues:

> It is interesting to observe that, for the idealistic, nondialectical comprehension of the relationship between awareness and world, one can still speak of *conscientização* [conscientization] as an instrument for changing the world, provided this change be realized only in the interiority of awareness, with the world itself left untouched. Thus, *conscientização* would produce nothing but verbiage.[147]

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[146] Action is certainly the concern of many transformative learning theorists. Mezirow, for example, argues that "perspective transformation reformulates the criteria for valuing and for taking action" (Mezirow, "Perspective Transformation," 100). Nevertheless, the primary concern is for the interiority of the self, as Boyd and Myers indicate: "The elements of transformative education constitute the realm of interior experience" (Boyd and Myers, "Transformative Education," 275).

[147] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, notes Ana Maria Araujo Freire, trans. Robert R. Bar (New York: Continuum, 2002), 89. bell hooks, a Black feminist writer and theorist influenced by the work of Freire, says something similar: "In retrospect, I see that in the last twenty years I have encountered many folks who say they are committed to freedom and justice for all even though the way they live, the values and habits of being they institutionalize daily, in public and private rituals, help maintain the culture of domination, help create an unfree world." bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 27.

For Freire then, action in the world as a result of changes in consciousness is critical. This conviction is reflected in his definition of praxis, which is described as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it."[148] Freire's understanding of praxis grounds his method of liberating education, described as the practice of freedom.[149]

Embodied in Freire's understanding of change are several important points, two of which resonate with my interest in engaging ecological praxis. The first point is that conscientization, and by extension praxis, emerges from a complex relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. "No one," Freire insists, "can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so."[150] There is a radical depth to the liberation Freire is calling for, as it can only occur in relationship with others. Friere uses the term 'communion' to indicate this depth.[151]

The second point is related to the first. Freire speaks of an important dualism alive within oppression, what he calls the ambiguity of the oppressed, carrying the "oppressor within." This needs to be confronted, Freire argues, in order to achieve true conscientization and liberation. Further, Freire notes that, similar to the fact that one cannot liberate another but only liberate oneself, so one cannot "unveil the world *for* another."[152] One cannot provide another's insight; one can only facilitate it.

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[148] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniv. ed., trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, intro. Donaldo Macedo (New York: Continuum, 2006), 36.

[149] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 69.

[150] Ibid., 73.

[151] Ibid., 128.

[152] Ibid., 169.

These two points speak to the complexity of action as a result of conscientization, to a dialectical relationship between theory and action. This relationship is ongoing and is most authentic when it occurs out of three things: communion with others, witness to injustice and engaged hope in a new world.[153]

In the course of my research, I found the insights of Freire to be quite compelling. What Freire offers is recognition of the depth of conscientization, of the complex relationship between theory and praxis and of the existence of contradiction. Further, the need for communion, witness and hope, are all religious themes.

Any of these aspects could have made Freire a logical dialogue partner in my project. However as I continued with my exploration, I reflected upon the specific reality of the ecological crisis and the need for change. The ecological crisis is unique in magnitude and scope from all other crises that have faced the human community; never before have we been faced with such daunting devastation and need for human redirection.

Given this magnitude, I decided that the ecological crisis needed to be the defining framework within which transformative change could be considered. While I was greatly intrigued by Freire's concept of praxis, I realized that it does not specifically address behavioural change in relation to the ecological crisis. Therefore, I turned to social psychology, in particular social marketing, to see what it has to say regarding environmental behaviour changes.

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[153] The importance of witness and engaged hope are also important themes in Freire's work. They are discussed in both *Pedogagy of the Oppressed* and *Pedagogy of Hope.*

1.5.3 Social Marketing

Social marketing is the application of marketing principles to influence behaviour toward a social good. The general consensus among social psychologists studying environmentally responsible behaviour is that there is a low correlation between ecological attitudes and environmental behaviour. The relationship between attitudes and behaviour depends upon the activity (for example, there is in fact a high correlation between attitude and activism), but it is still generally low.[154]

Within social marketing, helpful insights have been made regarding determinants of ecological behaviour. In general, they can be listed in two categories: personal and situational factors. Using the example of individual recycling, Wesley Oskamp and others suggest that the personal factors are the "characteristics of an individual that are associated with recycling behavior."[155] By contrast, marketing strategy based upon situational factors "attempts to identify manipulable aspects of a particular environment that facilitate recycling behaviors."[156] It has generally been found that the situational factors are more

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[154] Doug McKenzie-Mohr et al., "Determinants of Responsible Environmental Behavior," *Journal of Social Issues* 51, no. 4 (1995): 139-156. Other major contributors to scholarship on environmental social marketing include P. Wesley Schultz and Stuart Oscamp. See P. Wesley Schultz, Stuart Oskamp and Tina Mainieri, "Who Recycles and When? A Review of Personal and Situational Factors," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 15 (1995): 105-121; and Stuart Oskamp, "Psychological Contributions to Achieving an Ecologically Sustainable Future for Humanity," *Journal of Social Issues* 56, no. 3 (2000): 373-390.

[155] Schultz, Oskamp and Mainieri, "Who Recycles and When," 105.

[156] Ibid.

important for predicting ecological behaviour and, more importantly, moving people to increases in such behaviour.[157]

Doug McKenzie-Mohr is a Canadian social psychologist whose work focuses on the situational factors that influence ecological behaviour. He closely studies the tests that determine what the situational factors are for each kind of behaviour and then advocates program design based on this information. This is what he labels "community-based social marketing."[158] For McKenzie-Mohr, the main situational factors that matter are the following: knowledge, tactical efficacy, moral responsibility, social diffusion, and social support. Tactics that he has determined lead to increases in ecological behaviour include gaining verbal and written commitments, block leader strategies, prompts, social norms, removal of external barriers, and effective use of communication.[159]

I found the material on social marketing to be fascinating in relation to the behaviour changes required in relation to the ecological crisis. The contributions of psychology to public planning, as McKenzie-Mohr and others advocate, is vital. Interestingly, I noted two gaps in the literature I surveyed. The first is that the authors, and the tests they surveyed and conducted, did not question the political systems within which environmental policy is being shaped. The worldviews out of which such systems operate, and in turn, of the scholars, were not questioned.

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[157] The factors that lead to increases in ecological behaviour differ from practice to practice. What leads people to conserve home energy differs from what leads them to recycle, and again to compost. Social psychology literature tends to demonstrate tests regarding specific activities.

[158] Doug McKenzie-Mohr, "Promoting Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing," *Journal of Social Issues* 56, no. 3 (2000): 543-554.

[159] Doug McKenzie-Mohr, *Promoting a Sustainable Future: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing* (Ottawa: National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy [NRTEE], 1996).

The second gap is more evident. Oskamp, for example, acknowledges that dramatic behaviour changes are needed, those that require major changes to lifestyle.[160] Yet few social marketing studies examine programs focused on what I would identify as ‘radical’ ecological behaviours – such as installing alternative energy and greywater systems or extensive political activism. I am curious as to what factors would play into behaviours such as these.

Overall in my readings of social marketing, I identified a strongly individual nature to the changes being advocated. Although the idea of community-based social marketing emphasizes the ways that situational factors affect our decision-making, that model is premised upon the choices that we make as individuals. This led me, in my own research, to the question of the relationship among personal, social and political action. In this, the social ecology of Chaia Heller has been helpful.

1.5.4 Social Ecology: Chaia Heller

In her book *Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature* (1999), social ecologist Chaia Heller examines the factors that contribute to the consumer society we live in today and how we might turn toward an ecological society. She contends that a needs-focused agenda waters down the potential for radical change, and argues for the recognition of a socially based desire that, challenging romanticized notions of nature,

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[160] Stuart Oskamp, “Psychological Contributions,” 380-382.

honours the yearning for being part of a greater quality of life.[161] In particular, Heller challenges what she terms consumer ecology, whereby

> practices such as recycling, energy conservation, veganism, vegetarianism, or consuming organic products, are considered not only physically and environmentally more healthful, but resonate with the moral desires to be pure of spirit as well.[162]

She forcefully argues that "the longer we focus on the ethics of consumption, *as if we could consume morally within a capitalist system,* the longer before we reveal the inherent immorality of the capitalist system itself."[163]

Thus, Heller brings together Freirean concerns regarding political change together with the need for behaviour change, advocated in social marketing, in response to the ecological crisis. By exploring the role of desire, she is asking questions similar to transformational learning regarding the paradigms within which people live and dream. Yet, she offers a challenge to all three models of change:

> The current ecological crisis serves as a bitter reminder that our social desire for nature must be translated into political action. It would be naïve to believe that a simple 'paradigm shift' to a new set of understandings about nature and desire could abolish social and ecological injustice. For flowing through and around such understandings are social *institutions* of capitalism, the state, racism, and patriarchy which shape particular ways that we relate to the natural world as well as to each other.[164]

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[161] Chaia Heller, *Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1999), 3-5.

[162] Ibid., 22.

[163] Ibid., 28. Original emphasis.

[164] Ibid., 143.

A helpful aspect of Heller's work, for my own project, is her delineation between social and political action. Heller explains that it is easy to confuse the two forms.[165] Social action is that which informs and changes community and personal life. Within the social context, "we engage in production and distribution, fulfill community obligations, attend to practices of education, religion, as well as participate in a range of other social activities."[166] The personal dimension of this is the place where we live out our most immediate needs, such as for food, love and nurturing.[167]

The political context is the location of the management of our social lives, where we make the collective decisions about how we want to live. "Marked by a quality of public responsibility, the political sphere is the place in which we, as citizens . . . participate in shaping the policies which in turn inform our everyday lives."[168] For various reasons that Heller delineates, the difference between social action and political action is often missed. Whereas social action is activity that helps to shift dimensions of our social (and personal) lives toward more ecologically sustainable patterns, political action is that which impacts the decisions that affect what social choices are available and our capacity to make those choices. It includes asking questions about who is making the decisions, to whom they are responsible and under what paradigm of understanding they are operating. Many of the environmentally responsible behaviour changes needed require action that

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[165] Ibid., 155.

[166] Ibid., 153.

[167] Ibid., 153-154.

[168] Ibid., 154.

moves beyond the individual and the social and into the political realm. This is a vital contribution that Heller brings to the question of behaviour change.

While Heller's work brings together and at the same time challenges the previous models of change that I have explored, she does not offer a framework for praxis itself. At this point in my exploration, I realized that certain themes had repeatedly arisen: transformation, education, tension and ambiguity between belief and action, and the need for a political dimension to change. I felt the need to find a model of change that brings all of these together, as much as possible. In the course of my search, I landed on the field of ecological literacy, in particular the work of David Orr.

1.5.5. Ecological Literacy

Ecological literacy is a form of environmental education that recognizes the need for human behaviour change as a result of knowledge gained. Its proponents acknowledge the political dimensions of such change as well as the personal and social transformations that must occur. [169] Within ecological literacy is an understanding that the paradigms in which we learn about the world directly affect our capacity to care about the Earth and to change our behaviour in relation to the ecological crisis. Proponents of ecological literacy take a specific moral as well as scientific stance: the ecological crisis is now the defining problem facing the whole Earth and the human community. Learning about the Earth and

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[169] 'Ecological literacy' is a term coined by environmental educator David Orr. It is the focus of Chapter Five. Scholars who write about ecological literacy include C.A. Bowers, *Educating for Eco-Justice and Community* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); David A. Gruenewald, "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place," *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 4 (May 2003): 3-12; and David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

how it works, alongside the best of the social sciences and humanities, is essential for determining how to change our behaviour to mitigate the worst of the ecological consequences facing the Earth. For all of these reasons, I have chosen ecological literacy as the dialogue partner with which I will engage the model of praxis I develop and explore its possibility as a tool for activating ecological praxis. I will return to discuss ecological literacy in detail in Chapter Five.

1.6 Conclusion

As seen in this chapter, McFague's question of ecological praxis is rooted in a larger trajectory regarding the question of change in ecotheology. My own examination of how she understands praxis sits within a sizable body of scholarship that explores a range of theological themes in her work, particularly those that study more pragmatic elements of her thinking. In turn, in order to appreciate the call for ecological praxis that McFague advocates and to understand the need for a theory of change that can function as a dialogue partner in the move for change, it is helpful to examine the theoretical path that my own thinking took in arriving at ecological literacy as an appropriate partner in the work.

As I have indicated, my project centers on the ecological praxis that McFague advocates in her ecotheology. While her call for praxis represents a later stage in McFague's own ecotheology, it builds upon an early and continuing concern regarding Christian discipleship. The understanding of action, upon which an ecological praxis of consumption reduction is predicated, is based upon a comprehension of how Christian belief is lived out in the world. This comprehension is located in McFague's early work, before her turn to ecotheology. I therefore have to begin where McFague's own theological

journey begins, with the publication of her dissertation as *Literature and the Christian Life* (1966). This is where Chapter Two starts.

Chapter Two

Concern for Christian Discipleship: A Model of Praxis in McFague's Early Work

2.1 Introduction

In order to appreciate the ecological praxis of consumption reduction that McFague advocates in her ecotheology, and to consider how such praxis might be elicited, it is necessary to examine the methodology that is at its base. This is found in McFague's early work, her scholarship on parabolic and metaphorical theologies before her turn to ecotheology. McFague's early and ongoing concern is for how Christian belief is understood and lived out in the world – how she interprets discipleship.

McFague discerns discipleship to be a dynamic, destabilizing force in individuals' lives. It is this understanding that undergirds McFague's later call for ecological praxis and which makes up a complexly formed comprehension of praxis. Despite this complexity and the central theological demand that is ecological praxis in her later work, McFague does not explain the basis of praxis that informs her work. A framework for understanding praxis is left unconstructed and undeveloped in McFague's scholarship. The construction and development of a model of praxis based upon her early thinking and later ecotheology is my task in this dissertation.

In this chapter, I will uncover the elements of McFague's understanding of praxis and will initiate its construction into a coherent model so that its defining aspects are revealed and so that it can be developed further. I will begin by exploring the importance of taking the world seriously in Christian discipleship. Discipleship, as a response to the world, manifests itself in the relationship among belief, language and action in peoples'

lives. I will examine this relationship and how it functions methodologically for McFague in the next section of the chapter.

Once this methodology is explained, I will explore examples of Christian discipleship as exemplified in religious autobiography. The lives of John Woolman and Dorothy Day offer dramatic illustrations of what discipleship can look like in the world.

I will then construct a model of praxis based upon McFague's ideas. I alternatively refer to it as a 'parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship' because it reflects a specific way of understanding Christian belief lived out in the world. I will define the term 'parabolic' as McFague utilizes the term and will construct the model through certain key components: self, world, God, and experience. These are essential components to the model that informs McFague's understanding of ecological praxis and is based upon her ideas regarding discipleship. I will conclude then with a succinct definition of the model of praxis I construct; this definition will serve as the basis for the further development of the model in later chapters.

2.2 The Importance of the World in Christian Discipleship

McFague's concern regarding Christian discipleship is the running constant throughout nearly forty years of her scholarship. In her early work, the subject of this chapter, McFague's examination of discipleship revolves around the importance of taking seriously how human beings respond to and act within the world.[170] McFague's interest in

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[170] In her early work, McFague understands the world as referring to the contemporary, practical and secular existence of the human person in relation to his or her fellow persons. Sallie McFague, *Literature and the Christian Life*; and *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,
- Note continues on next page. -

human experience within the world begins with her dissertation, published as *Literature and the Christian Life.*

In *Literature and the Christian Life*, McFague explores the terrain of the 'Christian life,' which she defines as "man [sic] as experiencing and responding to God and his [sic] fellows."[171] McFague's consideration is that a lack of concern for understanding the world, which in part leads to a "refusal to take the world seriously"[172] in theology, impedes the acting out of Christian discipleship. McFague presents a dynamic understanding of discipleship as Christian belief that is lived out actively in a person's life. The relationship between belief and lifestyle is direct:

> [T]here is more to discipleship than willing oneself over to God in Jesus Christ. There is also the living out of this new orientation, and it is my contention that this living out is such a mundane, concrete, contemporary business that only an intimate acquaintance with the situation in which we are to do this living out can give us the equipment for a realistic and profound response.[173]

McFague believes that discipleship itself is hampered by lack of attention to the world. It is restricted in two ways. First, she suggests that it is difficult for one to trust God "deeply and realistically" in the face of worldly threats and contingencies. Second, it is hard to follow the commandment to love one's neighbours if one does not understand the needs, wants, hopes, and dreams of others.[174] Love must be informed if it is to be real and lasting.[175]

1975). Later, her understanding of the world expands to recognize that the world is a specific, concrete place that exists beyond human interaction, although it is always understood and interpreted through our relationships with that world. McFague's definition of the world also expands in a central way to include the natural world.

[171] McFague, Literature and the Christian Life, 116.

[172] Ibid., 137.

[173] Ibid., 140.

[174] Ibid., 137.

McFague's conviction is that for any society to operate effectively, it must have a "viable image of the significance of temporal life" to human functioning.[176]

McFague later dispenses with the singular notion of 'the Christian life' that characterizes her first publication, but the dynamic understanding of discipleship inherent within the term continues. In *Speaking in Parables* (1975), it is central: "Coming to belief through insight and the life that then ensues – this parabolic model – has deep implications for theology: it is these implications which form the heart of the present essay."[177] In *Metaphorical Theology* (1982), McFague is concerned about how belief, understood in the same dynamic manner as discipleship, can be sustained in a world of scepticism and discontinuities.[178] In *Models of God* (1988), discipleship requires interpreting the nature of salvation as bound up with our concern for the world, "the well-being, the health, of the whole body of the world."[179]

2.3 Belief and Action in Christian Discipleship

The importance of paying attention to the world leads McFague to ask questions regarding the meaning of belief and action in Christian discipleship. Both concepts, as I

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[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid., 202.

[177] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 7. Some of the implications for theology are the possibility of a rigor to parabolic reflection that matches more traditional models and the possibility that there will be a multiplicity of theologies that reflect both the persons doing the theology and the open-ended nature of parabolic reflection. Since the publication of *Speaking in Parables*, these implications have become manifest in McFague's own metaphorical and ecological theologies, as well as in the emergence of feminist and liberation theologies, among others.

[178] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), x.

[179] Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 146.

will explain here, exist in relationship to the world in which they are experienced. After I discuss how McFague understands belief, I will explore how she regards the idea of action.

2.3.1 The Concept of 'Belief' in McFague's Theology

McFague refers to belief throughout her work, yet rarely attempts a systematic definition of the term. Nevertheless, McFague's scholarship reveals an understanding of belief as a fluid movement between the self and the world. In her first book, McFague describes belief in this way:

> The Christian understands himself [sic] to be loved by God, loved so deeply that he has been given a new heart and will through this love, a new heart and will which he now seeks to direct to God in gratitude and to his fellowmen [sic] in forgiving love.[180]

The emphasis here is on the movement from experiencing the love of God to directing that love toward others.

McFague also emphasizes belief as a process, rather than a state of being or aspect of one's identity. In *Speaking in Parables,* McFague emphasizes that Christian faith is always a process of coming to belief; it is continually being lived and renewed through engagement with the world.[181] The content of belief in McFague's work is explicitly Christian; it comprises a dynamic awareness in one's head and heart of the love of God, interpreted through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The way in which such belief is experienced is, for McFague, a continuing process of living out the love of God through relationships with others in the world.

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[180] McFague, *Literature and the Christian Life*, 110.

[181] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 3.

2.3.2 McFague's Understanding of Action

The concept of action is as central to McFague's scholarship as her ideas regarding belief. Indeed, the two terms are bound up together. In McFague's early work, she is influenced by the work of Hannah Arendt, who provides the following definition of action in her book *The Human Condition* (1958): "To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, 'to begin,' 'to lead,' and eventually 'to rule,' indicates), to set something into motion."[182] Actions are only ever carried out by specific, particular, embodied persons. To divorce the action from the person who engages in the action is to render it meaningless.[183]

Action for McFague is equated with the terms 'life' and 'lifestyle' in *Speaking in Parables*,[184] although the words are more carefully parsed in *Metaphorical Theology.* There she writes, "Our lives and actions take place in networks of relationships" – note the conjunction 'and' distinguishing the two terms.[185] Generally speaking though, the three terms, *action, life* and *lifestyle* alternate in McFague's work. They each refer to the human person acting and existing within specific social and political contexts. What is important to note is that for McFague, speaking about one's life is rarely if ever removed from the actions one takes or from the contexts in which actions occur. Action is inextricable from how life is understood.

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[182] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed., intro. Margaret Canovan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 177.

[183] Ibid., 180-1.

[184] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 149, 176.

[185] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 94.

2.3.3 The Relationship Between Belief and Action

The requisite relationship between belief and action is, for McFague, reflected in the ministry of Jesus. She writes:

> The gospel was identified not with a teaching or a 'religious' experience but with an action or history played out in the particular stories of individuals. The stress on action over against teaching (the kerygmatic tradition) and religious experience (the mystical tradition) is significant, for it ties in directly with the way of the parables. Or rather we might say, the stress is on experience and belief only *in action*, that is, on the experience of *coming* to belief, the *action* the individual takes in response to an action on his or her behalf by God. The stress on the individual likewise relates story directly to parable, for in each of Jesus' parables it is the life of an individual that is at stake.[186]

McFague maintains that "'who' a Christian is is known only in action – belief and language must be *shown* in action, in life."[187] In McFague's call to Christian discipleship, then, is the recognition that the Christian identity of the believer is intertwined with one's action in the world; the two aspects cannot be separated.

2.4 The Importance of Language in Christian Discipleship

McFague's interest in Christian discipleship and in the relationship between belief and action in the world leads her to explore how language functions in that relationship. In a religion that places so much emphasis on the verbal, McFague asks how we can

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[186] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 120-1.

[187] Ibid., 149n.

understand the function of language in Christian discipleship.[188] The starting point lies in the linguistic basis of human existence. McFague writes:

> It is almost a common assumption now that human beings *are* linguistic – this, and not our reason (understood abstractly, non-linguistically) is what is most distinctive about us. We are the ones who speak (reason or conceptualization is dependent on linguistic symbolization), who name all things and thus give order to our world and give ourselves a past and future.[189]

Human beings are thoroughly linguistic, McFague insists.[190] "The language of a people is their sense of reality; we can live only within the confines of our language."[191]

A question then is precisely *how* are human beings linguistic? How do we construct language and perceive reality? For McFague and others, the answer is through metaphor.[192] Metaphor, says McFague, is the basis of language, and since language is the medium

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[188] Ibid., 27. McFague writes on the same page, "While our self-consciousness about language is in many ways a contemporary phenomenon, the Judaic-Christian tradition, being strongly verbal, has always been self-conscious about language. Contrasted with nature cults, mystic religions, liturgical and ritualistic traditions, Judaism and Christianity are 'logos' religions: human beings are constituted by the Word as well as by words, or by the Word as made known to them through words."

[189] Ibid., 26.

[190] Ibid., 22.

[191] Ibid., 27. McFague's position regarding the linguistic nature of human beings reflects, she insists, an "almost universal opinion" (Ibid., 26). In making her argument, she turns to, among others, George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1972); and W. M. Urban, *Language and Reality: The Philosophy of Language and the Principles of Symbolism* (New York: Macmillan, 1939).

[192] The scholarly influences on McFague's understanding of metaphor are many. Some of her key sources are Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962); Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth,* trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Harpers, 1946); Ian Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Elizabeth Sewell, *The Human Metaphor* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964); and Elizabeth Sewell, *The Orphic Voice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960). She is also influenced by the work of Paul Ricoeur, whose understanding of symbol, she says, "is practically identical with my view of metaphor" (*Literature and the Christian Life,* 40n). See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

through which we understand and construct our world, it is the basis of thought.[193] Metaphor, insists McFague, is the "crucial constitutive of language."[194]

Metaphor, thus, is central to McFague's understanding of the role of language in Christian discipleship. As I will explore, metaphor is how belief, language and action function together in discipleship. More needs to be said at this point about the nature of metaphor.

2.4.1 Defining Metaphor

A metaphor is a familiar word or image used in an unfamiliar context to shift our thinking and seeing to new ways. It opens up to new meaning a part of reality that could not be discovered any other way. Metaphor shocks one into comprehension. Metaphor holds a tension that is not present in symbol; whereas a symbol suggests that a thing is *like* something else, metaphor says that a thing both *is* and *is not* like something else at the same time.[195] Metaphor is effective when it has both affective and structural power to create and shape meaning.[196]

McFague suggests that the use of metaphor is not merely one aspect of language, it is the primary form. In effect, metaphor is the method by which human beings know and

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[193] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 50.

[194] Ibid., 32.

[195] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 16.

[196] Ibid., 42. McFague explains, "[M]etaphor belongs to the semantics, not the syntax, of language. That is, it is concerned with meaning: it is in the form of assertions, of judgments. . . . [I]n the semantical view of metaphor, the judgment of similarity (and difference) has structural and organizing possibilities because we are dealing here with two *matrices* of thought, two systems of associated commonplaces. The most fruitful metaphors are the ones with sufficiently complex grids to allow for extension of thought, structural expansion, suggestions beyond immediate linkages." Ibid., 38-39.

shape their world.[197] It reflects the way that the human mind works.[198] As McFague tells it, metaphor is "a way of *knowing*, not just a way of communicating. In metaphor knowledge and its expression are one and the same, there is no way *around* the metaphor, it is not expendable."[199]

It is important to remember that metaphor only has meaning through the engagement of the person in the thinking process. The human person creating new meaning cannot be removed from the context or the method of creating metaphor without losing the metaphor's meaning.[200]

2.4.2 Metaphor in the Parables

As I have noted, McFague's interest in language and the function of metaphor arises from her concern for how Christians come to belief and how they live out that belief in their lives. She sees in the roots of the Christian traditions a deeply metaphorical language. McFague suggests that metaphor is the method of the gospels, particularly the parables:

> [P]arables are metaphors. Parables are stories, of course, but of a particular kind – stories that set the familiar in an unfamiliar context, which is also what a metaphor does. A metaphor is a word used in an unfamiliar context to give us a new insight; a good metaphor moves us to see our ordinary world in an extraordinary way.[201]

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[197] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 46. Here, McFague distinguishes "at least three levels of concern with metaphor: metaphor as the creation of new meaning – poetic metaphor; metaphor as constitutive of language – radical metaphor; metaphor as the method of all human knowledge, whether social, political, intellectual, scientific, or personal – metaphor as human movement." Each of these feeds into the next, so that it is not a case of choosing the way in which metaphor will function. Her delineation is helpful for determining the way metaphor is functioning in a certain context. For my purposes, it is the linguistic underpinnings of metaphor in language, and human behaviour, that is important.

[198] Ibid., 56.

[199] Ibid., 4.

[200] Ibid., 15-6.

[201] Ibid., 4.

The parables use the things of ordinary life, then, to suggest the world of the divine. In the parables, the metaphorical shock between the simultaneous 'is' and 'is not' creates new knowledge *about God*. In attempts to suggest the kingdom of God and how human beings might live within and toward that kingdom, the gospels, especially the parables, use metaphor. Two examples are the parable of the wedding feast, in which one's refusal of the wedding invitation is a matter of one's life or death,[202] and the parable of the mustard seed, in which the kingdom of heaven is compared to the smallest seed.

The parables, understood as metaphor, illustrate a point that is central to McFague's understanding of Christian discipleship and so to the roots of her understanding of praxis. Divine meaning is brought to people through ordinary, mundane life, through quotidian reality. This is paradigmatic in the parables. Ordinary life reflects experiences of human persons in all of their bodiliness, interacting in and with the world. Since it is precisely through quotidian reality that God is revealed, that reality – ordinary life – is revealed as important to God and to people. By extension, the world *as it is* matters to God. This point augments McFague's argument, discussed earlier, regarding the importance of the world in Christian discipleship.

2.4.3 The Role of Metaphor in Theological Language

"There is no way . . . to have strange truth directly."[203] McFague recognizes the role of theological language in reflecting and forming Christian belief. In her own work, this

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[202] Ibid., 77.

[203] Ibid., 41.

leads McFague to develop a metaphorical theology that explores various metaphors for God that can be life-giving and suggest new ways of relating to and experiencing God in the world.

To examine McFague's metaphorical theology here is beyond the scope of this dissertation.[204] However, a brief exposition of McFague's work on extended metaphors in theological language will highlight how she understands the relationship between theological models and Christian discipleship.

How might we understand the relationship between metaphor, theological language and Christian discipleship? Models, as extended metaphors, illustrate how theological language is related to discipleship, to Christian belief and action in the world. Theological language is a tradition's attempt to take the primary images and metaphors of the tradition and order them into conceptual ideas and categories. So that the tensive power of metaphor within theological language might be maintained, McFague suggests that this conceptual ordering be accomplished through the role of *model*. She defines a model as "a dominant metaphor, a metaphor with staying power."[205] A model is a more comprehensive metaphor with structural and organizing potential.[206] Models are the bridge from primary images to conceptual language:

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[204] McFague's metaphorical theology has been widely influential. Three scholarly articles that examine her metaphorical theology in different ways include David J. Bromell, "Sallie McFague's 'Metaphorical Theology,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 485-503; Stephen W. Need, "Language, Metaphor, and Chalcedon: A Case of Theological Double Vision," *Harvard Theological Review* 88:2 (1995): 237-255; and Harry L. Wells, "Taking Pluralism Seriously: The Role of Metaphorical Theology within Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30:1 (Winter 1993): 20-33.

[205] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 23.

[206] "The focus of a metaphorical theology will be on models, for models, like metaphors, retain the tension at the heart of all religious language and, like concepts, order the images of a tradition so that they may become an intelligible pattern for life." Ibid., 103.

> Models, as systematic and relatively permanent metaphors, are a critical link between parables, which are also metaphors, and conceptual language, which orders, analyzes and criticizes the images of a tradition in a logical and comprehensive fashion.[207]

To flesh out her discussion on the role of models McFague examines the similarities and differences between theological models and models in science. Models in science, as extended metaphors, bring what is known into unknown territory to discover new things about the world.[208]

However, there are differences between theological and scientific models, of which the most pertinent to this project is the kind of questions each is asking. Whereas scientific models are aimed at deducing what something is and how it works, theology is an effort to understand the meaning of human existence and experiences of God in the world. While the different questions are related to each other, what theology does is unique:

> [T]heological models have a valuational component lacking in scientific models. That is, theological models *affect feelings and actions in the world; they often determine how we feel about ourselves and our world, and how we conduct ourselves in it.*[209]

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[207] Ibid.

[208] McFague devotes a chapter in *Metaphorical Theology* to the role of models in science and what they teach about the function of model in theology. She quotes a statement by scientist and theologian Ian Barbour to explain scientific models:

> [T]heoretical models are novel mental constructions. They originate in a combination of analogy to the familiar and creative imagination in creating the new. They are open-ended, extensible, and suggestive of new hypotheses . . . such models are taken seriously but not literally. They are neither pictures of reality nor useful fictions; they are partial and inadequate ways of imagining what is not observable. Ian Barbour, Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 47-48; quoted in McFague, Metaphorical Theology, 91.

[209] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 107. Emphasis added. Debates exist in theological ethics regarding the relationships between theological models as emphasizing the transcendent nature of God, and the limited nature of human ethical language; the tensive relationships between our interpretations of ‘is’ versus ‘ought’ in ethics. McFague’s emphasis here on the valuational aspect of theological models is to highlight the fact that, for better or worse, our interpretations of God affect our actions in the world.

McFague, thus, is concerned with how theological language, coming as it does from theological models, leads to Christian discipleship, to belief lived out in the world.[210]

2.5 The Relationship Among Belief, Language and Action

McFague's work on metaphor is sparked by her interest in the dynamic interplay between belief and action in Christian discipleship. Metaphor, as a constitutive aspect of human language, is the way that belief, language and action function together in Christian discipleship. Belief, language and action form a complex triad of movement in the person in relation to God, others and the world. I have already discussed the relationship between belief and action. As McFague shows, language is also directly, though complexly, related to action. It is through language that people understand and shape the world around them. We construct our world through language, through the use of metaphor. McFague states, "We live our lives according to our constructions of the world; as Erich Heller said, 'Be careful of how you interpret the world; it *is* like that.'"[211] This statement reflects the complex reality that our actions are dictated by the language that we and others use to describe the world; in turn, our language is informed and changed by and through our actions, as we strive to make sense of things. It is a complicated, dialectical relationship.

The relationship between language and belief is likewise complex. This relationship is examined by McFague in her exploration of theological models, discussed above. How

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[210] This is not to suggest that scientific models do not play a role in human action. To the contrary, scholars have identified major models in science that have led to destructive human and human-earth practices. See for example Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

[211] McFague, *Models of God*, 28.

we use language, the shifts that occur within language over time and across culture, distinguishes how we understand reality and how we act in relationship with God, ourselves, other human beings, and the rest of the world.[212] That language is socially constructed, and that we act out of those constructions, profoundly influences the shape and function of belief. McFague recognizes that action is the locus where language and belief are formed: “Language and belief are hammered out in action; they arise from and must return to the social and political worlds in which we find ourselves.”[213] In this way, belief, language and action, functioning as a triad through metaphor, is at the base of Christian discipleship.

2.6 Christian Discipleship in Religious Autobiography

In McFague’s attempt to comprehend how belief, language and action function together in Christian discipleship, she turns to religious autobiography for clues. McFague is interested in radical changes to lifestyle, dramatic actions in the world as a result of one’s faith. There are certain religious figures who have exemplified this kind of action. Turning to their stories can be illustrative of how belief, language and action function in Christian discipleship. The examples of such iconic figures as Quaker preacher John Woolman and Catholic social activist Dorothy Day are two who have influenced McFague’s thinking throughout her scholarship.[214]

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[212] Ibid., 28.

[213] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 175.

[214] Not only does McFague examine their autobiographies in *Speaking in Parables*, she returns to their examples in her last books of ecotheology. See McFague, *Life Abundant*, and *New Climate for Theology.*

John Woolman and Dorothy Day have written religious autobiographies that describe how their sense of themselves intertwines with their faith in God and their actions in the world. As McFague discusses in *Speaking in Parables,* it is through the form of religious autobiography that the belief-language-action dynamic is particularly well presented. By examining the memoirs of Woolman and Day I will show how that dynamic has played out in the dramatic changes they each made in their lives to reflect their faith experiences. McFague's interest in religious autobiography began after she finished writing her dissertation:

> The issue that engaged me was the nature of human existence as understood in Christian faith and in Western literature. At first it took the form of wanting to understand radical Christian life styles. I was interested in people like John Woolman and [Dietrich] Bonhoeffer: Christians whose deep commitment led to radical stances, not of an ascetic but of a worldly sort. [215]

In McFague's early work, religious autobiography assists her in understanding how belief and language play out in life.[216] A brief discussion of the function of religious autobiography will help illustrate this.

2.6.1 The Function of Religious Autobiography

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[215] Sallie McFague, "An 'Intermediary Theology': In Service of the Hearing of God's Word," *Christian Century* 92, no. 23 (June 25, 1975 – July 2 1975): 626.

[216] It is, in fact, precisely the genre of religious autobiography, which describes "lives lived as metaphors," that later influences McFague's ecotheology and call for an ecological praxis. Personal interview, November 17, 2007.

McFague defines an autobiography as "a story, the story of a life."[217] It is a story with the purpose of revealing the self[218] in the intricacies and details of the life of a person. Light is shed on "the mystery of the self."[219] In religious autobiography (also called a confession) the mystery of the self is the self in relationship with God. Regular autobiography functions as metaphor by bringing the familiar details of life into contact with the unfamiliar self. In religious autobiography the unfamiliar is the self in relationship with God. Metaphoric insight emerges from how the self-God relationship plays out in the course of a life.[220]

The function of autobiographies, however, is not merely to tell a good true story. The function, ultimately, is to educate the reader not only about the writer but about herself or himself. Good autobiographies offer a form of "practical wisdom" about how thought and life play themselves out.[221]

The same holds true for religious autobiographies. They do not present rule books for how one should live her or his life. McFague recognizes religious autobiographies as paradigms that suggest possibilities for living out a life of belief, language and action in the

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[217] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 145. McFague's work on autobiography is influenced by the work of influential literary scholar James Olney and German scholar Roy Pascal. See James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); and Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

[218] I will defer defining the term 'self' until later in this chapter.

[219]McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 151.

[220] "What shines through indirectly in a confession is God's hand in the intricacies of an actual, historical life." Ibid., 145.

[221] "The 'knowing,' then, that takes place both for the writer and the reader of autobiography is not unlike the 'knowing' that takes place in relation to aesthetic objects. I understand aesthetic knowing as wisdom, or getting in on the feel of life; it is not conceptual or scientific knowing but a grasping of the feel of life through the imagination. If this is so, what, then, is the 'truth' or 'value' of such knowing? Roy Pascal says that autobiographical and aesthetic truth is the truth not of knowing but of being, for it has to do primarily not with knowing something but with living life." Ibid., 155-6.

specific contexts of time and place. Religious autobiographies question the reader: "And who are you? How is your language and belief integrated with your style of life, your action in the real world?"[222] The value – and challenge – of reading religious autobiographies is that they bring home the importance of Christian discipleship for ourselves. As McFague avers, "Matters are likely to get uncomfortable from now on. It is no longer a question of poetry and novels, of language and of belief, but of the *parabolic possibilities of my own life.*"[223]

The phrase 'parabolic possibilities' points toward what is implied in McFague's understanding of Christian discipleship. I will explain the notion of the parabolic in relation to discipleship after analyzing the autobiographies of Woolman and Day. In my analysis, I am asking the following questions: How do belief, language and action play out in the religious autobiographies of John Woolman and Dorothy Day?[224] How do they offer examples of Christian discipleship in their own lives? What do they tell us about Christian belief lived out in the world?

2.6.2 Convincing Through Conduct: John Woolman

John Woolman was an eighteenth-century Quaker and social reformer who had a devout faith in God from an early age. For his entire life he concerned himself with how to

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[222] Ibid., 176.

[223] Ibid., 146. Original emphasis.

[224] John Woolman, *The Journal of John Woolman and A Plea for the Poor: The Spiritual Autobiography of the Great Colonial Quaker*, 2nd ed., John Greenleaf Whittier Ed., intro. Frederick B. Tolles (Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 1961); and Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of the Legendary Catholic Social Activist* (1952; repr. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).

live a Christian life. How this manifested concretely was shaped by two formative experiences.

The first formative experience occurred while Woolman was a child. Upon coming across a robin's nest, he killed the mother bird in sport. After realizing that he had left the baby robins to die cruelly of starvation, he killed them, too. Out of this experience, Woolman came to the formative realization that God creates a principle within humans of goodness towards all. However, this principle can become closed if it is not attended to and nurtured.[225]

Because Woolman believed that it was God who placed this capacity for empathy within 'the human mind,' it was thus a spiritual requirement to make one's mind and actions congruent with each other in a manner that increases one's regard for others. At a tender age Woolman experienced a dissonance between his actions and his Christian faith; the realization of such dissonance led Woolman to seek harmony between his beliefs and actions.

The second formative experience, to which Woolman would become famously associated, occurred when he was a young man. In his first year as a Quaker minister, while employed for a merchant, Woolman was asked to write a bill of sale for a slave woman. He was extremely uncomfortable with the idea as he did not want to be party to the condition of slavery. Woolman went ahead and wrote the bill but immediately regretted the action; after this time, he committed himself to living his life in accordance with his beliefs.[226]

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[225] Woolman, *Journal*, 3.

[226] Ibid., 15.

In this example, there is a similar recognition in Woolman of the need to have belief and actions cohere. Further, the function of language becomes evident; Woolman speaks directly about his beliefs to his employer and to the purchaser, a fellow member of the Quaker Society of Friends. Woolman begins to convey his beliefs to others through both language and action.

For Woolman the relationship between language and action is of particular concern. He believed that "conduct is more convincing than language"[227] and was scrupulous in analyzing his own conduct for inconsistencies in living in the spirit of Christian sanctity. Woolman believed that he could convince people to refuse slavery and other forms of oppression if they saw such conviction embodied in his own lifestyle.

Despite this apparent dualism between language and action, Woolman's commitments convey the complex relationship among belief, language and action. Woolman was keenly aware that while one can argue for or against anything, the language of persuasion can be most effective when it coheres with one's belief in God and with one's actions as a result of such belief. In turn, this caused a dramatic shift in Woolman's words, as he spoke them to others and as he wrote them in his autobiography, the *Journal*. He was modest, humble, yet unwavering in his speaking and presentation.[228]

In the *Journal* Woolman is struggling to live out the pervasive awareness of God's love that he feels inside himself and his conviction that there is a divine spark within all

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[227] Ibid., 51.

[228] Laura Marie Hartman suggests that the examples by which Woolman tries to live are non-verbal embodiments of his commitment: "His preaching was persuasive, but the way he embodied certain ethical concerns – arriving at a Friend's house on foot, and refusing to use silver during the meal, for example – added strength and integrity to his message." Hartman, "An Ethics of Consumption," 56.

others.[229] It was Woolman's own apprehension of the universal love of God that conditioned the way he lived his life.[230] The universal love of God is theological language, a model of God that reflects the religious experiences Woolman had as a boy and a man. How theological language affects one's beliefs and one's actions is another dimension to the belief-language-action triad. McFague discusses this in relation to Woolman's activism:

> These acts of protest, which in another person might have been merely idiosyncratic gestures, or in our day might be calculated as political protest, were in Woolman directly related to his gradual perception of God's universal love, his love for all people equally.[231]

For McFague what is important is not just that Woolman's belief in and experience of God's universal love led to his actions. What is significant in this religious autobiography is that Woolman developed a "style of pointing to God's love for all people only in connection with concrete occurrences."[232] There is a relationship between the specific and the universal, the local and the general, that was central to Woolman's mission and his life. Belief, language and action are interconnected in that Woolman used concrete experiences in his own life and the lives of others to convey his firm belief in God's love for all. In the way he lived his life, Woolman was at once demonstrating God's universal love (the 'is' of metaphor); at the same time he was an ordinary, eccentric man trying to make sense of the world (the 'is-not').

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[229] Margaret E. Steward, "John Woolman's 'Kindness Beyond Expression': Collective Identity vs. Individualism and White Supremacy," *Early American Literature* 26 (1991): 267.

[230] Frederick B. Tolles, "Introduction," in *The Journal of John Woolman and a Plea for the Poor: The Spiritual Autobiography of the Great Colonial Quaker*, 2nd ed., John Greenleaf Whittier Ed. (Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 1961), v.

[231] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 167.

[232] Ibid., 167-8.

2.6.3 Love For the People: Dorothy Day

The more obvious function of language, what we say, is reflected in Dorothy Day's work as a journalist and founder, with French activist Peter Maurin, of the Catholic Worker movement in 1933. Catholic Workers were those individuals who felt called to serve the poor and were required, like Day herself, to adopt a life of voluntary poverty in solidarity with those they served.

The title of the movement she founded highlights the two central aspects of Day's life. First, she was an anarchist and supporter of a Communist workers revolution;[233] she loved the 'masses,' the vast numbers of people living in deep poverty, and as a journalist brought attention to their plight and the political and economic roots of poverty. Day also became, at age thirty, a Roman Catholic, out of conversion experiences that married her growing love for Christ and the Catholic Church with her commitment to helping the poor.

It is in her conversion experiences that we see the relation between theological language interconnected with belief and action in the life of Day. Although Day had an early interest and belief in God,[234] her love for the masses led her to recognize a powerful understanding of God in the gospel stories. The model of God that formed Day's belief and actions in the world is reflected in the following passage, in which she conveys what she

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[233] June O'Conner, "Dorothy Day's Christian Conversion," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 166.

[234] Sallie McFague, "Conversion: Life on the Edge of the Raft," *Interpretation* 32, no. 3 (July 1978): 266.

was seeking, but could not find, among those who were helping the poor in the early 20th century:

> I did not see anyone taking off his coat and giving it to the poor. I didn't see anyone having a banquet and calling in the lame, the halt and the blind. And those who were doing it, like the Salvation Army, did not appeal to me. I wanted, though I did not know it then, a synthesis. I wanted life and I wanted the abundant life. I wanted it for others too. . . . I wanted every home to be open. . . . Only then did people really live, really love their brothers. In such love was the abundant life and I did not have the slightest idea how to find it.[235]

This passage represents a model of God who is actively on the side of the poor and oppressed. It is this model that merges with and sustains Day's love for people, both the masses and the individuals who she meets in the course of her work.[236]

Whereas Woolman's early and enduring religious faith led him to live out a life of radical coherence to his beliefs, for Day it was her love for the people that led to her love for God. It can be said that in certain ways her actions as a radical led to her belief in Christ. Day's example helps to highlight the complex relationship among belief, language and action in Christian discipleship.

Further, there is a paradox in Day's religious experiences. In addition to her love of the people, it was her love for her common-law husband, Forster Batterham, and the child she had with him that led Day to God.[237] It was a cruel twist, then, that Batterham could not

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[235] Day, *Long Loneliness*, 39.

[236] Day's commitment is "to each person in need whom she meets." McFague, "Conversion," 267. It is an attentive love in which she is present to individuals, in living in relationship with each person she meets and serves in community.

[237] Religion scholar June O'Conner explains, "Day's falling in love with Forster, together with her earlier feeling of being 'in love with the masses' . . . were profoundly influential experiences in her recognition of and receptivity to God." O'Conner, "Dorothy Day's Christian Conversion," 163. McFague notes also the euphoric roots of her conversion: "It was, as [Day] says, not her need and misery that finally drove her to God, but the great natural joy she experienced both with her mate and especially with the birth of her daughter." McFague, "Conversion," 266.

accept the validity of religion, and so their relationship ended when Day baptized their daughter, and then herself.

Such loss speaks to the depths of Day's conviction. It also illustrates how the interplay among belief, language and action in a person's life can emerge from deeply painful personal experiences. Day's belief in a God who was on the side of the poor fuelled the radical actions she was engaged in; as well, her belief demanded to be asserted in such a way that she was forced to give up conjugal love.

McFague points out that Day experiences conversion as a demand to have courage, "a willingness to risk and suffer, to live lives of dis-ease and spiritual adventure."[238] For both Day and Woolman, the common denominator that binds together belief, language and action in their lives is love. Their love for a God who offers universal love for all is what drives each of them. Theirs is not a soft, saccharin love that one can experience in the warm comfort of one's own home. Day quotes Dostoevsky: "Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams."[239] This also holds true in Woolman's life.

Belief, language and action in the lives of Woolman and Day are thoroughly bound together. Their belief in God is reflected in their language, in what they say about God, the world and themselves. Further, their language reflects particular metaphors and models of God, a theological language that drives the actions they take. In turn, their actions continue to deepen and nuance their understanding of and faith in a God who loves the world. In their religious autobiographies we see dramatic examples of Christian discipleship.

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[238] McFague, "Conversion," 255.

[239] Day, *Long Loneliness*, 285; McFague, "Conversion," 268.

2.7 Christian Discipleship and the Parabolic

Woolman's and Day's experiences of God in the world cause such changes in themselves that they enact these changes in their lifestyles in unremitting and pervasive ways. It is this kind of Christian discipleship, one that is lived out in such dramatic and enduring ways that is at the base of McFague's understanding of praxis.

In the reference McFague makes, quoted earlier, about the parabolic possibilities of one's own life, I believe she is suggesting that Christian discipleship is a parabolic model of experiencing God in the world. McFague uses the idea of the parabolic as a way to speak about the relationship between belief, language and action. Basing her ideas upon the parables, McFague is getting at a radical disorienting that happens as a result of experiencing God in the world. She suggests that "the parables keep 'in solution' the language, belief, and life we are called to."[240]

The parabolic accomplishes what metaphor does, only more deeply and specifically in relation to God. "In the parabolic tradition . . . the transcendent comes *to* ordinary reality and disrupts it."[241] By 'parabolic,' McFague is referring to the upending of regular life through the experiences of God in everyday life and the subsequent reordering of life based upon those experiences. In McFague's exploration of Christian discipleship, she is

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[240] McFague, "Conversion," 1.

[241] Ibid., 3.

interested in how belief, language and action function deeply enough to cause such a *parabolic* shift in one's actions in relation to one's faith.

2.7.1 Parabolic Shifts: Disorientation and Reorientation

The idea of the parabolic, as interpreted by McFague, suggests that life gets turned completely upside down by the presence of the holy in the ordinary. McFague refers to this, based upon Paul Ricoeur's work on parable, as a disorientation and reorientation of the self in response to experiencing God in the world. As the reader will recall, McFague's understanding of the belief-language-action triad is formulated from her study of parable and how parable functions metaphorically, in the gospels and in the lives of Christians. In discussing how the parables function, McFague says:

> They work on a three-fold sequence, as Ricoeur says, of 'orientation' (the realistic, ordinary story), 'dis-orientation' (the extravagant, surprising, unnerving upset of our ordinary experiences), and 're-orientation' (a redescription of human experience that, though heavy with risk and openendedness, is not without its hints and directions).[242]

In life as in the parables, it is the "deformation of ordinary existence by its placement in an extraordinary context"[243] that causes the disorientation and reorientation.

The disorientation and reorientation of the parables is not limited to those gospel stories. It is also that of individuals who are markedly and dramatically affected by experiences of God in the ordinary world. The disorientation of the self does not lead so much to a new set of beliefs and guidelines for how one should be and act in the world,

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[242] Ibid., 258. McFague references Paul Riceour, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia*, no. 4 (1975): 107-108.

[243] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 94.

although that is a part of the equation.[244] Rather, the reorientation is to a new vulnerability before God.[245] McFague describes it as a process, rather than an event.[246] It is a process, enacted dramatically in one's lifestyle that lasts throughout one's life.[247]

To understand the dynamic of disorientation and reorientation in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, let us return for a moment to the autobiographies of Woolman and Day. The disorientations each experienced, which were extremely painful in the personal and emotional lives of each author,[248] led to permanent reorientations in the service of God's call. Such reorientations were lived out in demanding public ways, made their lives difficult, and put them at odds with most of society. Yet these reorientations also

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[244] In her article, "Conversion: Life on the Edge of the Raft," McFague refers to the process of disorientation and reorientation as conversion. She defines it thus: "'Conversion' in ordinary usage means two things: either an abrupt change to an enthusiastic religious attitude accompanied by a highly emotional experience, or the passing over from one perspective on reality to another. . . . [I]t is the second [meaning] which carries the deeper freight and more revolutionary potential." McFague, "Conversion," 255.

Throughout the article, McFague is referring to conversion entirely within the dynamic that leads to dramatic lifestyle changes for the converted.

'Conversion' is an admittedly complex term with a wide range of definitions. While some scholars and religious adherents privilege a definition that emphasizes conduct changes as a result of the conversion, others are concerned primarily with the inner experience of a person, with less attention to how conversion does or does not play out in the world. For this reason, and because McFague only refers to the term once in her scholarship, I have decided to avoid the term when discussing the parabolic model of action. For readings on conversion, see Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971); Walter Conn, ed., *Conversion Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation* (New York: Alba House, 1978); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Modern Library, 1994; and Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

[245] McFague, "Conversion," 258.

[246] Ibid., 260.

[247] McFague gives the examples of Paul of Tarsus and Augustine. Of Paul she writes, "The dis-orientation, or conversion, resulted in a lifelong process of reorientation. The result of Paul's life is an attempt to re-orient all his thinking and doing along these new lines." "Conversion," 260. Of Augustine: "The reorientation, already at work in tandem with the long period of disorientation, is primarily the task of the rest of his life." Ibid., 263.

[248] McFague's insight into Woolman's journey echoes some of the pain that Day experienced: "But [Woolman's] journey – the conversion, if you will, the gradual deepening of the new perspective on reality – was a long and painful one." Ibid., 264.

led to greater intimacy with God for both Woolman and Day, as well as the sense that they were living out, with their bodies and their minds, their actions and their words, God's universal love for all people.

The life stories of these two figures remind us, again, that the movement in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship is one of process, rather than event. It is not through individual experiences themselves, but through the process of having experiences of God, making sense of and living them out in one's actions, that the model of praxis happens. The disorientation and reorientation of the experience of God in the world is neither intellectually chosen nor linearly followed. The wisdom here of discipleship is that it is experienced in the quotidian world; it is not merely an internal development.

2.7.2 A Parabolic Understanding of Discipleship

The notion of the parabolic in relation to Christian discipleship suggests a comprehension of human behaviour that is at the root of McFague's understanding of praxis in her ecotheology. While the term 'Christian discipleship' suggests the way that Christian belief plays out in life, it is McFague's specific interest in the function among belief, language and action in radical lifestyle changes that fuels her ideas around praxis. It is McFague's parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship that serves as a framework for McFague's understanding of praxis.

This framework, as an observation into human behaviour, is left unconstructed and undeveloped in her work. In sections 2.3-2.5 of this chapter I construct its methodological underpinnings, which are located in the function of metaphor in the relationship among belief, language and action in Christian discipleship. By exploring, in section 2.6,

McFague's interest in how Christian discipleship plays out in the lives of individuals, especially those who were led to radical lifestyle changes in response to their faith, I have highlighted McFague's understanding of how belief, language and action operate in the making of such radical changes.

In this final section, I will continue to construct the parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship into a model of praxis and shape it into a working definition that can be developed further with insights from McFague's ecotheology. In my analysis of McFague's early work, I have identified some essential aspects of this model that need to be brought forward and clarified. It is important to construct how McFague understands the self, world, God, and human experience, for they represent, to me, essential aspects of how McFague interprets the dynamism inherent in discipleship.

2.7.2.1 Self

The meaning of 'self' in McFague's early work is based upon her comprehension of the medium of autobiography. As I discussed earlier, the function of autobiography is to reveal the self through the story a person tells about his or her self engaged with the world. It is not through a mere recounting of one's trials and tribulations that the self becomes understood; the self is revealed only through the layers of belief, language and action as they are relayed by the writer.

McFague's understanding of the self begins with a description provided by James Olney, a scholar of autobiography. He states:

> The self . . . is infinitely difficult to get at, to encompass, to know how to deal with: it bears no definition, it squirts like mercury away from observation; it is not known

> except privately and intuitively; it is for each of us, only itself, unlike anything else experienced or experienceable. [249]

The self as mystery reflects the fact that the self is often hidden from oneself as well as from others. This does not mean, however, that the self cannot be revealed. McFague appreciates autobiography because it reflects stories of the self interacting in the world; the self is revealed indirectly, through these stories. Other mediums can function similarly, including other forms of literature and art and, as we have seen in McFague's early work, in religious and theological language.

Although McFague reminds us that we cannot look directly at the self,[250] we can approach the self through language and gain some appreciation for how the self comes into being. The self is formed through metaphor. Olney explains it thus:

> The self expresses itself by the metaphors it creates and projects, and we know it by those metaphors; but it does not exist as it now does and as it now is before creating its metaphors. We do not see or touch the self, but we do see and touch its metaphors: and thus we 'know' the self, activity or agent, represented in the metaphor and the metaphorizing.[251]

As we have already seen in McFague's work, language, through metaphor, is the method by which humans create and know their world. It is in bringing the 'is' and the 'is-not' together that creates new meaning. So, too, the method of metaphor in people's lives shapes and reveals the self.

We know, now, that McFague understands the self as a mystery formed through metaphor. We can only get at who or what the self is indirectly, through the person's

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[249] Olney, *Metaphors of Self*, 23; quoted in McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 147.

[250] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 149.

[251] Olney, *Metaphors of Self*, 34.

engagement with the world. How, exactly is the self revealed in this way? The answer is located at the base of the dynamic among belief, language and action. McFague states, "People *do* reveal who they are in their speech and action, and both are necessary, for without language action would be the movement of robots, and without action speech would disintegrate into abstract passivity."[252] Thus, the self is the axis around which action and language revolve. The self is revealed only in the dynamism between action and language. Examining the self through this dynamism gives one a tangible way to get *at* the self. McFague states that "together, action and speech become the 'sign,' the metaphor, disclosing indirectly *who* one is."[253] Together, action and language function "as a metaphor or parable of the self."[254]

In addition to the influence of autobiography in McFague's early work, she is, in her turn to metaphorical theology, made increasingly cognizant of the importance of context in the metaphors and models that shape theological language. She is referring to, among other things, the social, political, historical, and bodily contexts of individuals in the world. In writing about the interpretative context for religious language, McFague says, "It is the context that recognizes that we who attempt to speak about God are social, cultural, and historical beings with particular perspectives influenced by a wide range of factors."[255] McFague is reflecting the insight that our social, cultural and historical locations are part of our understanding of the self. As McFague along with other feminist scholars have pointed

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[252] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 149.

[253] Ibid.

[254] Ibid.

[255] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 3.

out, "our class, race and sex; our nationality, education, and family background; our interests, prejudices and concerns"[256]are likewise aspects and determinants of the self. They function in the metaphors that we use and embody to shape ourselves and the world in which we are embedded.

To summarize, then, who is the self in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship? The self is the person interacting with herself or himself, with others and with the world through the contexts of political, social, historical, and bodily location. That self is a mystery disclosed indirectly through the person's actions and language. The self is formed through the very interrelationship among belief, language and action. A parabolic understanding of the self in Christian discipleship is dynamic and tensive; the self is formed by the very function of discipleship itself.

2.7.2.2 World

If the self is the person interacting in the world, then what, exactly, is the world? I discussed McFague's understanding of the term at the beginning of the chapter when first considering her concern regarding discipleship. I will return to that discussion briefly now to examine more closely what the 'world' means in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship.

In McFague's early work, the 'world' refers to the concrete, ordinary, secular existence of people in relationship with themselves and others. It is the location in which we live our lives and strive to make meaning. For her, the world is a concrete place; it is,

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[256] Ibid.

however, both created and interpreted through metaphor. To understand the meaning of the world in terms of the parabolic, the function of metaphor in creating and interpreting the world needs to be explained.

In explaining the relationship between language and action in the function of metaphor, I discussed McFague's idea that we construct our world through metaphor. For her this means that how we perceive the world is based upon our constructions of what is happening in the world. Through our language, for example, we come to believe in the benevolence or cruelty of life; what kind of meaning there is in our sufferings and joys; how human beings are supposed to act toward one another, how we punish transgressions, and so on. In turn, we experience the world as we have perceived it.

As I described regarding the meaning of the self, McFague recognizes the importance of context in our understandings of ourselves and God and how context affects how we see the world. The world at any time, while being at once a concrete reality that exists outside of our constructions, is also always contextually located in history, politics and social location. It is continually interpreted through our individual and collective contexts.

To get a closer sense of what the world means for McFague, it is helpful to return to the autobiographies of Woolman and Day for a moment. The world for each activist is the concrete world of human suffering, oppression, love, joy, and intimacy with others. It is the place where God's presence is experienced, and where both Woolman and Day struggle to make God's universal love apparent. It is a world that is, indeed, shaped by people's

metaphors and constructions, about God, themselves and others. The world is where such constructions are manifested in the lives and on the bodies of human beings.[257]

This is the world that is meant in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. It is a world that, albeit formed by and interpreted through metaphor, is a real, concrete place in which human persons live, love and suffer with, among, and against themselves and others. The meaning of 'world' in this context holds the reality of time and space alongside the phenomenon of changing interpretations of the world through changing metaphors.

2.7.2.3 God

McFague is well known for the models of God that she presents in her metaphorical theology. As alternatives to the predominant model of God as father, McFague explores the metaphors of God as mother, lover and friend to see what insights they bring about God and the relationship of God with human beings and the world.[258] I am not, however, basing my discussion on those models or any others. What I am discussing is the methodological foundation of McFague's models of God. What assertions, based upon her study of metaphor and parabolic theology, can be made about God in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship?

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[257] As I stated near the beginning of this chapter, in McFague's early work the 'world' refers primarily to human beings in relationship with each other. In her ecotheology her understanding expands to include the natural world as well. In this chapter I am sticking to McFague's early understanding, with the proviso that I will explore the expansion of boundaries in Chapter Three. Notably, John Woolman was aware that the world that experienced God's universal love included the natural world. See Woolman, *Journal*, 8.

[258] See McFague, *Models of God.*

First, the nature and function of metaphor in language suggests that what we say about God has the features of 'is' and 'is not'. God both is how we imagine the divine, and is not at the same time. This behooves us to be careful in the assertions we make about God, the relationship between God and people and the relationship between God and the world. This does not mean that nothing can be said about God; rather, we approach language about God through indirection. What we say about God, how we conceptualize God and our relationship with the divine must be tentative, provisional and open to change.

Second, the parables, as well as the stories of Jesus, point, among other things, to the importance of relationality. Jesus, as the parable of God,[259] points to the active relationship of God with human persons and with the world. While there is much that we cannot say for sure about the nature of God, McFague suggests that the Christian scriptures[260] point to this quality. God is relational. In a parabolic understanding, it is suggested that 'God in the world' means, among other things, a God in active relationship with us and all things.

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[259] McFague explains, "The belief that Jesus is the word of God – that God is manifest somehow in a human life – does not dissipate metaphor but in fact intensifies its centrality, for what is more indirect – a more complete union of the realistic and the strange – than a human life as the abode of the divine? Jesus as the word is metaphor par excellence; he is the parable of God." *Speaking in Parables*, 76.

[260] While McFague still considers the Christian scriptures to be foundational to Christian faith, her understanding of their authority shifts in her book *Metaphorical Theology* and later. There, she likens the authority of the Christian scriptures to that of a classic poetic text. As such:

> It can be contemporaneous or 'timeless' in that it speaks a universal language through its own particularity, not because it says one thing, but because it can say many things. It is rich, open, diverse, for as a poetic text it is constituted by metaphors open to many interpretations. As such, it is also a classic text which lives beyond its own time as it meets and accommodates itself to the experiences and interpretations of diverse peoples. We shall argue that the authority of Scripture is the authority of a classic poetic text and that such a notion of authority is substantial and enduring, both because *its authority is intrinsic* (the world it presents, that is, the reality it redescribes, speaks with power to many people across the ages) and because *its interpretation is flexible* (the world it presents is open to different understandings). McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 59.

The third point that can be suggested about God is that God is "on the side of life and its fulfillment."[261] This is a bold statement, made all the bolder for her later realization that 'life and its fulfillment' extends beyond human life to the life systems of the Earth.[262] As I will indicate in Chapter Three, it is in fact her assertion that God is on the side of life and its fulfillment that leads to her turn to ecotheology.

To summarize, based upon the function of metaphor, trying to talk about and conceptualize God requires careful awareness of the 'is' and 'is not' character of any assertions made about God. In continuity with McFague's development of various models of God, I might emphasize the "as" signifier to highlight the metaphorical character of God-talk. McFague discusses God *as* mother, *as* lover, *as* friend. The word helps to temper God-talk so that literalizing conceptions of God are avoided – no matter how 'true' they may seem to be based upon contemporary circumstances.

Thus, I am defining God in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship *as* relational, *as* on the side of life and its fulfillment. Rooted in an understanding of God from the parables and Jesus as the parable of God, these assertions seem enduring and relevant. Based upon McFague's investigations, it seems safe to assume that God is relational and on the side of life and its fulfillment. Maintaining the term *as*, however, will remind us to remain careful, indirect, and cautious in these and any other assertions.

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[261] McFague, *Models of God*, x.

[262] In *Models of God*, McFague makes explicit reference to the concerns of the nuclear and ecological crises; she directs her metaphorical theology in this book to be 'liberation theology' that responds to these crises and more (xiv). I should note, however, that she does not develop an actual ecotheology until her next book, *The Body of God.*

So then, God is an understanding of the divine as relational and as on the side of life and its fulfillment. This is the God who is active and alive for Woolman and Day, as well as for McFague.

2.7.2.4 Experience

Self, world, God; the relevance of these terms in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship rests upon their relationship to each other. That relationship revolves around the term ‘experience.’ One point continually reiterated by McFague is that all of human understanding, which is based upon experience, is mediated through metaphor. We cannot get at the world or any understanding of it in any other way. Yet this does not mean that nothing exists beyond metaphor.[263] Human experience is at the base of knowledge; what is important to remember is that such experience is always already interpreted.[264]

As McFague claims, experience exists at the moment before language. However, because humans are by nature linguistic, the bringing of experience into conscious awareness is, by necessity, metaphorical. Thus, our understanding of our experiences should be likewise metaphorical. We must be continually cognizant of their ‘is’ and ‘is not’ quality.

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[263] McFague explains, “To claim that all constructions are metaphorical is to insist that one never experiences reality ‘raw’; it does not follow from this, however, that there is nothing outside language. All that follows is that our access to reality is in every case mediated and hence partial and relative.” McFague, *Models of God*, 26.

[264] McFague highlights the hermeneutical process of experience: “‘To interpret or not to interpret’ is not a human choice: we are hermeneutical creatures. To say that we are hermeneutical, that to interpret is the distinctive human way of being in the world, is identical to saying that we are linguistic, for, as we have seen, language is at base metaphor.” McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 55.

Like the discussion on the concept of God, it does not mean that nothing can be said about experience. McFague identifies two aspects that help define the term further.
First, experience is small as much as it is great. It is not only the ‘grand’ experiences, the ‘great’ epiphanies into the mystery of the human condition that matter in a parabolic understanding of discipleship. Experience, based as it is on metaphor and the dynamic of belief, language and action, refers to ordinary, everyday experiences as much as, if not more than, it does on the seminal moments in the lives of individuals.[265]

The second aspect of experience is that it is embodied.[266] Human experience is felt, mediated and interpreted through our human bodies in their particularities of age, gender, ethnicities, infirmities, et cetera. The corollary of this, as I discussed in terms of understanding the self and world, is that we are all contextually embedded in our social, historical, political, and cultural locations. As I discussed earlier, contextuality, as well as the related importance of embodiment, are factors in the interplay of belief, language and action.

Experience in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, thus, can be described as rooted in ordinary, everyday experience (as well as the great moments in life); it is embodied and contextually specific.

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[265] Again, McFague’s concern for the ordinary, quotidian reality of individuals is influenced, in her early work, by her study of the parables.

[266] This idea will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

2.7.2.5 Summary

Together, these component parts of a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, as I have uncovered in McFague's work, illustrate the complexity and challenge of Christian belief lived out in the world. My analysis of how McFague understands the self, world, God, and experience is my own construction; this is how I have analyzed and begun to develop the methodology at the base of McFague's call for ecological praxis. Together, these components form the basis for a model of praxis that reflects McFague's understanding of action and Christian discipleship. Putting them together into a working definition, the model of praxis I have constructed in this chapter can be defined as:

> A radical disorientation of the self in response to experiencing God in the world, leading to a permanent reorientation of the self in the world, evidenced in dramatic and enduring lifestyle changes.

The value of considering how the self, world, God, and experience are understood in this model lies in the fact that these are also, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, critical aspects of the insights McFague develops in her ecotheology. Understandings of the self, world and experience and the role of the sacred are likewise essential to ecological literacy, the tool I employ in Chapter Five to consider how an ecological praxis of consumption reduction can be encouraged.

2.8 Conclusion

McFague's understanding of praxis is based upon the function of belief, language and action in individuals' lives. It is that which informs McFague's call for ecological praxis, and so I also refer to the model I have constructed interchangeably as a parabolic

understanding of Christian discipleship, to reflect that it is based upon how McFague comprehends the way that Christian belief is lived out in the world.

This model of praxis, as I have outlined in this chapter, is complex and multi-layered. However, if it is to be responsive to the ecological crisis and help activate the ecological praxis that McFague has advocated, it needs to be developed further. I argue that it can be so expanded with the considerable insights that McFague develops in her ecotheology. As I stated at the outset of this chapter, it is in her ecotheology that McFague's concern for Christian discipleship continues. For this and other reasons that will be elucidated in Chapter Three, that makes the utilization of her ecotheology for developing the model of praxis appropriate. In order to develop McFague's earlier understanding of praxis with insights from her ecotheology, those insights need to be uncovered and analyzed in light of her concern for discipleship. That is the task of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Sallie McFague's Ecotheology: Discipleship toward the Natural World

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two I identified the first way that McFague's interest in Christian discipleship manifests in her scholarship. Located in her concern for taking the world seriously, McFague identifies a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship in her early work. This understanding underlies McFague's call for ecological praxis. Because this understanding had not been explicitly identified by McFague, I constructed it into a model of praxis in order to highlight its methodology and definitive aspects important for considering ecological praxis.

It is my opinion that the model needs to be further developed so that it might become more specifically relevant in light of ecological degradation, and could therefore help lead people to engage in the ecological praxis that McFague is advocating. The unique challenges that the problem of the ecological crisis presents, and the level of change that is needed in human behaviour, suggest that any theory of change must factor in the distinctiveness of the problem and the magnitude of change being demanded. Since McFague's call for ecological praxis is based upon a comprehension of action that was formed prior to McFague's consideration of ecology, my suggestion is that the model can be enhanced using insights from McFague's ecotheology.

The use of her ecotheology is appropriate for two reasons. The first reason is that McFague's interest in discipleship continues throughout her ecotheology. McFague's comprehension of discipleship is a parabolic understanding based upon the function of

belief, language and action in individuals' lives. In her ecotheology, McFague's concern for discipleship and the importance of the world continues, and takes a new turn in the light of the ecological crisis. An ecological reorientation of the human person within the natural world functions as a new locus for discipleship.

The second reason that it is apt to draw upon McFague's ecotheology to develop the model of praxis is that, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, her increasing insights into the relationship between ecology and theology have in various ways informed her thinking regarding praxis. McFague's insights have informed her thinking, but as far as I can discern, they do not inform the methodology that is the foundation of her call for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction.

McFague's ecotheology is about enlarging the scope of concern for Christian discipleship. In order to use her insights to develop a model of praxis upon which her ecological praxis is predicated, distinct tasks are required. The first task is to outline and analyze the key insights in McFague's ecotheology as they relate to the question of discipleship. That is the function of this chapter. The second task is to apply those insights to a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, and in so doing develop the model so that it can become more relevant and adequate for engaging in ecological praxis. I will address that in Chapter Four.

The outline of this chapter, then, is as follows. McFague's ecotheology reflects the influence of three scholars upon her work: Gordon Kaufman, James Gustafson and Thomas Berry. I will sketch out the main contributions that each of these thinkers make to McFague's work. I will then identify the methodological constructs out of which her key insights emerge. This will comprise the first section of the chapter.

An analysis of McFague's ecotheology reveals four key insights in her work. Together, these insights reflect McFague's concern for discipleship in response to the ecological crisis and suggest resources for developing the model of praxis constructed in Chapter Two. The four insights are an Earth-based starting point, the centrality of embodiment, the need to know and love nature, and the importance of an ethic of care. A discussion of them will comprise the second section of this chapter.

Finally, I provide a critical assessment of McFague's work in order to highlight possible limits to her discourse that might pertain to her understanding of praxis. Three critiques of McFague's ecotheology are examined.

3.2 Christian Discipleship in Light of the Ecological Crisis: Influences on McFague's Thinking

After developing a parabolic and then a metaphorical theology in her early work, McFague turns her attention to constructing a theology that will be an adequate response to the demands and contours of the ecological crisis. This reflects the way that McFague's concern for Christian discipleship manifests itself in her scholarship. While in her early work McFague's thinking on discipleship was influenced by scholarship on linguistics, metaphor and autobiography, her recent work suggests a shift toward various thinkers and ideas that reflect her interest in a theology that responds to the crises of the contemporary era. Relevant to my project are the contributions of constructive theologian Gordon Kaufman, theological ethicist James Gustafson and cultural historian Thomas Berry.

The projects of Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry are distinct from one another and from that of McFague. What each shares, however, is a conviction that human

constructions of God affect our actions in the world. In Berry's case, his conviction is that humanity requires a larger construction of the universe as a guide for action. For McFague, the relationship between our constructions of God and our actions is a matter of Christian belief, and so the influence of these thinkers is directly related to how she configures discipleship. Drawing attention to the contributions of each of these thinkers to McFague's thought will be helpful to better understand the dimensions added to McFague's concern for Christian discipleship in her ecotheology.

3.2.1 Constructing God: Gordon Kaufman

In his work *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (1993), Gordon Kaufman provides a systematic treatment of certain themes in theology based upon his conviction that all theology is constructive. He describes theology as a human imaginative construction in response to the ultimate mystery that envelops life and to the exigencies of human life.[267] While all theology is constructive, it is not always recognized as such. Kaufman is intentional about bringing this to the fore and developing it into a methodology.

Kaufman notes that human beings live within symbolic frames of reference or worldviews. Worldviews are creative pictures through which human life is interpreted and oriented for meaning.[268] The great religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Judaism, Islam,

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[267] Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[268] Ibid., 36. Kaufman explains:

> Although the human spirit has no way of overcoming the mystery of life, it is also true that we are not able simply to live with a blank, empty Void. So humans create pictures, pictures of what they

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and Hinduism, are examples of such worldviews. The idea essential to Kaufman's position is that we humans do not experience God or the world *as it is.* Rather, our experiences are interpretations based upon our knowledge of the world, our social, cultural and historical contexts, and the worldviews within which we already live. This reflects, although with a different emphasis, McFague's position regarding the role of metaphor in human interpretation of the world.[269]

Because theology is constructive, Kaufman argues that to come up with the best possible constructions we must attend to at least three things: the priority of human experience;[270] the crises of the day – for him, namely the nuclear threat and the ecological crisis; along with the best knowledge of the world[271] around us as it is available. In

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> think the world is like, pictures of what they imagine are the ultimate powers or realities with which they must deal; and they create rituals through which they enact their own roles among these realities and powers. Ibid., 29.

[269] As noted in Chapter Two, McFague believes that metaphor is the linguistic basis of human existence. Kaufman shares a similar conviction in *In Face of Mystery*: language is a dialectical process; it is through social interaction that we acquire language (33), and through language that we develop human consciousness. Language is fundamentally related to human experience (166).

[270] Kaufman refers to human experience as the self-reflective subjectivity that is unique to humans. We not only experience things in the world but are able to be the subjects of such experience. Ibid., 163-5. Experience is a dialectical process:

> Experience is always . . . dialectically interconnected with our reflection on it and our reconstruction of it. We take in the events of life and the objects of experience in terms of concepts and categories inherited from our culture, even though all the while we are actively participating in the remodelling and remaking of these very categories and concepts so they will better fit that experience – that is, so they will enable us better to anticipate its diverse features, to absorb their richness and fullness, and to direct our activities in response to them. Ibid., 51.

[271] Kaufman, with McFague, believes that *all* understandings of reality, not just theological ones, are constructions. How we perceive the world is an imaginative construction based upon what is being perceived scientifically (and social scientifically, psychologically, et cetera). Ibid., 255. Kaufman provides a commonsense definition of the world:

> The conception of the world, now, is the notion of the overall context within which all living and acting go on, the overarching context of all the changing day-to-day contexts of our lives, and thus the pervasive underlying order and structure of things, always taken to be in certain fundamental respects knowable (and known), something on which we can rely. Ibid., 113.

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attending to these three dimensions Kaufman is responding to the concerns he has regarding anthropocentrism[272] and idolatry[273] within theology. He believes that theology must be deconstructed and reconstructed to rid itself of these faults and that it must attempt to reconceive God, human beings and the world in a more accurate light.[274]

What does Kaufman mean by this? How do we judge the 'truth' of theological constructions, if they are indeed constructions? For Kaufman, the criteria for judging the truth and adequacy of theological constructions are their consequences for the life and well-being of human beings and all of creation.[275] Like McFague, Kaufman is interested in the relationship between belief and the actions people take, reflected in theological language

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Further, he indicates that the world should be understood as an evolutionary ecosystem. Ibid., 115 However, unlike McFague, Kaufman does not address the unique implications of defining the world, theologically, in its ecological context.

[272] Kaufman writes:

> What I do want to direct attention to is the contention . . . that the originative and ultimate reality behind everything (God) is to be understood largely in terms of images and metaphors derived from and peculiar to *human* existence – indeed, *male* human existence: God is pictured as lord, king, creator, judge, father, and so on. . . . Moreover, human beings are given their fundamental definition not principally by their relatedness to the other creatures roundabout them, but by their unique relationship with the creator, to whom in their inmost spirit they are thought to be akin. . . . Nature . . . does not have a significance here in any way comparable to that of humanity, nor does it have any real integrity of its own; rather, it functions largely to provide stage setting and props for the central dramatic action which transpires between God and humans." Ibid., 76.

[273] One of Kaufman's driving questions is the concern with distinguishing between God and idols in theology. Shannon Ward Schrein notes that both Kaufman and McFague are influenced by H. Richard Niebuhr, as well as liberation and feminist theology, in this regard. Shannon Ward Schrein, "Constructivist and Revisionist Feminist Christology in Conversation: Sallie McFague and Elizabeth A. Johnson" (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1995), http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdweb?index=0&did=741212651&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=2&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1310936596&clientId=3345 (accessed July 17, 2011), 118.

Based upon the criteria of human experience, the ecological crisis, and knowledge of the world, Kaufman asserts that "any kind of human devotion or activity, any institution or social order, which is oppressive or destructive of human beings must be regarded as idolatrous; it is not grounded upon faith in or obedience to what is intended by the word 'God.'" Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 79-80.

[274] Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 76. Dialogue with disciplines other than theology (and philosophy, the traditional theological dialogue partner) is necessary if anthropocentrism and idolatry are to be overcome. Ibid., 12.

[275] Schrein, "Constructivist and Revisionist Feminist Christology," 6.

and concepts, and the consequences of belief in human lives. Kaufman examines central concepts in Christian anthropology, theology and ethics. The one that directly influences McFague is his construct of God.

All models of God are constructs; they are products of the collective human imagination in specific social and historical contexts. Kaufman explains:

> The symbol 'God,' like the rest of language and like other important religious symbols around the world, was created as the women and men in that historical movement gradually put together a world-picture which enabled them, with some measure of success, to come to terms with the exigencies of life. This symbol, then (like all others), must be understood as a product of the human imagination.[276]

How then do we arrive at constructs of God that reflect the human imagination and that are life-sustaining in the face of human oppression and ecological catastrophe?

To begin with, such constructs must be intelligible. Kaufman maintains that our concepts of God must refer to the best understanding of reality coming from evolutionary science.[277] How does he conceive of God, then? Kaufman says that what he means by God is "that reality, *whatever it might be*," orientation upon which human beings are given a sense of being sustained in the exigencies of life and by which humans can adjust their conduct accordingly.[278] Given the need for a model of God that will allow for consequences for human behaviour, and given Kaufman's understanding of the evolutionary universe, Kaufman creates the following definition for the divine in

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[276] Kaufman, In Face of Mystery, 39.

[277] Kaufman explores the science of the evolutionary universe, and pays close attention to how human historicity – our ability to shape and be shaped by historical conditions – has emerged from and is continuous with the evolutionary movement of the universe. He names this as the evolutionary-historical trajectory. See Chapter 20 of *In Face of Mystery.*

[278] Ibid., 79.

Christianity. God is “that cosmic serendipitous creativity which manifests itself in the evolutionary-historical trajectory”[279] in which the human person has emerged and continues to develop.[280]

This seems like an open-ended definition of God. However, such a definition is designed to emphasize that God is mystery. This should serve as a caution against strong proclamations of what or who God is. It is not entirely open-ended, however. Not anything goes. Kaufman relies on a monotheistic schema to lend the definition of God nuance and solidity within a Christian context.[281] The schema is designed to describe the worldview that has pervaded the practices, beliefs and cultural practices of an entire group of people. It is to reflect a structure of understanding that already exists in Christianity and can, in

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[279] Ibid., 375.

[280] Kaufman wishes to emphasize both human interdependence upon and interrelatedness with all life on Earth, as well as our distinctive historicity and self-consciousness. Thus, he creates the term ‘biohistorical’ to bring together the two aspects of biology and historicity that function together, in contemporary times, as what is understood as human nature:

> [W]e will come much closer to articulating the fundamental assumptions about the nature of the human which are widely accepted today if we speak of our interconnectedness and interdependence with all other forms of life (on the one hand), and of our cultural creativity in history, producing a thoroughly cultural form of existence (on the other) – if we speak of ourselves, that is to say, as what I shall call ‘biohistorical’ beings. Ibid., 109.

[281] Kaufman describes what he calls a ‘monotheistic categorial scheme.’ Having the three-fold structure of God-humanity-world, it is designed to

> call attention to a symbolic structure which pervades (or is intended to pervade) the whole of life, among those peoples who have inherited ancient Israel’s devotion to a single God. My contention is that their social, political, and economic institutions, family patterns, customs surrounding work and leisure, the stories they tell and the songs they sing, their personal and private practices of meditation and reflection - these all are in certain respects ordered and organized in relationship to this categorial pattern. Ibid., 80.

Kaufman's estimation, continue to function in a manner that is affirming and healing for human beings and the whole of creation.[282]

3.2.2 Theocentric Ethics: James Gustafson

For theological ethicist James Gustafson, all theology is construal.[283] That is, theology is the interpretation of human experience of God, human beings, God-world, God-human, and human-human relationships.[284] Gustafson is critical of the deep anthropocentrism he sees present in Christian theology and ethics. This is central to Gustafson's argument. His understanding of the implications of anthropocentrism strike at an issue more vital than either Kaufman or McFague articulate:

> [T]his anthropocentrism implies a denial of God as God – as the power and ordering of life in nature and history which sustains and limits human activity, which 'demands' recognition of principles and boundaries of activities for the sake of man [sic] and of the whole of life. It seems to imply a denial of the need for humans to *consent* to 'being,' to recognize not only that conditions for human action and the development of culture are present but also the dependence upon basic resources of life that are ignored at the peril of human and other life.[285]

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[282] Ibid., 81.

[283] Whereas Kaufman uses the term 'construction,' Gustafson prefers to refer to 'construal.' Gustfason deliberately avoids Kaufman's term. As Byron Bangert discusses, "[Gustafson] consistently uses the term 'construal' to acknowledge that his work involves a critical interpretive dimension. I believe he also uses the term construal, rather than construction, precisely to avoid identification with certain forms of theological constructivism on the one hand, and critical theory on the other." Bangert, "Toward a Naturalistic," 43-40. For McFague's purposes, the difference, in discussing models of God, is not material. Both Kaufman and Gustafson are referring to the imagining and conceptualizing of God based upon human experience.

[284] James Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, vol. 1, *Theology and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Gustafson's idea of construal is adopted from Julian N. Hartt, "Encounter and Inference in Our Awareness of God," in *The God Experience*, ed. Joseph P. Whalen, S. J. (New York: Newman Press, 1971), 30-59.

[285] Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective., 84.

Gustafson is equally disparaging of a strong ‘utility value’ in religion, whereby people are focused on what religion and religious ideas can do for them, rather than how they can relate themselves to the ultimate object of religious devotion.[286] Out of these concerns, Gustafson believes in a moral imperative that human beings must conduct themselves “so as to relate to all things in a manner appropriate to their relations to God.”[287] This is Gustafson’s central idea; it is what he refers to as a theocentric ethics. He queries:

> What happens if right conduct has to take into account human dependence on things which are not ultimately objects of human creation and are beyond human control? We can still say that God commands certain things because they are right, but the context is enlarged in which the rightness of human activity is assessed.[288]

A theocentric ethics, in which all conduct is to be directly related to God, shifts the context for action.

Gustafson’s theocentric ethics are based upon several convictions. The first is the centrality of religious piety. Piety is defined by Gustafson as “the primary moment in a religious view of the world.”[289] It is a basic attitude or stance of the self toward the world, and a disposition to act accordingly. The strength of piety is that it allows for the dark side

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[286] Ibid., 16. There is an apparent contradiction between Gustafson’s criticism here and Kaufman’s conviction that the basis for judging theological constructions are their consequences for the well-being of humans and the rest of the natural world. Gustafson might criticize Kaufman for holding a ‘utility value’ of theological models. In turn, such criticism could be made of McFague.

However, I do not think that Kaufman is conforming to a utility value for theological models, nor is McFague. The key here is that the models are examined for the life and well-being of the whole human community and for the natural world. By doing so, the complex, sometimes contradictory needs (and desires) of people and the natural world are taken into account. This behooves constructive theologians such as Kaufman and McFague to consider such contradictions in their theological models, and to avoid creating models that emphasize utilitarian ways of conceiving God and the world.

[287] Ibid., 113.

[288] Ibid., 96.

[289] Ibid., 61.

of religious response – fear as well as awe, anger as well as respect – that Gustafson believes faith does not.[290]

The second conviction that shapes Gustafson's theocentric ethics is the priority of human experience.[291] Experience comes before reflection. Gustafson states, "We reflect on human experience itself, and on objects perceived, interpreted, and known through our experiences of them and through the experiences of others."[292] Human experience has a deeply social character; it is constituted and interpreted within social contexts. [293] Similar to Kaufman, Gustafson holds that religious response and ethics are based upon human experience of the powers of life and death, rather than previous religious doctrine.

A third conviction for Gustafson is the importance of religious affectivity. Religion, argues Gustafson, is a matter of affectivity. [294] Religious affectivity is composed of three aspects. The first is religious piety, as described above. The second is the aspect of the human senses, [295] or sensibilities: those of dependence, gratitude, obligation, remorse and repentance, possibility, and direction toward the future.[296] The third aspect of religious affectivity is that of emotion. Human emotion in response to religious experience is an important source of knowing itself. Gustafson explains:

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[290] Gustafson believes that piety links ethics with theology: "Piety is, in a sense, the hinge which joins the frame of the moral and natural ordering of life to the door of human duties and obligations. Morality and religion are, for those of religious consciousness, inextricably intertwined." Ibid., 167.

[291] Gustafson defines experience as "of person and things that are objective to the self, at least for normal human experience." Ibid., 128.

[292] Ibid., 115.

[293] Ibid.

[294] Ibid., 195.

[295] Gustafson uses the word 'sense' as in consciousness, being conscious of the particular sense. "'Sense' covers both affectivity and awareness." Ibid., 198.

[296] Ibid., 130-4.

> The language of affectivity . . . does not imply that emotions are contrary to intellect. There is a knowing that comes through loving, through fearing, through pleasure. The intellectual construal of the religious meaning of the affections and their objects is continuous with primary experiences. But while theology is not merely a linguistic-intellectual activity, it is a constructive intellectual activity using imagination and imagery as well as concepts. Its primary language is first-order religious language of metaphors, analogies, similes, myths, and symbols. . . . Theology is a response to and expression of experiences of religious affectivity, evoked immediately by many objects. It is a knowing activity, though the texts of its validity are not those of solid-state physics.[297]

Theology is, therefore, grounded in religious affectivity as a form of knowing, whether this is recognized or not. The three aspects of religious affectivity are interrelated. Piety is a source of human emotion; the senses have profound affective dimensions. Religious affectivity, understood through the interrelated aspects of piety, sense and emotion, is evoked and engaged in response to others, including the Other that is God.[298]

Based upon his convictions regarding religious piety, human experience and affectivity, Gustafson explores several dimensions of a theocentric ethics, of which the most influential to McFague's work is his construal of God. Gustafson explores how human persons are to understand God in a way that avoids anthropocentrism and a utilitarian view of God. He turns to science to allow him to understand the reality out of which our ideas of God should come.[299] Gustafson is decidedly conservative on what he believes can be said about God. He suggests a minimalist definition:

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[297] Ibid., 229.

[298] Ibid., 129.

[299] Science is also necessary in order to create a more accurate construal of the human person. Gustafson argues that "human life is to be construed in continuity with 'nature' as much as in distinction from it." Ibid., 282. Such continuity emphasizes the following: the radical dependence and interdependence of human life on and with the natural world; humans as a valuing creature, a characteristic we share with other animals; and humans as agents, having, like other animals, "the capacity to exercise powers in accordance with purposes and intentions so as to affect the course of events." Ibid., 287.

> 'God' refers to the power that bears down upon us, sustains us, sets an ordering of relationships, provides conditions of possibilities for human activity and even a sense of direction."[300]

Theologian Byron Bangert identifies Gustafson's theology to be in the vein of *via negativa* – that little can actually be known of God, and thus little can be said with conviction.[301] However, what can be known comes from the reality of the world as understood by science. God is "experienced through the particular objects, events, and powers that sustain us, threaten our interests, create conditions for human action, or evoke awe and respect."[302] Gustafson recognizes the embeddedness of the human within the natural processes of the earth and that all of creation is important, not just human beings. This is the mark and direction of a theocentric ethics that counters the common anthropocentrism and utility value of religion.[303]

3.2.3 The Universe as Story: Thomas Berry

Thomas Berry (1914-2009) was a Passionist priest and cultural historian whose work is the result of more than six decades of scholarship. First discussed in the overview of ecotheology that I provided in Chapter One, Berry's work is the most comprehensive contribution to the problem of the ecological crisis within a religious framework to date.[304]

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[300] Ibid., 264.

[301] Bangert, "Toward a Naturalistic," 22.

[302] Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, 208-9.

[303] Gustafson states, "My argument radically qualifies the traditional Christian claim that the ultimate power seeks the human good as its central focus of activity." Ibid., 271.

[304] Berry was ordained as a Passionist priest in 1942 and received a doctorate in history from the Catholic University of America in 1949. He studied the great world religions of China and India in their original languages. Berry also studied the work of Thomas Aquinas in Latin for more than a decade. After his studies, Berry taught world religions until he retired in 1979. It is in the seventies and later that he published his major
- Note continues on next page. -

From Berry's ideas, the two that most directly influence McFague are the importance of story and the need for a functional cosmology.

Berry's ideas regarding the importance of story are influenced by the idea that human communities function within cultural narratives: communal stories that offer the larger context in which personal and communal identities and experiences are understood.[305] Stories serve to provide individual and communal energy for engaging in the trials and tribulations of life.[306]

The problem for Berry is that humans no longer have a story, a mythic narrative that effectively tells a tale of human becoming and existing within a larger world of meaning. Berry writes:

> It is all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story.[307]

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works on religion and the ecological crisis. Key titles include *Dream of the Earth; Great Work*; *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006; and, with Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992). For a comprehensive biography of Berry, see Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Biography of Thomas Berry," http://www.thomasberry.org/Biography/tucker-bio.html (accessed December 30, 2011).

[305] Heather Eaton, "Feminist or Functional Cosmology," 77.

[306] Through his studies of the religions of China and India, North American Native religions and the Christian traditions, Berry discovered that religions offer cultural narratives that orient people within themselves and the world. Encoded in cultural narratives are symbol systems that emerge from human consciousness and the myths that form around them. Together, the symbol systems and myths carry aspects of truth in them. Berry argues that we need to return to the studying of the functional myths that traditional peoples maintain out of their relationships with the world around them, for the truths they hold about human relationships with the universe in the past and in traditional cultures in the present, and what they can teach the rest of the human community about restoring human-Earth relations. For an overview of the intellectual influences on Berry's thinking, see Anne Marie Dalton, *A Theology for the Earth: The Contributions of Thomas Berry and Bernard Lonergan*, Religions and Beliefs Series, No. 10 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999).

[307] Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 123.

After the Black Death[308] and in the shift to a world-wide industrial society, we lost touch with a story that can help encourage, sustain and limit humans in life. The current story that has gripped humanity is a distorted vision whereby we see ourselves as separate from and dominant over the rest of the natural world. This has led to our shutting down of the life systems of the planet.[309] Berry calls this a cultural pathology because it goes against the reality of our species as emergent from and continuous with the universe.[310]

Berry's alternative is to suggest that we create a new mythic narrative that will help move humanity out of its overconfidence on technology[311] and toward healing human-Earth relations. The creation of such a story is, he argues, the primary task facing humanity:

> The greatest single need at present is the completion of the story, as told in its physical dimensions by science, by the more integral account that includes the numinous and consciousness dimensions of the emergent universe from its primordial moment.[312]

Berry calls this the "new story" or the universe story. [313] He bases this story upon scientific understanding of the emergent universe.[314] Understanding the universe as a process, the idea of cosmogenesis is central to Berry's work.[315]

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[308] The Black Death was a traumatic experience in Western history, when approximately one-third of the population in Europe was killed by a plague in less than two years. Berry believes that the Black Death, combined with other social problems in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, led to an excessive emphasis on redemption in the Western psyche. Ibid., 125-126.

[309] Ibid., 206.

[310] Ibid., 205. Tu Weiming recognizes that this cultural pathology is at the base of modernity, in particular the Enlightenment tradition. See Tu Weiming, "Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality," in *Worldviews and Ecology*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1993), 19-29.

[311] Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 205.

[312] Ibid., 120.

[313] These are the phrases that Berry consistently uses to denote the narrative potential of scientific insight into the universe.

There are certain features of cosmogenesis that inform Berry's understanding of the emergent universe.[316] The three that are most relevant to Berry's influence on McFague are the following. First, the emergent universe is characterized by communion, subjectivity and differentiation. Communion, which represents the comprehensive unity of the universe,[317] refers to the fact that everything in the universe exists in relation to everything else. Subjectivity refers to the interiority of every thing in the universe. While we typically think of subjectivity in solely human terms (and occasionally in terms of animals), the concept refers to the capacity of all things in the universe to participate in the emergent process.[318]

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[314] Influenced by the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, as well as by the new physics, Berry is convinced of the importance of telling the details of the universe in such a way that situates the human as integral to the development of the universe. As far as we know, humans are the only beings with self-reflective consciousness; humans are the universe reflecting upon itself. In *The Universe Story*, authored with physicist Brian Swimme, Berry provides the details of the history of the universe, from its beginnings through to its manifestation as the Earth and, later, as the human, including the rise of civilizations and modern nations within the gambit of universe history. See Swimme and Berry, *Universe Story.*

[315] In sharing the details of the emergent universe, Berry emphasizes that the universe is not a place or thing; it is a process whereby everything that exists emerges from the initial flaring forth (another term for the Big Bang), in ever-increasing complexity. 'Cosmogenesis,' a term coined by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, emphasizes that the cosmos is a time-development sequence of irreversible transformations. Berry writes:

> This sequence of irreversible transformations is now the central fact of our existence. We and everything around us came into being within this sequence of transformations. Our personal story is intelligible only through this larger story since everything that has happened in this more comprehensive story has been needed for us to be as we are. Thomas Berry, "Christianity in an Emergent Universe," in *Light Burdens, Heavy Blessings: Challenges of Church and Culture in the Post Vatican II Era; Essays in Honor of Margaret R. Brennan,* ed. Mary Heather MacKinnon, Moni McIntyre, and Mary Ellen Sheehan (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2000), 363.

[316] In my Master's thesis I identify five key aspects that emerge from the theory of cosmogenesis. See Jessica Fraser, "The Dream Drives the Action: An Exploration of the Meaning of Cosmogenesis in Thomas Berry's Functional Cosmology" (M.A. thesis, Saint Paul University, 2005), http://search.proquest.com .proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pqdtft/docview/305359550/abstract/136B268AB784F17E282/2?accountid=14701 (accessed May 14, 2012) , 47-55.

[317] Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 46.

[318] Anne Primavesi refers to this as 'autopoiesis' and explores the idea theologically. She writes, "Autopoiesis refers to the power each thing has to participate directly in the cosmos-creating endeavour." Primavesi, *Sacred Gaia*, 75.

Differentiation refers to the vast diversity of forms and ways of being in the universe. As with snowflakes, no one thing is like any other thing in the universe.

The second feature of the emergent universe is that everything is genetically related to each other. We are, quite literally, cousins with the stars in the sky, as well as with animals, plants, rocks, and people on the other side of the planet. As Berry evocatively explains:

> The entire universe is genetically related. Every individual being is cousin to every other being in the universe since everything emerges by an unbroken sequence from the same physical-spiritual source.[319]

The third aspect that impacts upon McFague is Berry's idea that the emergent universe is the primary revelatory experience.[320] Berry writes, "Our new consciousness of the universe and of the planet Earth can be understood as a revelatory experience of universal significance for the human community and for every phase of human activity."[321]

By primary, Berry means two things. First, all other beings in the universe, including humans, are universe-referent; there is nothing beyond the universe in the phenomenal order to which we can order ourselves. Our context is the universe itself. Second, religious expression, including that of Christianity, is an aspect of human consciousness. Human consciousness has emerged from the universe process. It is an aspect of the universe itself, evolving and growing. Since human consciousness is an aspect

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[319] Thomas Berry, "The Cosmology of Religions," in *Pluralism and Oppression: Theology in World Perspective,* ed. Paul F. Knitter, R. Panikkar et al. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 108.

[320] Berry, *Great Work*, 75.

[321] Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 111.

of the universe itself, so is religious expression.[322] Our responses to our experiences of the divine are grounded in this world; this world, which is part of the universe process, is the primary revelatory experience giving rise to Christian forms of worship and understanding.

In light of the ecological crisis and information about the emergent universe coming from new physics, Berry argues that we need a functional cosmology.[323] A functional cosmology can provide an alternative to the cultural pathology that has gripped much of humanity. It gives us a sense of belonging, and the possibilities and limits for a fulfilling human existence. The details of the emergent universe, told as a story, can operate as a functional cosmology.

Berry's idea equates cosmology with worldview. As discussed in Chapter One, cosmology as worldview[324] echoes ancient definitions of cosmology as thinking about the whole, about how everything fits together in the universe.[325] By the term functional, Berry

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[322] Berry explains, "Since the human in its religious capacities emerges out of this cosmological process, the universe itself can be considered as the primary bearer of religious experience." Berry, "Cosmology of Religions," 103. Berry points out that absolutely everything in Christian belief comes out of and depends upon the world around us, including our moral teachings, sacraments, liturgies, and spiritualities. Thomas Berry, "Christianity's Role in the Earth Project," in Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, 133.

[323] Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 90.

[324] Not all who are engaged with the cosmology of new physics equate cosmology with worldview. Included in this camp are Carl Sagan, Stephen Jay Gould, and Stephen Weinburg. Eaton, "Critical Inquiry," 34-50.

[325] A useful definition comes from Rosemary Radford Ruether, who defines cosmology as

> A view of the relation of humans to the rest of nature, their relation to each other in society, and their relation to the ultimate foundation source of life (the divine). They have been blueprints for what today we would call a combined scientific, social-ethical, and theological-spiritual worldview. Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 32.

Cosmology and worldview are not identical terms. Worldviews do not always hold a cosmological frame of reference. There is, however, a dialectical relationship occurring between worldview and cosmology, whereby worldview can shift our understanding of the universe, and in turn, as we see with Berry and McFague, the discoveries of new physics are inviting us to shift our worldviews in light of the emergent universe and world crises.

is referring to the capacity for the universe story to act on physical, spiritual and emotional levels to create a new vision of human-Earth relations. Understanding the universe as story can give humans the imagination and strength to make the radical changes needed to heal our relationship with the Earth and begin ecological reparation.

The emergent universe forms the basis for the new story that Berry is advocating. The new story serves as the functional cosmology that he believes is essential in our time. Berry's functional cosmology is meant to be the larger narrative within which specific creation stories, such as that of Christianity, can be interpreted. As the new story of the universe, it returns us to our roots:

> [W]e must begin where everything begins in human affairs – with the basic story, our narrative of how things came to be, how they came to be as they are, and how the future can be given some satisfying direction. We need a story that will educate us, a story that will heal, guide, and discipline us.[326]

A functional cosmology, Berry maintains, will allow humans to see themselves in their cosmological context, as aspects of the universe process, as well as allowing the universe to be recognized in its human dimensions.[327] It is meant to be a compass for navigating healing human-Earth relations.

3.2.4 The Influence of Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry on McFague's Understanding of Christian Discipleship

The works of Gordon Kaufman, James Gustafson and Thomas Berry have been instrumental to the thought of McFague, most notably on her understanding of Christian

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[326] Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 124.

[327] Ibid., 219.

discipleship.[328] While their thinking is diverse and comprised of sometimes conflicting viewpoints, the key thinking that these scholars share on McFague's scholarship is this: human constructions of God affects our actions in the world. Since McFague's understanding of Christian discipleship is bound up with human action, the implication is that human constructions of God have a central impact on discipleship. From the claim regarding constructions of the divine follow other specific influences from Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry for McFague's thinking on discipleship.

The first influence is on McFague's commitment to advocational theology. Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry are responding theologically to the crises facing the contemporary era, especially the ecological crisis. One key aspect of McFague's scholarship that Kaufman has influenced has been her orientation to what she calls advocational theology. Advocational theology is theology in pursuit of social justice and ecological reparation. McFague refers to a talk that Kaufman gave in 1983, wherein he states that in the climate of the nuclear threat and ecological devastation, all theologians must turn to the task of deconstructing and reconstructing theological ideas to better

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[328] McFague is also influenced by American pragmatism on the nature of experience, process thought on embodiment, agency, self and other, and by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza on "the critique of foundational theology and substitution of a 'political broad reflective equilibrium.'" Sallie McFague, "Cosmology and Christianity: Implications of the Common Creation Story for Theology," in *Theology at the End of Modernity*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International), 30 n13. For work in these areas see William Dean, *American Religious Empiricism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987); Nancy Frankenberry, *Religion and Radical Empiricism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987); Rebecca Chopp, "Feminism's Theological Pragmatics: A Social Naturalism of Women's Experience," in *Journal of Religion* 67 (1987): 239-56; Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: Free Press, 1968); Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978); and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

respond to these threats.[329] Kaufman's talk represented a profound turning point in McFague's thinking in this regard.

Advocational theology reflects the demand that Christian discipleship, understood through the dynamic of belief, language and action, places upon the theologian in her or his work. In her recognition that theology must be pursuing an agenda of social and ecological justice if it is to be relevant, McFague argues that the work of theologians must, in its own way, contribute to discipleship.

One of the problems in classical Christian theology that McFague refutes in her ecotheology is that of anthropocentrism. This is the second major influence of the three scholars on McFague's work. The critiques that Kaufman and Gustafson make regarding anthropocentrism are very influential on McFague's thinking. So too is Berry, who, by recasting human understanding of the universe as cosmogenesis and situating the human within the universe story, offers a universe-centric reflection upon anthropocentrism.[330] Gustafson's insight into the implications of anthropocentrism for human relationships with God and the world is more radical than Kaufman's. Neither scholar however, nor McFague, takes the problem of a human-centric interpretation of reality as far as Berry does. For

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[329] McFague says:

> My constructive phase began upon reading Gordon Kaufman's 1983 Presidential Address to the American Academy of Religion. Kaufman called for a paradigm shift, given the exigencies of our time—the possibility of nuclear war. He called theologians to deconstruct and reconstruct the basic symbols of the Jewish and Christian traditions—God, Christ and Torah—so as to be on the side of life rather than against it, as was the central symbol of God with its traditional patriarchal, hierarchical, militaristic imagery. I answered this call, and my subsequent work has been concerned with contributing to the task." Sallie McFague, "An Earthly Theological Agenda," *Christian Century* 108, no. 1 (Jan 2-9 1991): 13.

[330] McFague refers to Berry's call to widen our 'identification horizon,' the worldview within which we see ourselves and all others. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 44. Quoted in McFague, *Body of God*, 213 n.6.

Berry, the world's religions need to reorient themselves in terms of the universe story. In so doing, anthropocentrism (and other ills) will be refuted. Kaufman, Gustafson nor McFague are prepared to go that far.

Nevertheless, the critique of anthropocentrism offers a significant challenge to understanding discipleship as Christian belief lived out in the world. McFague acknowledges that effective Christian discipleship requires a reorienting of the human in the natural world so that humanity is not the sole source of value and meaning in the world.

Third, like Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry, McFague recognizes the importance of attending to new physics, evolutionary science and ecology in creating a theology that can better respond to the demands of the current era. For McFague, attending to the insights from various scientific disciplines is central to discipleship. In her early work, McFague argues for taking the world seriously because it is the locus where Christian belief is lived out. Better attention to the world can, she argues, lead to more effective Christian discipleship. McFague presents the importance of the various sciences in learning about the world, and thereby the importance of those sciences to discipleship.

Related to the use of science in theology is the elaboration of criteria for judging the adequacy of religious models. This is the fourth influence on McFague's scholarship. I noted that Kaufman's criteria is based upon the consequences of theological models for the life and well-being of human and nonhuman others. Gustafson holds a similar position that is rooted in enlarging the context for action within the moral imperative. For Berry, the universe as primary revelation is the source for all theological models. For Kaufman and Gustafson the criteria are based upon the priority of human experience in creating theology

and ethics. Berry places human experience within its larger context of the emergent universe.

McFague's work does not reflect Berry's insight into this matter, although the emphasis that she places on human experience is conducive with his thought. McFague shares with Kaufman and Gustafson the conviction regarding the priority of human experience, and uses that conviction to construct a model of God that, she hopes, will have positive consequences for others and allow human beings to engage in discipleship, conducting themselves in a manner appropriate to their relations to God.

There are other influences on McFague's work from these three thinkers. Like Kaufman and Gustafson, and in line with Berry, McFague suggests a model of God that can be non-anthropocentric, consonant with scientific interpretations of reality and adequate in the face of the ecological crisis. McFague is particularly influenced by the way in which Kaufman and Gustafson go about constructing their models of God. McFague marries Kaufman's constructive theology, Gustafson's theocentric ethics and her own work on metaphorical theology to create a model of the universe as the body of God. I will discuss this model in some detail shortly.

Gustafson's work on religious affectivity and its function in knowing has been his most definitive influence on McFague's ecotheology. In her work on embodied knowing, which I discuss in a later section, McFague privileges the knowing that comes from humans *being*, as well as having, bodies. She locates human emotion, which is a constitutive part of religious affectivity, within our embodiment.

With regard to Berry, McFague adopts his conviction regarding the importance of creating a story that can function as a mythic narrative. She also adopts terminology,

referring to the details and characteristics of the universe and the Earth as a common creation story. However, there is a distinction in the care each takes with the idea of the universe or common creation story. Berry is careful to say that the universe is *not* a story; it is an emergent process that is best understood as a narrative.[331] McFague, however, is not so precise in her distinctions. At no point in her work does she remind readers that the details of the universe are not, in and of themselves, a narrative.

McFague also adopts Berry's ideas and language of a functional cosmology. She accepts his ideas regarding cosmology as worldview and the idea that the universe as story can function as a cosmology to reorient human relations.[332] For McFague, "The common creation story gives us a functional, working cosmology. It gives us a way of understanding where we fit."[333]

3.2.4.1 Distinctions from Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry

Despite the wide-ranging and in-depth influence that Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry have had on McFague's thinking, there are three areas where her position diverges from theirs.

The first reflects a criticism that McFague makes of Kaufman's construct of God. While both scholars root their definitions of God within an understanding of the evolutionary universe, McFague is critical of Kaufman's position that personal constructs of God are inappropriate and anthropocentric. She argues that the construct of God as

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[331] Swimme and Berry, *Universe Story*, 229.

[332] McFague, *Body of God*, 40-41.

[333] Ibid., 112.

serendipitous creativity does not "preach."[334] Humans need, in McFague's estimation, personal models of God that we can relate to as we do in our human relationships. Although the model of the universe as the body of God is a metaphor with grand proportions (the whole universe is not what we typically consider in our human relationships), McFague is trying to emphasize, as I indicate below, the importance of embodiment, of human and other bodies. This is not reflected in Kaufman's non-personal, disembodied construct of God.

The second area of theological divergence reflects differing positions on the nature of human sin. Here McFague diverges from Gustafson. McFague has a much more optimistic view of the potential for human ethical behaviour than does Gustafson. Gustafson believes that there lies within the human a fault that is ineradicably embedded; the best that we can do is continually grapple with that fault and struggle to live out a theocentric ethics.[335] McFague is more convinced that we can choose to live ethically in accordance with our reality as embodied, ecological beings.[336] I believe that McFague's understanding of Christian discipleship, which has at its base a dynamic relationship among belief, language and action, reflects this more positive view.

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[334] Sallie McFague, "Response," *Religion and Intellectual Life* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1988): 42.

[335] Gustafson speaks less to the idea of sin and more to the understanding of the human fault. This fault is composed of four elements that are common to all human beings: idolatry, whereby we wrongly locate our trust and confidence; misplaced desire ("wrongly ordered love"); corrupt rationality, whereby we wrongly perceive things and our relationship to things; and disobedience, which is 'the experience of unfulfilled obligations and duties." Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, 294. For Gustafson the human fault is reaching and pervasive; it moves beyond a limited moral sense to represent "a deeper misplacement of ourselves and our communities in relation to other persons and communities, and in relation to nature," as well as in relation to God. Ibid., 306.

[336] McFague's work echoes the more hopeful stance taken by Kaufman. Kaufman suggests that his understanding of the human person as biohistorical creates norms which can guide human being and acting. In Kaufman's work, the premise of ethical action is more helpful than the notion of sin. See Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*.

The third area of divergence lies in McFague's utilization of Berry's ideas. McFague believes that Berry's interpretation of the emergent universe rests within the vein of creation spirituality. While Berry (and others) present great insight into the grandeur of the universe, she believes that Berry is missing "a sense of the awful oppression that is part and parcel of the awesome mystery and splendour."[337] McFague believes that Berry's optimism in the evolutionary trajectory of the universe is ungrounded, and suggestive of a simplistic understanding of how human beings are motivated to do good.[338]

I believe that this is an inaccurate reading of Berry. In his book, *Dream of the Earth* (1988), he includes chapters on the evils of technology and patriarchy. He incorporates aspects of human oppression, including most notably but not exclusively, the ecological crisis, into understanding the larger arc of the emergent universe. McFague's misreading of Berry in this respect suggests that she has not considered how thoroughly the human is embedded in the process that is the universe. I will say more about this later in the chapter.

3.3 A New Path for Christian Discipleship: McFague's Ecotheology

McFague incorporates the influences of Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry to develop an ecotheology that takes seriously what insights from the disciplines of cosmology and ecology provide about the nature of the world. She offers a new path for understanding Christian discipleship in light of the ecological crisis.

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[337] McFague, *Body of God*, 71.

[338] Ibid.

As I stated earlier, there are in McFague's ecotheology four key insights that form a basis for developing the model of praxis: the importance of an Earth-based starting point, the centrality of embodiment, the need to know and love nature, and an ethic of care. I will be presenting and analyzing each of these in detail in a later section. For now, however, it is useful to present the methodology and model of God out of which the insights are constructed in McFague's work. Central to McFague's claims are the distinction she gives to her ecotheology as a theology of nature and the model that she develops of the universe as the body of God.

3.3.1 A Theology of Nature

McFague defines her work as a 'theology of nature.' She uses that term to distinguish the work she does from other theological projects that draw upon cosmology, namely natural theology and creation spirituality. Natural theology, which attempts, in McFague's words, "to harmonize (or find points of contact between) belief and knowledge of the world,"[339] often leads to a weak or strong version of the anthropic principle.[340]

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[339] McFague, *Body of God*, 65.

[340] A weak anthropic principle suggests that conditions in the universe were made "just right" for life to appear. A strong anthropic principle promotes the idea that the universe was manifested from the beginning for the purpose of intelligent beings. The anthropic principle is also called intelligent design theory. McFague refers to the work of Holmes Rolston III as representing a strong anthropic view of natural theology (Holmes Rolston III, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey* [New York: Random House, 1987]) and Arthur Peacocke as presenting a weak version (Arthur R. Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming – Natural, Divine, and Human*, enl. ed. [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1993]).

Creation spirituality, while conveying the wonder of the created order, lacks, in McFague's opinion, sufficient appreciation of the power of oppression and tragedy in the world.[341]

A theology of nature, by contrast, "attempts to reconceive belief in terms of contemporary views of the natural world."[342] For McFague the switch is to re-imagine belief based upon the best of science, instead of trying to understand the science from the previously constructed categories of our religious traditions. McFague suggests four criteria for a theology of nature:

> First, it must be informed by and commensurate with contemporary scientific accounts of what nature is. Second, it needs to see human life as profoundly interrelated with all other forms of life, refusing the traditional absolute separation of human beings from other creatures as well as of God from the world. Third, it will be a kind of theology that is creation-centered, in contrast to the almost total concern with redemption in some Christian theologies. It will be a theology that focuses, in the broadest and deepest sense, on the incarnational presence of God in the world. Finally, it will acknowledge and press the interconnectedness of peace, justice, and ecological issues, aware that there can be no peace or justice unless the fabric of our ecosystem is intact.[343]

The role of science, life as interrelated, creation-centered theology, and the intertwining of peace, justice and ecology; these criteria translate into the construction of the universe as the body of God. The theological, ethical and spiritual dimensions of the universe as God's body reflect this theology as a theology of nature.

In developing the theology of nature in her ecotheology, McFague moves beyond the influences of Kaufman and Gustafson, taking their ideas regarding the role of science,

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[341] For McFague, Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox are proponents of creation spirituality. See Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, and Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

[342] McFague, *Body of God,* 65-6.

[343] Sallie McFague, "Imaging a Theology of Nature," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, ed. Charles Birch, William Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 203.

the priority of human experience, and advocacy further than either scholar does on his own. She moves in the direction that Berry does, adopting some of his ideas, and radicalizes the implications of cosmology and ecology and the place of the human being, albeit not as thoroughly as Berry.[344] That radicalization begins at the very place where McFague shares a central conviction with Kaufman and Gustafson: the development of a model of God appropriate for our time. For McFague that is a model of the universe as the body of God.

3.3.2 The Universe as the Body of God

The central influence of Kaufman and Gustafson upon McFague's ecotheology is the conviction that human constructions of God affect our actions in the world. Berry's call for a functional cosmology is also a reflection that human constructions, of the world as well as our understanding of the divine, affect human behaviour. McFague begins from these shared convictions by orienting her ecotheology from the model of the universe as the body of God. As the basis for the whole of her ecotheology, it is McFague's attempt to explore a relationship between God and the world that is adequate in the contemporary era. McFague asks:

> In what ways would we think of the relationship between God and the world were we to experiment with the metaphor of the universe as God's 'body,' God's palpable presence in all space and time? If what is needed in our ecological, nuclear age is an imaginative vision of the relationship between God and the world that underscores their interdependence and mutuality, empowering a sensibility of care

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[344] Berry writes, "The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human – at the special level, with critical reflection, within the community of life-systems, in a time-development context, by means of story and shared dream experience." Berry, *Great Work*, 159. McFague does not go so far as to call for the reinvention of the human, although she is suggesting a reinterpretation of Christian traditions.

> and responsibility toward all life, how would it help to see the world as the body of God?[345]

As I discussed in Chapter Two, models are extended metaphors that reflect insights gained through experience, organized to allow people to conceptualize their experiences into viable relationships between themselves, the world and God. One of the crucial aspects of theological models, then, is their impact upon human action. The model of the universe as the body of God is not a description of reality; no model is. Instead, it is an imagining of the God-world relation based upon the following: an understanding of Christianity as an incarnational religion, the divine present in mundane reality, and the need for a model that may lead to appropriate action in response to human oppression and the ecological crisis. McFague suggests that the model of the universe as the body of God "embraces both the guts and the glory, both the mud and the mystery – or, more precisely, suggests that the peculiar form of divine available to us, if we live within this model, is *only* through the guts, the mud."[346] We are reminded here of what happens in the gospels, in particular the parables: God is revealed through the quotidian reality of people's lives. The model of the universe as the body of God is, therefore, an appropriate metaphor in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship.

There have been numerous models of the God-world relation in Christian history that have different implications for discipleship.[347] McFague argues that the universe as the

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[345] McFague, *Models of God*, 60.

[346] McFague, *Body of God*, 135.

[347] There is the deistic model of God as the clockmaker who creates the world and its laws and then, basically, leaves it to run on its own. This model arose out of the 16th-century scientific revolution, but is still around today among contemporary scientists and Christians. There is the dialogic model, in which "God speaks and we respond." This ancient model of God's responsiveness to the world has, in its current form, been reduced
- Note continues on next page. -

body of God functions best as a combined "agential-organic model." The agential model highlights God's transcendence; God is an agent "whose intentions and purposes are realized in history, especially human history."[348] There are, however, three major drawbacks to this model if it is held on its own as a template of the relation between God and the world. First, it is difficult to differentiate between divine action and the processes of evolutionary history. Second, the model is highly anthropomorphic; God is imagined as a kind of superhuman with control over the world the way humans have control over their bodies. Third, in its contemporary form (of God as a supermind, rather than an actor and doer in the world) it has lost its ethical and liturgical dimensions.[349]

The drawbacks to the agential model can be mitigated, in McFague's opinion, by combining it with the organic understanding of God and the world. Traditionally, the organic model emphasizes that the world itself is divine. This is the classic, and ancient, paradigm of the world as God's body. It emphasizes the radical immanence of God. The limitation to this model is that God is completely identified with the world; it is difficult if not impossible to imagine God beyond the world as it is.[350]

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from a relation between God and the world to a relation between God and *me*; God and the individual human person removed from their social and ecological contexts. The model that is most prevalent today is the monarchical model; God as the all-powerful king who demands loyal subservience. It is a political model limited to human beings; God is indifferent to the natural world. Ibid., 137-9.

McFague's understanding of the various models of God comes from the work of Ian Barbour and Claude Stewart. See Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974) and Claude Y. Stewart Jr., *Nature in Grace: A Study of the Theology of Nature* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983).

[348] McFague writes, "The analogy that is often used in this model to explain divine action in the world is the human self realizing its purposes through its body: God is related to the world and realizes the divine intentions and purposes in the world, in a way similar to how we use our bodies to carry out our purpose."*Body of God*, 139.

[349] Ibid., 139-40.

[350] Ibid., 140.

The strength of the classic organic model, however, is in its imagining of the immanence of God; this is the only framework that offers an image of God in relation to all of creation, not just human beings. To remedy the charge of pantheism with this model, McFague suggests that it be combined with the classic agential model. The model of the universe as the body of God is, for McFague, an agential-organic one that emphasizes, simultaneously, the transcendence *and* the immanence of God in relation to human beings and all of creation:

> The agential model preserves transcendence, while the organic model underscores immanence. Alone, the agential model overemphasizes the transcendent power and freedom of God at the expense of the world. Alone, the organic model tends to collapse God and the world, denying the freedom and individuality of both. But if the model were that God is related to the world as spirit is to body, perhaps the values of both the agential and organic models could be preserved.[351]

Rather than being pantheistic, the agential-organic model of the universe as the body of God is *panentheistic*:

> Everything that is is *in* God and God is *in* all things and yet God is not identical with the universe, for the universe is dependent on God in a way that God is not dependent on the universe.[352]

That is, God is in all things, but not exhausted by all things. McFague locates her understanding of panentheism within the long Hebraic and Christian traditions.[353]

McFague's suggestion of a panentheistic agential-organic model of the universe as the body of God leads me to the question of how we judge the adequacy of this framework

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[351] Ibid., 141.

[352] Ibid., 149.

[353] McFague is influenced in her understanding of panentheism within Christianity by its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. She is also, in varying ways, influenced more contemporaneously by process theology, Hegel and Tillich. Ibid., 254n24.

for representing the relationship between God and the world.[354] The criteria for judgement center upon McFague's convictions regarding constructions of God and human action, the importance of science and the priority of human experience. Does the model hold up under the scrutiny of McFague's own theological convictions?

The first criterion is whether the model corresponds to the best understanding of reality coming from contemporary science. Any God-world understanding must be intellectually compatible with insights into evolutionary science, cosmology, biology, et cetera. Second, is the model a valid interpretation of Christian faith? That is, does the model cohere with the central claims of Christian tradition, so that it might appropriately be called Christian? Third, in addition to corresponding to the best of science and the central claims of Christian faith, does the model of God reflect "our own embodied experience"?[355] This is about intellectual coherence with the ways of knowing among people in their social, historical and bodily contexts and reflects the priority of human experience in creating models of God. Finally, and most centrally for McFague, does the model lead to the "well-being of the planet and all its life-forms?"[356] With this final criterion we see most clearly the implications of any model of God for human action upon the world. Since McFague's conviction is that the constructions we create of God affect our actions, it is imperative that such constructions be judged for their adequacy in this regard.

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[354] Byron Bangert criticizes McFague precisely on the point of the adequacy of her work conceptualizing the God-world relation. I will be considering this criticism near the end of this chapter.

[355] Ibid., 152.

[356] Ibid.

3.4 Reinterpreting Discipleship: Key Insights in McFague's Ecotheology

As I have shown, McFague develops a theology of nature and model of the universe as the body of God based upon the influences of Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry. Yet while these scholars have made a lasting impact on McFague's work, McFague uses their ideas in her own way to highlight her concern regarding Christian discipleship in light of the ecological crisis. In developing a theology of nature centered upon the model of the universe as the body of God, McFague extends and transforms the ideas she adopts from Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry into four central aspects of her ecotheology. They are (1) an Earth-based starting point in her work; (2) the centrality of embodiment; (3) the need to know and love nature; and (4) the value of an ethic of care.

These four insights are by no means the only ones that McFague develops in her ecotheology, nor are they the only sagacious contributions that she makes to the field of theology and ecology. McFague has presented important ideas regarding economics in ecotheology,[357] the role of nature writing in encouraging a Christian ecospirituality,[358] and more recently, considered the context of the climate crisis in theological terms.[359] I am, however, emphasizing the importance of an earth-based starting point, the metaphor of embodiment, an epistemology of nature, and the value of an ethic of care, because they are relevant to my project in four main ways. The first relevance is that, above and beyond the other contributions that McFague makes to ecotheology, these four provide the reader with

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[357] McFague, *Life Abundant*.

[358] Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

[359] McFague, *New Climate*.

a relatively complete overview of the major tenets of her thought in the area. As I will show in Chapter Four, McFague's call for ecological praxis represents a response to the concern for Christian discipleship that has driven her work from its earliest days. Learning about the major aspects of her ecotheology contributes, along with her earlier scholarship, to knowledge about how McFague's concern for discipleship develops throughout her work and how McFague eventually suggests the specific idea of ecological praxis.

The second reason that these four contributions are relevant to my project is that they are substantively new insights within McFague's *oeuvre*. I have already identified the foundational importance of parable and metaphor to McFague's work; equally important are these unique insights in theology and ecology.

Third, these four aspects form the theological basis of McFague's call for ecological praxis. This will be elucidated in Chapter Four; my task in this chapter is to expose and analyse their presence in McFague's writings as they stand.

The fourth reason that these insights are important will also be developed in Chapter Four. Together, an Earth-based starting point, the centrality of embodiment, a nature epistemology, and an ethic of care are the key points that I will use to develop the model of praxis constructed based upon McFague's early work.

3.4.1 Earth-Based Starting Point

The central question in McFague's ecotheology is an anthropological one: "Who are we in the scheme of things, and what is required of us?"[360] This reflects McFague's

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[360] McFague, *Body of God*, 80.

concern for an advocational theology that is responsive to the demands of Christian discipleship, understood through the relationship among belief, language and action:

> The emphasis on praxis and commitment, on a concerned theology, need in no way imply a lack of scholarly rigor or a retreat to fideism. Rather, it insists that one of the criteria of contemporary theological reflection – thinking about our place in the earth and the earth's relation to its source – is a concern with the *consequences* of proposed constructions for those who live within them.[361]

The question of who we are in the scheme of things leads McFague to develop an Earth-based starting point. Like Kaufman, Gustafson and Berry, McFague turns to science to help answer the question. However, McFague's position differs from that of Kaufman and Gustafson. While they consider the human in relation to contemporary science, it is still from the starting point of the human being and of the human being in relation to God. McFague's starting point is instead Earth-based. An Earth-based starting point begins from human involvement in and continuation with the other-than-human aspects of the Earth. It begins with our similarities to the rest of the Earth community rather than our differences. In this regard, McFague moves closer to Berry's position, although she does not go so far as to orient the human person within the emergent universe.

Questions and concerns about human beings, God and the world are located within the Earth systems and evolutionary processes of the Earth. Questions are directed outward from this point. The question is not how we can understand the world and ourselves in light of religious doctrine, but rather, how our doctrines, beliefs, and ethics can be reinterpreted in light of the current picture of reality.

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[361] Ibid., 69.

To develop this perspective McFague turns to postmodern science.[362] Postmodern science is a paradigm for understanding the relationship between the observer and the observed in science. Scholars within this paradigm examine the material world with an emphasis on the relationality and interdependence among things, on historical and evolutionary progression and, with a focus on things functioning in systems and wholes, as a community of living and nonliving entities.[363] In postmodern science all knowledge is acknowledged to be contextual, limited and partial.

The position within postmodern science is that science, like any other human endeavour, is socially constructed. We interpret the world through the worldviews, biases, and previous constructions we have about how things are. McFague quotes biologist Stephen Jay Gould: "Science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity."[364]

McFague draws upon postmodern science to offer two aspects of an Earth-based starting point. Using Thomas Berry's terminology, she suggests that a common creation story can serve as the big picture and that nature can serve as the small picture of how an Earth-based starting point can play out in the lives of human beings.

The common creation story is the larger context that McFague provides for situating humans within an Earth-based starting point. She calls it "the view of reality current in our

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[362] McFague develops her understanding of postmodern science from Ian Barbour's work *Religion in an Age of Science*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1990). McFague, *Body of God*, 217-8, n.22.

[363] Books that present scientific discussions on postmodern science for lay readers include Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint: New Discoveries in Nature's Creative Ability to Order the Universe* (New York: Touchstone, 1988); Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*, introduction by Carl Sagan (New York: Bantam Books, 1990); Erich Jantsch, *The Self-Organizing Universe: Scientific and Human Implications of the Emerging Paradigm of Evolution* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980); and Swimme and Berry, *Universe Story.*

[364] Stephen Jay Gould, *Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1981), 21-22. Quoted in McFague, *Body of God*, 94.

time."[365] It starts with the beginning of the universe, at the moment of the Big Bang, approximately 13.7 billion years ago.[366] Some of the key characteristics of the universe are that space and time began at the same moment; space is continually expanding, and time is moving forward in one direction. The direction of the universe is in irreversible movement from lesser to greater complexity in an irreversible[367] sequence of events.[368] These events, however, are not entirely linear; there are examples of things coming to existence within the universe that could not have been predicted by earlier aspects; this is what is meant by describing the universe as emergent.[369] Life is a prime example of such emergence.

Borrowing from Berry, McFague uses the idea of a common creation story to provide people with a sacred narrative that is located within an Earth-based starting point. She says, "The story of the universe is *our* story, the common creation story of everything that is, and if we are to know how to think and talk about ourselves, our world, and God, it is essential that we learn something about it."[370] There are certain features of the common

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[365] McFague, *Body of God*, 28. It is useful to remember that McFague believes that reality can never be experienced 'raw,' but is always interpreted through the human lens of experience, perception and bias. When McFague calls the common creation story the view of reality current in our time, she means that it is the best interpretation of the scientific data that is possible, given our previous constructions and understanding of how the world operates.

[366] NASA, "How Old is the Universe?" National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2010, http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/uni_age.html (accessed March 30, 2011). In *Body of God*, McFague dates the age of the universe at approximately 15 billion years old. While that date reflects scientific understanding about the universe at the time of publication of *Body of God* in 1993, my dissertation reflects the updated information.

[367] That the universe is irreversible is recognized by observation as well as by referring to the law of thermodynamics. See Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*.

[368] Swimme and Berry, *Universe Story*.

[369] Ibid., 99.

[370] McFague, *Body of God*, 45.

creation story that are intrinsic to its meaning, as McFague understands it. The first, she says, is that the story is common and uncommon at the same time. She explains:

> The adjective 'common' distinguishes this creation story from the cosmogonies and cosmologies of the various religions that, while also providing narratives of the origin and theory of the universe, are accepted only by their adherents. The distinctive characteristic of the common creation story is its inclusiveness, but an inclusiveness marked, in its present stage, by the most radical diversity and individuality imaginable.[371]

The story of the universe is also common in that it is the story of all of us and all that exists in the universe; there is a common beginning and history to everything.[372] At the same time, the story is uncommon. It is uncommon, McFague avers, "because it is the wildest, most outrageous, most awesome tale conceivable."[373] McFague, in the telling of the common creation story, is trying to convey the awe-inspiring implications of the story of universe and Earth history.[374]

The common creation story is the big picture of an earth-based starting point. Again, McFague adopts Berry's idea that the story reflects a functional cosmology, a

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[371] Ibid., 220n32.

[372] McFague answers the unspoken criticism that such a claim for a common story is universalizing, washing over the cultural, social and religious distinctions among human groups and how they perceive the world. Is it feeding into the hubris of the modern paradigm that it alone holds the truth? McFague replies:

> Our answer is that the contemporary scientific view of reality is not monolithic (there is more than one interpretation) and that it is a *view* (a picture, not a set of permanent, absolute facts). . . . [I]t is essential at the outset to recognize that when we speak of the common creation story we remember that it is . . . a narrative of the beginning and evolution of the universe that, while accepted in broader outlines by the majority of contemporary practicing scientists, relies on many assumptions, includes many unknowns, and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Ibid., 39-40.

[373] Ibid., 27.

[374] McFague also notes that although the picture of the emergent universe has been interpreted by many in the way that she interprets it, not all scientists read the data in the same manner as McFague. While some describe it in the postmodern sense presented here, "it can also be described in an atomistic or reductionist way, with a mechanical rather than an organic model." Ibid., 29.

worldview of who we are in the scheme of things.[375] The small picture of an earth-based starting point, in McFague's work, is that of nature; more specifically, the 'near' nature that surrounds and embeds each one of us.[376] In answering the question about how to understand nature, McFague refers to the big picture of the common creation story. She then says, "The small answer to the question . . . assumes the big answer as its context . . . but sees nature in the near neighbour, whether that be another human being, a tree, or even a goldfish."[377] The small picture, then, is near nature. For McFague, near nature is concrete, specific and local. An Earth-based starting point requires a sense of belonging in and love of nature; this can only come about through contact with and knowledge of the nature that

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[375] McFague is *not* suggesting any purpose behind the trajectory of the emergent universe and its manifestations on Earth. The details of cosmology, evolutionary theory and ecology are studied for their revelations into a world of startling complexity and diversity, which offers a new vantage point for understanding human beings and our relationship to God and the world. McFague denies any kind of intelligent design or anthropic principle to understanding the emergent universe:

> The common creation story is the story of the physical universe . . . more precisely, the story of everything that exists on the matter/energy continuum. It claims that no special entity, principle, or substance needs to be or should be introduced to explain the evolution of the universe from its simple beginning to its present outcome, to human beings with brains or minds (and some would claim, spirits). McFague, *Body of God*, 47.

For an overview of various religious responses to evolution including intelligent design, see Eaton, "The Revolution of Evolution."

[376] McFague acknowledges that 'nature' is a construction, like all other defining concepts. What we mean when we talk about 'nature' is an interpretation of reality through our social, historical and cultural lenses. McFague explains:

> If 'Christian' has many meanings, 'nature' has more. In a sense, nature is everything, including ourselves. . . . So, in one sense there is nothing but nature, for none of our cultural transformations could have occurred except through the physical evolution of the remarkable human brain. But in another sense, we construct nature: nature is never "natural," for while we and everything we think and do comes from nature, all our thoughts about it and actions in it are distinctively human, that is both *distanced* and *particular*. As the self-conscious creature, the only one, as far as we know, who does not live in nature like a fish in the ocean but can reflect on nature, human beings interpret their surroundings, their world, that is, nature. Our relationship with nature is like our relationship with our own bodies: we can live only in and through them, we are nothing without them, we are intrinsically and entirely embodied and yet, we can distance ourselves *from* them and have many different views *of* them." McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 16-7.

[377] Ibid., 22.

is in front of us. "*We will not care for what we do not know, and we cannot know what we do not experience*."[378] How does one gain such affinity for the natural world? McFague suggests it often starts in childhood:

> People, who, as adults, have a love and concern for nature usually develop it as children through direct experiences in particular locales that have the feel of wildness. There is often a ditch, a small park, a creek, an abandoned railbed where one could wander, collecting bugs or chestnuts, chasing squirrels – or whatever. The place need not be large, certainly not a wilderness, but it should be wild: that is, undomesticated, potentially surprising, inviting us to meet earth others as subjects. A television nature film or even a self-interpreting nature trail will not do: the experience must be direct, it must be in a particular place, and that place should be wild.[379]

Although such affinity for near nature can often start as a child, adults can develop this experience. What is essential for everyone are "hands-on, down to earth, close encounters" with nature others.[380]

It is what is 'wild,' as opposed to 'wilderness,' that is important. The concept of wilderness is a human construction that evokes an image of a pristine, untouched, magical place that human beings can escape to in order to be renewed, recharged, and relieved of the strains and stresses of everyday life. For some, the definition of nature is equated with wilderness.[381] Wildness, however, is something different:

> 'Wildness' is a place to be visited on its own terms; it is not necessarily a vast track of land, but a place available for exploration. Wildness means accepting the place and those who live in it as other, as others – it is not the size or remoteness of the area that matters, but the opportunity it presents to meet earth others as subjects. Wildness can be found in a piece of near-by nature: a small city park, of course, but

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[378] Ibid., 23. Original emphasis.

[379] Ibid., 120.

[380] Ibid., 123.

[381] Ibid., 124. Today, wilderness is often the preserve of elites; one must have the money and the means to escape to the wilderness.

> also what one naturalist calls 'hand-me-down habitats,' 'unofficial countryside,' 'shreds and scraps of the natural scene' – free places for pottering, netting, catching, and watching. . . . Wildness can even, if pressed, be found in a terrarium or an aquarium, an apartment balcony garden, house plants, or a goldfish named Ellery.[382]

Equally a human construction, wildness conveys what McFague is trying to get at in an Earth-based starting point. It is available to virtually anyone, regardless of urban or rural location or socio-economic status.

McFague argues that we cannot love what we do not know, and that we need to know near nature in an Earth-based starting point. We come to know near nature through direct, specific experiences with wild nature others. Yet such knowledge must also be educated. Specific scientific knowledge of ecosystems is essential to understanding the small picture of nature in an Earth-based starting point.[383] Such knowledge must be combined with the experience of nature through encounters with wildness. The combination of knowledge and experience of the small picture of nature with the big picture of the common creation story is the foundation of McFague's Earth-based starting point.

McFague understands discipleship to be about how Christian belief is lived out in the world. How a person situates herself or himself in the world will inform how she or he understands discipleship and what it will look like. In the turn to an Earth-based starting point, McFague is asking a sustained question about where and how a person is situated in the world and what that means for how she or he lives out a belief in God. Since paying

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[382] Ibid. The reference to the goldfish is from the work of nature writer Annie Dillard. See Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek: A Mystical Excursion into the Natural World* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 126.

[383]McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 134.

attention to the world is crucial to effective discipleship, the reorientation of the human person in relation to the natural world offers a paradigm shift in that attention. The context in which discipleship is engaged is now much larger, with a new reference point for the Christian.

3.4.2 Centrality of Embodiment

The concept of embodiment lends itself particularly well to an Earth-based starting point, in McFague's estimation. Embodiment emerges from a contextualized understanding of the body. The details of science that are interpreted through the common creation story and an understanding of nature organize themselves around an understanding of the body that McFague finds instructive for a theology that can respond to the ecological crisis.

For McFague the body is a useful model for underlining the implications of the model of the universe as God's body for ecotheology. Body becomes the primary ecological motif in her theology of nature.[384] Like other concepts, McFague understands the body as a social construction.[385] Feminist analysis of how the body is constructed and interpreted in human culture emphasizes this point.[386] Despite the ambivalent, contradictory

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[384] McFague, *Body of God,* 17.

[385] McFague states, "What we mean by body is a set of associations or stereotypes that are often assumed to be 'natural' or 'obvious' but are, of course, complex, highly nuanced networks of values and interests controlled implicitly (and at times explicitly) by those in power." McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 25.

[386] There is a large body of literature in feminist thought regarding the body. A small sampling includes Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Barbara Brook, *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (New York: Longman, 1999); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1998); and Janet Price and Margrit Shildrik, ed. *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

and highly conflictual relationships people can have with human and other bodies, McFague believes that the idea of the body is an important concept for ecotheology.[387]

One of the key insights coming from postmodern science, McFague insists, is that we not only *have* bodies, we *are* bodies. McFague explains:

> One of the most important revelations from postmodern science is the continuum between matter and energy . . . which overturns traditional hierarchical dualisms such as nonliving/living, flesh/spirit, nature/human being. . . . Whatever we say about that part of ourselves we call brain, mind, or spirit, it evolved from and is continuous with our bodies.[388]

Our bodies, thus, are constitutive aspects of ourselves. This idea has radical implications for a tradition such as Christianity which has not been immune to the conflicting ways of dealing with the body, as mentioned above. It is from the idea that we not only have but are bodies that the construct of embodiment emerges in McFague's work.

Embodiment has implications for how we understand ourselves and how we act in the world. McFague explains:

> The common creation story allows for and indeed encourages a basic stance toward reality that privileges embodiment. It suggests that when human beings tackle the difficult issues of the meaning of things and the equally problematic issue of how to conduct themselves properly – in other words, the issues of truth and conduct, being and doing, what to think and what to do – they take with utmost seriousness the most fundamental thing about themselves and everything else: embodiment.[389]

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[387] There is a large body of literature illustrating the parallels between the oppression of women and the degradation of the natural world. McFague is influenced by, among others, the following works: Susan Griffin, *Made From This Earth: An Anthology of Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982); Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Merchant, *Death of Nature.*

[388] McFague, *Body of God*, 16.

[389] Ibid., 47-8.

McFague suggests that if embodiment is the central characteristic of humans and other beings, then embodiment should "provide the primary context for obligation."[390] It is the model upon which Christian discipleship should be predicated.

McFague interprets scientific insight into the connection between mind and body to argue that embodiment holds within it an imperative for love. We should love the body, our own bodies and the bodies of others. We should love the body, she insists, both in general and in specific ways. Such love should not be limited to human bodies. "[W]e ought to love and honor the body, our own bodies, and the bodies of all other life-forms on the planet. The body is not a discardable garment cloaking the real self . . . it is the shape or form of who we are."[391]

The imperative to love the body is not merely an aesthetic or affective appeal. McFague believes that hatred and fear of the body is part of the cause of the ecological crisis. Unless we change how we feel about human and other-than-human bodies, she insists, the ecological crisis will continue unabated.[392] The model of embodiment unites social justice concerns for oppressed human bodies with ecological degradation.[393]

There are several key points to McFague's understanding of embodiment and its implications for ecotheology. The first is that embodiment is characterized by commonality and diversity. This echoes a key characteristic of the common creation story. McFague suggests: "Embodiment gives us a commonality with everything else on the planet with

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[390] Ibid., 48.

[391] Ibid.

[392] McFague writes, "It is not enough to change our life-styles; we must change what we value." Ibid., 17.

[393] Ibid., 18.

which to reconceive our place in the scheme of things."[394] This commonality is a critical starting point for McFague, as it counters the idea of divisive difference that is embedded in Western culture and epistemology. Alongside and intrinsic to the idea of commonality is the notion of diversity. In our very commonality as embodied beings, we are diverse. In the ways that human and other-than-human beings are diverse, our needs are different. How we see and act in the world is influenced by the distinct ways in which each of us is embodied:

> [W]hat we consider meaningful and true is profoundly influenced by the different ways we are embodied (our skin color, sex, class, and so forth), and that how we behave toward others ought to be profoundly influenced by the real differences that embodiment creates.[395]

The second key aspect of embodiment is justice. There is an ethic rooted in the model of embodiment as McFague understands it:

> If the ecological crisis is calling for an end to narrow anthropocentrism as our moral code . . . then embodiment may move us not only toward a more biocentric and cosmocentric perspective but also toward a more inclusive sense of justice for the needs of *all* (embodied) human beings. In an embodiment ethic, hungry, homeless, or naked human beings have priority over the spiritual needs of the well-fed, well-housed, well-clothed sisters and brothers.[396]

More will be said about the ethic that emerges from McFague's ecotheology later in this chapter. For now what is important to note is that the call for justice is intrinsic to the notion of embodiment in McFague's ecotheology. Acknowledging the constitutive aspect of embodiment for all beings demands a sense of justice for beings in their very embodiment.

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[394] Ibid., 48.

[395] Ibid., 29.

[396] Ibid., 48.

The final key point of the model of embodiment in McFague's work is that creaturely embodiment suggests a form of divine embodiment. This is at the base of the model of the universe as the body of God. The universe as God's body suggests God as embodied.[397] McFague argues that the divine embodiment of God "makes sacred all embodiment," meaning that the constitutive aspect of embodiment of all creatures is a sacred aspect of who and what we are.[398]

Divine embodiment in Christianity is exemplified *par excellence* in the immanence of Jesus. Divine embodiment, reflected paradigmatically in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, "is empowerment toward the liberation, well-being, and fulfillment of all the bodies within God's body."[399]

Embodiment, as McFague understands it, represents a new avenue for interpreting Christian discipleship. McFague sometimes refers to the model of embodiment as the 'view from the body.' She cautions us that "the view from the body will not tell us precisely what to do about biodiversity, global warming, or abortion."[400] Embodiment does not provide the nuts and bolts about what to do, or how to act. Instead, it provides a "framework larger than individualistic anthropocentrism" for reflecting on these and other issues.[401] Embodiment can offer an avenue for shifting belief, language and action within the context of the ecological crisis, as well as the context of other forms of injustice on the planet.

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[397] In Chapter Two, I discussed the cautionary 'as' versus 'is' for talking about models of God. God *as* embodied reminds us that the idea is a model, an extended metaphor that acknowledges that our assertions about God, while based upon the best information we have, are tentative and heuristic.

[398] McFague, *Body of* God, 84.

[399] Ibid., 192.

[400] Ibid., 204.

[401] Ibid.

Discipleship is the question of how to act out what we believe. Christian belief lived out in the world can be interpreted as a form of epistemology. For McFague, the implications of embodiment lead to the very question of epistemology. She refers to "embodied knowing, embodied doing" to reflect the importance of embodiment for the relationship between knowing and action. What this suggests, McFague avers, is that

> when human beings tackle the difficult issues of the meaning of things and the equally problematic issue of how to conduct themselves properly – in other words, the issues of truth and conduct, being and doing, what to think and what to do – they take with utmost seriousness the most fundamental thing about themselves and everything else: embodiment.[402]

McFague notes that Western epistemology and ethics have neglected the notion of embodiment.[403] Yet we already know and act in the world based upon embodiment. When we see other bodies as different from ourselves in a dualistic way, then that difference is viewed as threatening and given a negative value. In turn, we know and act according to these values.

To counter this, there are certain models of knowing that are rooted in the body. They have value, she suggests, for a theology that attempts to take embodiment seriously in light of ecological and social injustice. 'Attention epistemology' is a deliberate method of paying attention to others in their differences. It acknowledges that our common and unique aspects of embodiment are constitutive aspects of ourselves, and so by paying attention to others in their embodiment, such difference is welcomed rather than feared. In this way,

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[402] Ibid., 47-8.

[403] Ibid., 49.

more accurate knowing will accrue. In turn, actions that are healing, restorative and justice-making will result.

Feminist epistemology is an example of attention epistemology [404] and suggests a way that such knowing can be engaged. McFague turns to feminist epistemology to provide a means for relating to the distinctive embodiment of the natural world. This means is called a 'subject-subjects' model of knowing and is part of the third key aspect of McFague's ecotheology, the need to know and love nature.

3.4.3 Need to Know and Love Nature

The third main aspect of McFague's ecotheology is that there is a specifically Christian need to know and love nature. McFague argues in *Super, Natural Christians* that "Christian practice, loving God and neighbor *as subjects*, as worthy of our love in and for themselves, should be extended to nature."[405] Her reasoning is that when we begin to love nature as neighbour, we will begin to treat nature in ways that are no longer deleterious to the Earth.[406]

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[404] McFague is influenced by numerous feminist scholars on the nature of feminist epistemology. Included among them are Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); and Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature.*

[405] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 1.

[406] Despite McFague's desire to include humans within an Earth-based starting point, as discussed previously, in this book she creates a deliberate distinction between human beings and the rest of the natural world to make her argument. It reads as though she has recreated a division in her language that she does not intend (and, by extension, in my own language as I work with this material). This highlights the problem with the divisions that are inherent in the English language when discussing humanity and the rest of the natural world. I have chosen to use McFague's own terminology in presenting and analyzing her ideas here.

The idea of the need to know and love nature as subjects is based, first of all, upon an ecological model of understanding the self and other. McFague explains:

> The ecological model says that the self only exists in radical interrelationship and interdependence with others and that *all* living and nonliving entities exist somewhere on this continuum.[407]

The self in this model is inherently and constitutively interrelated and interdependent. This suggests, in part, that the other to which the self is relating impacts upon the self in defining ways. McFague explains:

> We humans are not solitary individuals who have occasional relations (when we feel like it) with other people, the natural world, and God. We are through and through relational beings who not only affect others but are affected by them.[408]

The ecological model of the self challenges the traditional model of self and other within Western thought, that of subject versus object.[409]

The traditional model of self and other is rooted in a dualistic way of perceiving the world. McFague appreciates the idea of the 'arrogant eye,' a term coined by feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye, as the patriarchal way of seeing others. The arrogant eye is a way of perceiving others in terms of their relationship to oneself.[410] The arrogant eye, while

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[407] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 2.

[408] Ibid., 8.

[409] McFague explains, "Whatever we know, we know by means of this model: I am the subject knowing the world (nature), other people, and God as objects. It is such a deep structure in all our thinking and doing that we are not usually aware that *it is a model*." Ibid., 7.

[410] Frye writes:

> [E]verything that is is resource for man's exploitation. With this world view, men see with arrogant eyes which organize everything seen with reference to themselves and their own interests. The arrogating perceiver is a teleologist, a believer that everything exists and happens for some purpose, and he tends to animate things, imagining attitudes toward himself as the animating motives. Everything is either 'for me' or 'against me.'" Marilyn Frye, "In and Out of Harm's Way: Arrogance and Love," in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1983), 67.

a patriarchal concept, is not limited to the male gaze. It is a way of perceiving that views other people and the natural world as objects for one's own use. This is a perception that many people hold in relation to others and the natural world.[411]

The arrogant eye is grounded in a method of organizing the world into dualistic categories. Hierarchical dualisms are a way of organizing ideas about the world into opposing categories, such as mind/body, spirit/matter, light/dark, good/bad. These dualisms are hierarchical because one side of the list is accorded value; the other is not. Ecofeminist theologian Heather Eaton notes, "To perceive differences in pairs, such as day/night, left/right or up/down, is not necessarily a problem. It is when pairs are considered as opposites, and not just as different, that causes the trouble."[412]

What, then, is the antidote to hierarchical dualisms, dualistic thinking and the arrogant eye? For Marilyn Frye and, in turn, for McFague, the answer is to develop the 'loving eye.' The loving eye refuses the dynamic of subject viewing object but denotes the sight of one subject gazing upon another subject. The loving eye is the opposite of the arrogant eye.[413] McFague defines the loving eye this way:

> The loving eye, on the other hand, acknowledges complexity, mystery, and difference. It recognizes that boundaries exist between the self and the other, that the interests of other persons (and the natural world) are not identical with one's own, that knowing another takes time and attention.[414]

McFague adopts the loving eye, in her methodology, as a way of perceiving others that can have concrete implications for how we see human and Earth others. The loving eye

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[411] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 33.

[412] Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies*, 38.

[413] Frye, "In and Out of Harm's Way," 75.

[414] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 34.

functions in McFague's ecotheology as a way to perceive, and in turn love, our neighbours, human and Earth others as neighbour.

Based upon the idea of the loving eye as a way of perceiving others, McFague advocates for an ecological model of a relational self. The way to love nature, based upon the relational self, is through a subject-subjects model of knowing. A subject-subjects way of knowing emphasizes that we know through relationships; we are always already in relationships with others.[415]

McFague identifies four characteristics of a subject-subjects model of knowing, based upon feminist epistemology. The first characteristic acknowledges the very difficulty of the model: "it demands maturity and the refusal either to fuse with others or retreat from them."[416] The lure of the arrogant eye, as well as of a romantic 'oneness with nature,' is ever present.

Second, the subject-subjects model is a multiple one; it is interactive rather than oppositional. "The model assumes that I am formed by many relationships of many different sorts with others, some of whom are like me and some unlike me in various ways."[417] Feminist epistemology recognizes the complexity of a subject-subjects way of knowing the world.

The third characteristic of the model is that feminist epistemology, while refusing the idea of knowing others as objects, believes that we can know others *objectively*. Based

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[415] Ibid., 37.

[416] Ibid., 105.

[417] Ibid., 105-6.

upon the understanding of the self in relationship with others, a loving objectivity is a kind of knowledge that knows the other for herself or himself.[418]

This does not, however, mean that one must only know the other merely for altruistic purposes. Self-interest need not be opposed to altruism. The fourth characteristic of the subject-subjects model of knowing recognizes that the flexible boundaries of self and others in relationship allow for self-interest and altruism to exists side by side; "in fact, they often converge," McFague avers.[419]

McFague does not argue for an abstract means of knowing and loving nature. She suggests a very specific way, based upon the subject-subjects model of knowing, that one can learn to love nature. "How Christians should love nature is by obeying a simple but very difficult axiom: *pay attention to it*."[420] As quoted earlier, one cannot love what one does not know.[421] Therefore, one must come to know the other as subject, as itself and with its own purpose and direction. "Love and knowledge go together: we cannot have one without the other."[422]

Paying attention to nature as subjects, then, requires gaining specific, detailed knowledge about various aspects of nature. The loving eye must be educated. "Accurate, detailed, scientific information about other lifeforms as well as whole ecosystems is central to educating the loving eye."[423]

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[418] Ibid., 106-7.

[419] Ibid., 107.

[420] Ibid., 27.

[421] Ibid., 29.

[422] Ibid.

[423] Ibid., 134.

Two cautionary points must be made here. The first is to be reminded that science itself is construction, as I discussed earlier. When finding scientific information on nature others, such knowledge must not objectify nature. Second, one must be careful in learning to know and love nature. It is not about a fusion of self with other, or about a mystical sense of oneness. McFague draws on ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood for help in defining nature others as subjects in a way that maintains the distinction between us and them:

> The ecological self recognizes the earth other as a centre of agency or intentionality having its origin and place like mine in the community of the earth, but as a different center of agency, which limits mine.[424]

This definition draws us back to McFague's call for the need to know and love nature as a Christian demand to love nature as neighbour, as subject. "We should love nature for the same reason we should love God and our [human] neighbour: because it is valuable in itself and deserves our love."[425] Loving nature as our neighbour, then, is a discipleship demand. It is one way that Christian belief can and should be lived out in the world.

This reminds us of the ethic embedded within the Christian call to love our neighbour, which McFague has extended to nature. It is an ethic of care, and it constitutes the fourth main aspect of McFague's ecotheology.

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[424] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 109.

[425] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 177.

3.4.4 Ethic of Care

The ethic of care that McFague advocates in her ecotheology is based upon the ecological model of self and others. It is the fourth key insight in McFague's ecotheology. McFague claims:

> The ecological model contains an ethic; just as who we believe we are in the scheme of things influences how we know others, so also it influences how we treat them. Being, knowing, doing: ontology, epistemology, ethics: the subject-subjects model is a total way of being in the world.[426]

This ethic of care, however, is not limited to the idea of knowing and loving nature as a Christian imperative. It is rooted within an Earth-based starting point and understands embodiment as its central principle.

Any ethic requires certain ground rules. McFague calls them, in this case, house rules:

> Since the world, according to the incarnation, is where God dwells, it is God's 'house,' and we should abide by God's house rules. The house rules for the whole earth are right relations among all creatures, relations governed in basic ways by economics. What God's house rules are – in terms of ecological and economic imperatives – is one of the major tasks of Christian discernment.[427]

The house rules for an ethic of care that responds to the ecological crisis are based upon an understanding of how ecosystems and organisms within ecosystems interact. Again, this information is interpreted through postmodern science. Its dominant features are interdependence, interrelatedness, complexity, and diversity.

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[426] Ibid., 149.

[427] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 14.

Once the house rules are established, the question is to whom the ethic of care is directed. It is a care for all in community: such a definition is anything but simple.[428] This has two principle features. The first is that care for all in community, if based upon the subject-subjects model of knowing, means that care must be specific, direct, and tailored to the needs of others. To provide proper care means coming to know those in community in their own distinctive embodiment, as subjects in their own right.

Second, the ethic of care is modelled upon a justice framework. The influence of liberation theology upon McFague's thinking is evident here: "Christianity insists that the ecological model give priority to the neediest among both people and nature."[429] This pushes other care ethics further toward a preferential option for the human poor and nature as the new or also poor.[430]

There is a lingering question in the ethic of care: What if one refuses to engage in such an ethic? What are the ramifications or implications of such refusal? For McFague the answer is how sin is to be understood within this context. Sin, McFague insists, is the refusal to accept our place in the scheme of things. It is the refusal to accept the limits that an Earth-based starting point, based upon the reality and importance of embodiment, puts upon ourselves. This idea of sin is located within the ecological model of self and others:

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[428] Ibid., 154.

[429] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 169.

[430] This is where the influence of liberation theology is most evident in McFague's work. McFague adopts the notion of the preferential option for the poor, and a position that understands ecological devastation within the same paradigm: "We human beings, especially some of us, have *made* nature poor, and we are being called to redress our excesses. Siding with the outcast is neither a popular nor necessarily a successful position. It will not solve all of the complex environmental ills that beset the natural world, but it reminds us of one central conviction: God loves the entire creation." McFague, *Body of God*, 201.

> The ecological view of sin refuses to raise its eyes above the minimalist view, insisting that justice among human beings means first of all adequate space for basic needs. It also means, for some, staying in their own, proper, limited place.[431]

McFague emphasizes, too, that this understanding of sin not only speaks to a broken relationship with God. It is also contrary to the ecological reality of the limits and implications of everything being interconnected and interdependent.[432] An ethic of care helps to counteract this distortion of reality. It can help to foster a feeling of belonging to the Earth. Such a sense of belonging, McFague insists, "only comes when we accept our proper place and live in a fitting, appropriate way with all other beings."[433]

McFague is specific about how an ethic of care can play out in response to the ecological crisis, within an affluent context such as that of middle-class North American Christians. Returning to the explicit language of Christian discipleship that she uses in her early work, McFague calls for 'cruciform living' as a model for Christian discipleship within such a context:

> The two dimensions of this love – for the earth and for God – together suggest that a cruciform mode of life is called for. Christian discipleship in our time, if it is to express love for God and for the earth, must be one of self-limitation, sacrifice, and sharing so that the neighbors, all God's creatures, might flourish. Christians are called, I believe, not only to embody an alternative vision of the abundant life, but also to help move our social, political, and financial institutions in this direction.[434]

Cruciform living involves creating an alternative notion of abundance, one that requires material changes in one's life: "limitations on energy use and sacrifice for the sake of

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[431] McFague, *Body of God*, 116.

[432] Ibid., 200.

[433] Ibid., 112.

[434] Ibid., 23.

others," among other changes.[435] It is a model of pragmatic, local and political change. It is referred to by McFague as cruciform because it is meant to model the way of Jesus Christ: "[T]he cruciform way of Christ means making sacrifices so that others might live."[436] The ethic of care, in McFague's estimation, is a way of framing cruciform living in order to understand its personal, communal and ecological dimensions within a combined understanding of social and ecological justice.

3.5 Assessment of McFague's Ecotheology: Implications for the Model of Praxis

As I have presented thus far in this chapter, the insights from McFague's ecotheology are significant. Modelling the universe as the body of God, emphasizing the importance of embodiment to theology, and drawing attention to the close relationship between knowing and doing; these are a few of the contributions that McFague makes. In Chapter One, I have outlined how other scholars have worked with these and other ideas to advance thinking in theology and ecology.

Nevertheless, a critical appraisal of McFague's work is needed. The question is raised as to the limitations in her ecotheology. While McFague's work can and has been criticized from a variety of vantage points,[437] the question for my purposes is, what

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[435] Ibid.

[436] Ibid., 33.

[437] Shannon Schrein criticizes McFague's relativization of the authority of Christian scripture and the uniqueness of Jesus as Christ in her theology. Schrein, "Constructivist and Revisionist Feminist Christology." Warren McWilliams offers a similar critique of McFague's Christology. Warren McWilliams, "Christic Paradigm and Cosmic Christ: Ecological Christology in the Theologies of Sallie McFague and Jürgen Moltmann," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 341-355. Deborah Beth Creamer believes that McFague lacks a sufficient appreciation for disabled bodies in her consideration of embodiment. Deborah Beth Creamer, "The Withered Hand of God: Disability and Theological Reflection" (Ph.D. diss., Iliff School of Theology and University of Denver, 2004.) http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/
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critiques might be made that could possibly challenge or compromise McFague's understanding of praxis, and/or the potential of her insights for developing the model of praxis? In answer to this, I have one critique of my own to offer and two from other theologians. I will discuss each of the criticisms in turn and then examine, collectively, their implications for McFague's comprehension of action.

The first critique is my own, centering on McFague's use of Thomas Berry's ideas to reorient the human person in the larger sphere of the natural world. She draws upon his thinking to locate the human within a functional cosmology. McFague is trying to emphasize the importance of cosmology as worldview in models of God and, by extension, in human belief and action. She brings the importance of cosmology as worldview to Christian discipleship.

However, it is my opinion that McFague does not go far enough in utilizing Berry's thinking. While she suggests that humanity be located within the common creation story of the emergent universe, she does not carry that idea forward into the key insights, as I have identified them, in her work. McFague moves away from the cosmological framework to an Earth-based perspective; this in itself is not a problem were that the Earth was continually located within the cosmogenesis that is the universe. However in McFague's model of the universe as the body of God, the universe, and the Earth by extension, loses its definition as an emergent process. This is what is transformative and revelatory in the work

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pqdtft/docview/305052488/abstract/13687E1A34D24E8A623/1?accountid=14701 (accessed May 6, 2012). G. Clarke Chapman believes that McFague's theocentric theology fails to provide a compelling vision of the Triune God and is theologically weaker than a Christocentric theism. G. Clarke Chapman, "What God Can Help? Trinity and Pop Religions of Crisis," *Cross Currents* 44, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 316-331; and Chapman, "Speaking of God in a Nuclear Age," *Anglican Theological Review* 73, no. 3 (Sum 1991): 250-266.

of Berry, with profound implications for the role and place of the human. The universe, in McFague's work, remains a place in which the Earth and the human are located. Berry's contribution that the universe is a process of which the Earth and, later, the human are integral dimensions, is ignored.

To be sure, McFague's contribution does shift the human, placing us as part of the natural world instead of outside and above it. However, despite her protestations to the contrary, McFague's work maintains a certain anthropocentrism that could be avoided were she to more fully incorporate Berry's insights. The human still holds the starring role in McFague's ecotheology.[438]

The second critique comes from Lisa Sideris, who examines to what extent ecotheologians consider natural selection in developing environmental ethics.[439] Sideris claims that McFague does not adequately consider evolutionary theory, namely Darwin's theory of natural selection, in developing her ecotheology. Focusing her analysis primarily on the book *Super, Natural Christians*, Sideris notes that McFague often conflates the field of ecology, with an emphasis on harmony and equilibrium in ecosystems, with evolution, which explores how changes occur over long reaches of time to create new species and adaptations.[440] She believes that McFague glosses over the predatory, conflictual and tragic

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[438] Bangert, "Toward a Naturalistic," 207.

[439] Lisa H. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology and Natural Selection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[440] Sideris points out that it is a certain interpretation of ecology that McFague is adopting, and is adopted by other ecotheologians. She writes:

> Today *ecology* conjures up for many people a model of nature as an interconnected and fairly stable system of complex relationships. Often the *ecosystem* concept plays a central role in discussions of ecology. . . . So, is nature harmoniously balanced and stable or do disequilibrium and conflict reign?

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aspects of the natural world in her exhortations for Christians to love nature. McFague is by no means the only scholar to neglect the negative aspects of evolution; it is a tendency, Sideris claims, of the field of ecology and theology overall.[441]

So what exactly is the problem with conflating ecology and evolutionary theory, to the neglect of natural selection? For Sideris, the problem is that McFague's theology, in particular her call for a subject-subjects model of relating to nature, is not rooted in biological realities, despite McFague's claims that it is so located. Sideris argues that for any ethic to be effective, it must be based in as accurate a scientific perspective of the natural world as possible. To emphasize the harmony of the natural world to the neglect of the real, tragic and conflictual elements, Sideris suggests, is to create an ethic of love for nature that is bound to fail. Sideris believes that McFague is blurring the lines between the scientific data she is working from and the ethic that can be derived from the data.[442] Sideris argues:

> McFague's ethic falsely imagines that nature functions in a way that permits the flourishing of every individual creature at once. As [Michael] Northcott points out, McFague sidesteps 'discussion of the real moral conflicts which living together in a physical universe' necessitates, owing to her commitment to 'dialectical pantheism' and vague egalitarianism, both of which render ethical decision making virtually impossible. . . . [T]here is a basic inconsistency between the emphasis on interdependence as central to the ecological perspective, on the one hand, and the

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> This brief sketch of both models of nature is, of course, overly simplistic. Yet the history of ecological science and evolutionary theory is in many ways the history of a context between two competing paradigms." Sideris, *Environmental Ethics*, 21-22.

[441] Sideris avers:

> [E]cological theology tends to give priority to the concept of *ecology* – and a particular interpretation of ecology – rather than *evolution*. The ecological model frequently shuts out important elements of evolutionary processes, especially those that seem to contradict or otherwise detract from the ethic ecotheologians seek to derive from nature. This neglect of evolution, and the preference for the term *ecology*, is common in environmental ethics as a whole. Ibid., 12.

[442] Ibid, 73.

> role prescribed for humans as healers and sustainers of life, on the other. Of course, McFague concedes that humans seldom successfully carry out this praxis in regard to nature, but she seems to believe that the flaw lies not with the ethic itself but with human flaws that prevent us from doing the right thing, even when we know what that is.[443]

Sideris believes that McFague has confused the relationship between science and ethics. The ‘is’ of the natural world does not necessarily denote the ‘ought’ of human actions.

Sideris is concerned with McFague’s romantic portrayal of the natural world. She perceives this as impeding the environmental ethic that can be created out of such portrayal. Sideris suggests that to balance this tendency in McFague’s (and others’) work, the adoption of a “comprehensive naturalized ethic” would be helpful. She writes:

> Adopting a comprehensive naturalized approach implies that we can extend an ethic of love to nature, but it also implies that we need to supplement it with other considerations about appropriateness – love’s stint and bound, as [Bishop Joseph] Butler says.[444]

This is a careful point that Sideris is making. The need is for an ethic that becomes contextually specific based upon the needs of wild (and nonwild) nature, even, and perhaps especially, when it appears to conflict with human love for the natural world.

Sideris emphasizes the weakness in McFague’s argument regarding a sentimentalized view of the natural world based upon the lack of serious consideration of evolutionary theory. The conflation of ecology with evolution is quite evident to me upon reading her work. However, it does seem that Sideris has ignored McFague’s claim that her emphasis is on the damage done to the natural world as a result of human actions. McFague states in *Body of God:*

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[443] Ibid., 82.

[444] Ibid., 251.

> The other side of the issue of natural evil is that it is not the principal kind of evil that endangers our planet. In the enlarged perspective of both evolution and solidarity with the oppressed, natural evil dims in importance in comparison with human sin. To be sure, terrible things happen to people accidentally and randomly, but of equal if not more importance is what *we do* to others of our own species, to other species, and to the planet itself. *The* issue facing us is not natural evil but sin, not the inability to accept the larger picture but the refusal to remove ourselves from the center of it.[445]

Perhaps this claim is not good enough. Perhaps McFague, if she is going to argue that her work coheres with science, still needs to consider a careful understanding of evolutionary theory in her work. Nevertheless, it is prudent to note that the ethic of care that she builds in her ecotheology is focused upon human degradation of the natural world.

The third critique of McFague's work comes from Byron Bangert. Bangert explores the strengths and weaknesses of McFague's ecotheology for developing a "naturalistic, theocentric, theological ethics" in his dissertation. He believes that the strength of McFague's work "lies in the power of her metaphorical theology to challenge, critique, and reshape our perceptions regarding the God-world relationship" and the ways that human beings fit into the natural world.[446] That said, Bangert insists that McFague's model of the relation between God and the world denies the possibility, in an intellectually plausible way, of God intervening in the course of history. He argues that McFague

> lacks a conceptualization of the relation of God to the world that would provide some basis for understanding how it is, or could be, that God is active in the causal nexus of events as an effective power or measure in the world. In short, McFague does not tell us anything about how God – not just human conceptions, images, or metaphors of God – makes a real difference in what transpires in the cosmos.[447]

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[445] McFague, *Body of God*, 177.

[446] Bangert, "Toward a Naturalistic," 191.

[447] Ibid., 163.

Bangert says that McFague engages scientific descriptions of reality in a decidedly modernist way (despite her claim to utilize postmodern science) that recreates a materialist understanding of the world. Despite her denial of scientific materialism, McFague is unable to explain how God can be conceptualized so that the divine can make any difference to or in the world.[448]

Bangert believes that the problem lies in a contradiction between McFague's metaphorical view of God as personal and agential and her metaphysical assumptions that deny a place for God in the workings of the natural world and human history. He wants to know how McFague can move from models of God being merely imaginative renderings of the divine to actually indicating some aspect of God as God really is: "A truly compelling theological construal needs to be able to claim a greater congruity between theological metaphors and their referents, including both God and the world as it really is, or even as it possibly could be."[449]

Along with McFague, Bangert is trying to avoid the possibility of God acting as a supernatural agent upon the world. His question is about finding an intellectually as well as theologically plausible way to conceptualize the God-world relation. For Bangert the possible solution is to draw upon process metaphysics. David Ray Griffin interprets the findings of physics that explain 'regularities' in the habits of nature rather than laws, so that there is always the possibility of God intervening in the world without it being considered a

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[448] Ibid., 161.

[449] Ibid., 208.

violation of the natural order.[450] While this is equally speculative, Bangert believes that Griffin's proposal is more internally consistent than McFague's and allows for a better modelling of the God-world relation.

3.5.1 Implications for McFague's Understanding of Praxis and Its Development

The question regarding the three critiques outlined here is what implications they have for McFague's understanding of praxis and its development with the key insights from her ecotheology. If there are material weaknesses in her work, what do they suggest for how she comprehends human action? How might these weaknesses relate to my own development of a model of praxis based upon McFague's work?

To be sure, these criticisms highlight an overall weakness to McFague's project: her usage of certain interpretations of science (the new cosmology, evolutionary theory, physics as interpreted through process thought) does not go far enough for developing her model of God and subsequent insights. However, the point of McFague's ecotheology is crystalline: she is emphasizing the close relationship between our images of God and our actions. Sideris and Bangert, as well as I, acknowledge that this is the central strength of McFague's work.

Christian discipleship must be reconsidered in light of this warrant. However limited her use of science, McFague is trying to stay close to general scientific interpretations of reality that emphasize that the human is embedded in the natural processes and systems of the Earth; she argues that this has fundamental implications for

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[450] Ibid., 299. See also David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

discipleship. The assessment of Sideris and Bangert and I is that in her lax use of science she does not go far enough in the implications of her work.

Interestingly, both Sideris and Bangert avoid dealing systematically with McFague's penultimate book of ecotheology, *Life Abundant*. Their criticisms are primarily targeted toward *Super, Natural Christians* for Sideris and toward *Body of God* for Bangert. McFague's epistemology is different in *Life Abundant* than in her earlier books.[451] I will suggest that my own critique regarding McFague's continuing anthropocentrism, as a result of not going far enough with Berry's insights, is also mitigated with the publication of *Life Abundant*.

In *Life Abundant*, McFague takes an epistemological turn toward considering human action in the world in response to the ecological crisis. It is here, as I have stated before, that she begins to develop the importance of and call for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction. In some ways, the challenges that I and others have made are answered by McFague. McFague is suggesting an ecotheology

> that rests on the relative absolute of giving glory to God by loving the world; that understands its context to be the well-being of the planet and its subjects all creatures; that views its universal statements to be risky and partial, made by culturally formed beings. I do not mean a theology just for nature, but one for the entire cosmos with all its creatures, human and otherwise.[452]

By focusing theologically on human action in response to the ecological crisis, McFague does three things that can alleviate concerns regarding the weaknesses highlighted in her work. First, in her focus on an ecological praxis that gives glory to God

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[451] Bangert, "Toward a Naturalistic," 271n156.

[452] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 33.

by loving the world, McFague has managed to create a theology that avoids being heavily anthropocentric and allows for the possibility of our actions to be conceived in light of the emergent universe. Bangert, who has also criticized McFague for maintaining a certain anthropocentrism despite her attempts otherwise, suggests that her work is more theocentric and thus less anthropocentric in this book than it has been previously.[453]

McFague does not pick up strands of thought regarding the emergent universe in *Life Abundant*. Instead, the shifting of her epistemology to the emphasis on "reality as defined by love"[454] allows the possibility to consider ecological praxis within the larger context of the new universe story.[455] Consider McFague's words: "We come to God through becoming *aware* of God's presence in one or more of its infinite forms in the world. God is always there (or here); *we* need become so."[456] This evocation can encourage us to consider ourselves and God in light of the process that is the universe.

Second, in *Life Abundant* McFague draws attention to the natural world as it is damaged by human beings. The subject-subjects model of her earlier work is now tailored more specifically to the problem of human sin, as opposed to natural evil. By doing this, McFague creates the contextually appropriate ethic that Sideris argues is needed. Indeed, McFague moves further to argue for an ecological praxis in the context of North American middle-class Christians. It is a praxis that recognizes discrepancies in responsibility and response on this continent and around the world.

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[453] Bangert, "Toward a Naturalistic," 168-169.

[454] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 135.

[455] As stated earlier, this is Thomas Berry's phrase for understanding the emergent universe as a grand narrative.

[456] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 137.

Third, in McFague's emphasis on ecological praxis as a form of Christian discipleship, she is focusing on the experiences of God through and in others, both human and other than human. While this does not entirely satisfy Bangert's need for a God-world relation that allows for God's direct intervention into things, McFague is placing emphasis on the Christian recognition that God works through and within other beings and our relationships with each other. It is this recognition that is given priority in McFague's model of praxis. As with an ethic that emphasizes human sin over natural evil, McFague's call for ecological praxis, while not denying the possibility for God to intervene directly in history, emphasizes the importance of human action as a result of experiencing God through and with human and more than human others. McFague is privileging this way of experiencing God in the world.

McFague speaks to this form of experiencing God more directly in *Life Abundant*. In developing the ecological economic model of God and the world, she says:

> The radical intimacy of God and the world in the ecological model means that we can experience God's presence anywhere and everywhere. There is no place where God is not. Is this pantheism? Are we saying that God and the world are identical? No, they are not, but we are suggesting that one needs 'double vision' to distinguish them. By 'double vision' I mean that God is always present in mediated form, through something or someone else. We do not meet God directly 'face to face,' but we do meet God in the world.[457]

McFague's language in this text is more forceful about who God is. In the passage above, the God that we experience anywhere and everywhere *is God*, not just our models or metaphors of God. Bangert's concern is for how McFague conceptualizes Godself as more than a model, so that we might think about how God acts in the course of history. While I

[457] Ibid., 149-150.

think that Bangert's criticism allows for a potential contribution to McFague's work that can strengthen her argument, McFague is advocating for the privileging of the God we meet in and through others. This is more than just a model of God, although we are always already interpreting and constructing our experiences. And this is a God who does act in the course of history; God does so through and with others.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented and analyzed key insights in McFague's ecotheology that can be a resource for developing the model of praxis based upon her work. The turn to ecotheology in McFague's large body of work represents a continuing concern for Christian discipleship, which is interpreted in light of the ecological crisis.

The main insights in McFague's ecotheology are substantive; they are built on the rich contributions of other theologians, scientific discoveries and her own metaphorical theology. Although the presentations of an Earth-based starting point, importance of embodiment, the need to know and love nature, and an ethic of care have their own weaknesses and limitations, they offer much to work with in developing the model of praxis. The model represents, as we saw in Chapter Two, a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. Since McFague's ecotheology reflects her interpretation of discipleship in light of reorienting the human person within the natural world, it is an appropriate fit for developing the model further. It is in the next chapter that I engage in this task.

Chapter Four

Discipleship in Response to the Ecological Crisis: Developing the Model of Praxis

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, I constructed a model of praxis based upon the understanding of action that is at the base of McFague's call for ecological praxis. McFague's understanding of praxis is located within her early work on parabolic and metaphorical theology and represents a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. It is a rich, complex framework for understanding the relationship among belief, language and action.

McFague's interest in praxis in her ecotheology combines her early commitments with her later acuity regarding ecology and theology. However, while McFague's concern for praxis has progressed because of considerations regarding cosmology, postmodern science, embodiment, the importance of the natural world, and other factors, these factors are not reflected in the methodology that grounds ecological praxis. Because the model is premised upon her early scholarship, the later influence of an Earth-based starting point, importance of embodiment, the need to know and love nature, and an ethic of care have not yet been factored into the model.

However it is my conviction that this model, as a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, needs to be advanced precisely with these insights. As the work of McFague and many others show, the theological and ethical demands of the ecological crisis are unique. At no point in human history have we faced a crisis of such scope and magnitude. As well, the ecological praxis that McFague advocates is specific, particular, and direct. In order for the model of praxis to be able to respond to the specific contours of

the ecological crisis, and to possibly help people to actually engage in the praxis McFague calls for, it is my belief that it needs to be further developed.

The insights presented in Chapter Three represent the tools that I will use to develop the model of praxis.[458] To begin, I will return to the working definition of the model as I understand it. I will expand upon the concepts of self, world, God, and experience using the insights from McFague's ecotheology that I elucidated in Chapter Three, and then analyze the implications each development brings to a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. Once I have done so, I will return to a discussion of the model as a whole and examine how we might understand the methodological basis of the model in belief, language and action, in light of this development.

In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss McFague's call for ecological praxis in light of the developed model of praxis. I will direct our attention to the shift to praxis language that is new to McFague's theology and will discuss the changing meanings that the term *praxis* adopts in her ecotheology in light of the model. I will also examine the theological dimensions and implications of ecological praxis as it is understood through the lens of a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship.

Finally, in the last section of the chapter I will conclude with a discussion of the goal of the model of praxis and the difficulty of engaging in ecological praxis.

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[458] As identified in Chapter One, other ecotheologians have expressed similar insights to McFague's. I could use the work of others, like those discussed in the first chapter, to develop the model of praxis. However, my intention in this thesis is to develop it using developments in McFague's own thinking. There is a progression in her thought that leads to her eventual advocation of ecological praxis; I am staying close to McFague's own work in order to discover what arises when the methodology behind her praxis is developed with the insights from her own thinking.

4.2 Developing the Model of Praxis with Insights from McFague's Ecotheology

The model of praxis I have constructed is a representation of McFague's understanding of praxis. For her it is based upon a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, whereby the individual is changed as a result of her or his experiences of God, to the extent that it changes her or his behaviour in the world. The methodological underpinning of this model is an interpretation of the dynamic relationship among belief, language and action in people's lives.

Despite the enduring impact of McFague's understanding of praxis on McFague's scholarship, it is left undeveloped in her writings. To elucidate the model and construct it based upon McFague's early work, I have created the following definition that draws forward its essential aspects. A parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship refers to

> A radical disorientation of the self in response to experiencing God in the world, leading to a permanent reorientation of the self in the world, evidenced in dramatic and enduring lifestyle changes.

In the definition there are key terms that need careful explication in order to get at the complexity and specificity of this understanding of discipleship. In Chapter Two I explored how the concepts of self, world, God, and experience are understood in McFague's comprehension, and thereby in the model of praxis developed here. It is to these concepts that I turn now to explore how the insights presented in Chapter Three can be used to advance this construct in light of the ecological crisis. I will discuss each definitive term in the model in terms of its meaning and implications for a parabolic understanding of discipleship. I will then return to a cohesive discussion to consider the function of belief, language and action as it might now be understood.

4.2.1 Self

In the model of praxis, the self is recognized as a mystery that is known only indirectly, revealed through one's speech and actions, and that is contextually located. Like everything else that human beings perceive and know, the self is formed through the 'is' and 'is not' method of metaphor. The interrelationship of belief, language and action is at the foundation of the self.

Within McFague's ecotheology, the human person is located within the ecological systems and processes of the Earth and within the larger narrative of universe history. There is a relocating and reorienting of the self within an Earth-based starting point. The mystery that is the self takes on cosmological and ecological dimensions.[459] The self is revealed through her or his location within universe history and the Earth's ecological processes.

Within a cosmological perspective, the self takes on a communal dimension. For McFague, the existential question of "Who am I?" is asked within a 13.7-billion-year trajectory.[460] This is not a new meaning of the self; it is an ancient understanding that is being deliberately resurrected by proponents of the new cosmology and reinterpreted with insights from postmodern science. The emergent universe is the sustaining source of the ecological dimensions of the self. The key features of the cosmological perspective include

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[459] McFague, *Body of God*, 126.

[460] Ibid., 38-46.

interrelatedness and interdependence, diversity and commonality, with microphase and macrophase dimensions.[461]

Within an ecological perspective, the self is interpreted through the ecological model of a relational self. It is a construct of the self that is determined through relationships with others.[462] Just as the self in the model of praxis is known through one's speech and actions, the self is also known through the epistemology that one uses to know and understand the world, God and others. McFague develops this idea in her ecotheology. This is the self as radically interrelated and interdependent with all that exists. The self *only* exists in radical relationship with others. The self is formed and developed centrally, rather than incidentally, through relationships with others.

4.2.1.1 Implications

The ecological model of the self holds several important implications for a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. Each implication emerges from the basic insight into the radical interrelatedness and interdependence of all that exists in the phenomenal order.

First, the ecological model of the self, as McFague presents it, makes explicit the relationship between the self and knowing. If we are deeply interrelated and interdependent, then how and what we know are profoundly related to how one perceives

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[461] These terms come from Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry and are defined by them as follows: "By microphase we mean that which pertains to the here and now of a particular creature. By macrophase we point to the larger realities involved in the moment, both in terms of the largeness of the universe and of Earth and the mystery of the unborn future." Swimme and Berry, *Universe Story*, 55.

[462] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 2.

oneself as subject. A construct of knowing that recognizes this is what McFague develops as a subject-subjects model of knowing. This framework reflects a specific understanding of the self as subject. It is the self as subject among and with other subjects. The subject-subjects model of knowing suggests the epistemology that leads to the development of the self.[463]

The second implication that comes from the ecological model of the self is that the self is not merely in relationship with other human beings, however radically these relationships are now perceived. The human self is in continual and direct relationship with the other-than-human world as well as human communities.[464] The living and non-living aspects of the natural world (of which we are a part, but is distinguished here for the ease of language in discussion) are, likewise, subjects in their own rights.[465] McFague describes this when she argues for a spirituality of knowing and loving nature. The self in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, then, is formed through one's relationships with the natural world as well as through relationships with other human persons.

In the ecological model of the self, the self continues to be formed through the 'is' and 'is not' of metaphor, as discussed in Chapter Two. Now, though, this is deeper and more radicalized. This is the third implication of the ecological model of the self for the development of the model of praxis. The relationship of the self with others is extended to the natural world; both human and nonhuman others are now perceived as subjects in their

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[463] Ibid., 37.

[464] The subject-subjects model is based upon human relationships, but McFague extends it to include the other-than-human world. Ibid., 107-108.

[465] Ibid., 108-109.

own rights. This relationship is also to be understood metaphorically. Learning who the self is and is not in those relationships offers more potential for expanding the self, as it also highlights the difficulty to learning who the self is.

The final implication of the ecological model is that the self is now more deeply contextually located than previously understood. Context has two additional dimensions: the cosmological context of the emergent universe and the context of near nature.[466] More than being additional frames of reference to consider alongside those of politics, history, and bodily and social location, these dimensions reinscribe and reinterpret the other contexts in addition to adding two new ways to interpret and understand the self.

Based upon these implications, who then is the self in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, developed with insights from McFague's ecotheology? The understanding of the self described in Chapter Two still stands; that understanding is now made more complex and rich with the insights from ecology and theology. The self, now, can be described as an ecological self who is radically interrelated to and interdependent with all that exists, including the natural world as well as with other human beings. She or he is constitutively and contextually located and oriented within the narrative of the emergent universe, as well as within the ecological systems and processes of the Earth. The self is a subject relating to other subjects; her or his understanding of this relationship is also representative of the self. The self is a mystery revealed indirectly through speech and actions, including how one perceives and knows human and more-than-human others.

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[466] As described in Chapter Three, 'near nature' refers to the natural world to which we have closer access and so feels more immediate. This would include, for example, meadows and lakes, local flora and fauna. McFague emphasizes near nature in *Super, Natural Christians*, while the context in *Body of God* is cosmological.

In summary, this developed understanding of the self in the model of praxis suggests other layers of the self that can be turned upside down by the experience of God in the world. Different aspects of the self can be affected; these aspects, though, still affect the self as a whole due to the very understanding of the self as relational.

4.2.2 World

In Chapter Two, I described three aspects of the world in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. The world is, at one and the same time, a concrete place that is interpreted and constructed through metaphor, the place where we live and strive to make meaning and the secular existence of people in relationship with themselves and others. These three dimensions of the world can each be expanded and nuanced based upon McFague's insights in her ecotheology.

4.2.2.1 First Dimension: The World as a Concrete Place

The first dimension is of the world as a concrete place. In recognizing that the world is a specific place that is nevertheless constructed and interpreted through a human lens, McFague turns to the best of postmodern science to develop a construction and interpretation that is as accurate as possible for perceiving the world. The world now means the whole Earth, located within the emergent universe. The world is now perceived in its cosmological, evolutionary and ecological dimensions. The dimensions are reflected in each of the key aspects of the world: the world is characterized by radical interconnectedness, interrelatedness, and interdependence; it is marked by similarity and difference; it has macrocosmic and microcosmic dimensions; and it contains living and

non-living aspects.[467] What this means is that the world is both larger and closer than previously perceived. The world exists in the sun and the planets, but also in the plants and animals, elephants and bacteria. The world has a discrete and bounded reality that exists within, outside and beyond human experiences. The scope and scale of the world can be overwhelming; however, the very function of metaphor allows for human beings to perceive the world in ways that make it possible to accept the size of the world and at the same time make it manageable for day-to-day conceptualization.

In addition to the world now meaning the whole Earth within the emergent universe, the world now means a world *in crisis.* Postmodern science has, among other things, drawn human attention to the scale and scope of the ecological crisis. Human-caused ecological devastation is so wide-ranging and all-encompassing as to now be a constitutive feature of the Earth itself, and thus of the world as we are now defining it.[468]

The world, as interpreted by McFague in her ecotheology, is a place where human beings are no longer the central reference point. It is a marvellously complex, mysterious place where evolutionary and ecological processes exist for the functioning whole of the Earth, not merely for the purpose and pleasure of human beings. So too, the repercussions of the ecological crisis are not designed to bring down humanity, but are the consequences of human activities.

So the world, now, is larger and closer than we understood it to be before. While still magnificent and mysterious in its workings, the world is marked by a crisis never

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[467] This is the world described as the common creation story in *Body of God.*

[468] McFague is careful to point out that not all humans are equally responsible for the global ecological crisis. A social justice analysis is a critical part of understanding the world in crisis.

before experienced to this extent in Earth history. This new understanding of the world begs new metaphors that reflect the reality that we are starting to understand from postmodern science.

4.2.2.2 Second Dimension: The Place Where We Live and Strive to Make Meaning

It is the world as a concrete place that is the basis for the second dimension of the world. The place where we live and strive to make meaning has new and deeper dimensions than previously understood. Throughout human history, meaning has continued to unfold or change as human beings continually interpret and construct the world around them. What can be discovered through the expanded interpretation and construction of the world offered by McFague? New ideas can emerge: the world now offers a larger context in which to live and make meaning.

How might this happen? The common creation story suggests that the world *itself* matters; it is not merely a backdrop for human drama.[469] The world itself has life-giving import for people in times of trouble, joy, despair, and hope. By paying attention to the world in which we live, value and impact can be added for how we live and make meaning.

4.2.2.3 Third Dimension: The Secular Existence of People in Relationship

The third dimension of the world in the original definition is that of the secular existence of people in relationship. This dimension is referring to the mundane, ordinary relationships of people with each other. The larger understanding of the world now

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[469] McFague, *Body of God*, 45-47.

developed by McFague provides a greater framework for understanding these relationships; the context within which these relationships exist is larger. When we are located within a larger, more complex world than previously understood, there is greater opportunity, risk and challenge for perceiving human relationships.

McFague's ecological interpretation of the world also expands the idea of the secular existence of people in relationship to include our engagements with the other-than-human world as well as with other human beings. Some of this was addressed in discussing the concept of the self. Our mundane interactions with the natural world, in part, comprise the world in this expanded definition.

4.2.2.4 Implications

In discussing the meaning of the world through these three dimensions, some of the implications of this more developed understanding for the model of praxis become apparent. First, the deepened understanding of the world allows for more ways to experience God in the world. There is, quite simply, more 'world' than there was before. When one becomes more aware of the world, one can be open to more experiences of God in that world.

Second, the reality of the world in crisis must be recognized as part of the world itself. This means, then, that the reality of the ecological crisis has implications for all three dimensions of the world as a concrete place where human beings create meaning, and for the secular existence of human relationships. Questions that must be asked in this context are, how does the ecological crisis impact upon our ability to make meaning and what

meaning we derive? What is the impact of the ecological crisis upon our mundane, everyday relationships?

Third, we are again reminded about the importance of recognizing the interpretative and constructive reality of the world.[470] Using the best of science as a guide, there is value in emphasizing constructions that are life-giving and that make the world larger, rather than smaller.

Finally, the world is more than just a stage upon which the human drama is enacted. No matter how large the world becomes through scientific knowledge, if that knowledge does not change how we understand the role of the world in our capacity to live and make meaning, then it matters not a whit.

So to summarize: the world, developed with McFague's insights, is understood as the Earth located within universe history, now marked constitutively and irrevocably by the global ecological crisis. It is a complex, mysterious, concrete place that is continually constructed and interpreted through metaphor. It is the place within which human beings are embedded; the world, in its mystery and its crisis, is the source out of which human beings strive to live and make meaning in everyday, mundane relationship with the human and other-than-human communities of which they are a part. This is the world in which Christian discipleship is engaged.

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[470] There is a continual challenge of talking about the world as a concrete, objective reality, while at the same time realizing that our thoughts and words about the world are always interpretations and constructions. Throughout this thesis I discuss the world as a real place, as a world in crisis, et cetera, all the while recognizing that how I, and others, see that real place in crisis is through interpretation.

4.2.3 God

The emphasis placed on interpreting God in a parabolic understanding of discipleship is on the tentative, provisional nature of our constructions of God. All assertions about God are constructions created through metaphor.[471] Language about God is approached through indirection. In the definition of a model of praxis based upon McFague's ideas, we are offered a way to talk about God. From the parables and the central claims of the Christian tradition, God in this model is perceived as relational and on the side of life and its fulfillment.

What does ecotheology add to this interpretation? The insights from McFague's ecotheology can be used to develop the construct of God in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship while maintaining the provisos of tentativeness and openness to change. McFague's ecotheology is based upon the importance of our constructions of God. Her concern is for how such constructions affect our actions in the world. Therefore, how we comprehend God in the model of praxis is a crucial part of the model itself. We are reminded about what is at stake in our conceptions of the divine.

Constructions of God reflect the way that human beings perceive the God-world relationship. McFague adds to the cautions for assertions about God with four additional criteria for judging the adequacy of any construct for representing the Christian God-world relationship. She suggests that conceptions of God, in addition to being tentative, provisional and open to change, must 1) correspond to the best of postmodern science; 2)

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[471] McFague's earlier models of God as mother, lover and friend are not addressed in this thesis because they lie outside the scope of my question regarding ecological praxis. However, it could be interesting to see what light these models might shed on McFague's model of praxis more generally. See McFague, *Models of God*.

cohere with the central faith claims of the Christian tradition; 3) reflect our own embodied experience; and 4) lead to the well-being of the Earth and all of its life-forms.[472] The methodological base of the constructions – the 'is' and 'is not' function of metaphor, alongside the conceptual understanding of God as relational and on the side of life and its fulfillment – are now nuanced and deepened by these additional criteria.

These criteria can be used along with additional insights from McFague's ecotheology to develop what we understand about God in a parabolic understanding of discipleship. McFague suggests that a model of the universe as the body of God can be an empowering, life-giving model for a theology that can adequately respond to the ecological crisis. She uses this model to explore a God-world relationship that can be healing in the face of the ecological crisis. It is based upon the same criteria that underlie the comprehension of praxis in McFague's early work: understanding Christianity as an incarnational religion; a parabolic understanding of the divine present in mundane reality; and the need for a framework that can lead to effective human action.[473]

To probe how I might develop this understanding of God, I am not interested in the universe as the body of God *per se*. Rather, I am curious as to what that construct of God adds to understanding God in the God-world relationship. What are the qualities interpreted as being of God in this model? What assertions, however tentative, provisional and open to change, can be made? I suggest that there are two assertions that can be added to the early

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[472] McFague, "Imaging a Theology of Nature," 203.

[473] McFague's early work on the parables reflects a focus on everyday, ordinary life as it is infused with the divine. While her methodology and interests shift over time, the emphasis remains the same: the divine as present in the world.

understanding of God as relational and on the side of life and its fulfillment. They are God as God of all creation, and God as embodied.

4.2.3.1 God of All Creation

First, the universe as the body of God suggests that God is the God of all creation, not incidentally, but centrally.[474] This assertion suggests that God is fundamentally concerned for the whole world and is interested in the relationships between human beings and the rest of the natural world. McFague develops this idea when she calls for the need to know and love nature as an extension of the Christian imperative to love our neighbours. As we saw in my discussion of the self, McFague develops the theological implications of this into a more nuanced understanding of subjectivity. The idea that God is the God of all creation in a central rather than incidental way expands and enhances the previous assertion of God as on the side of life and its fulfillment. That God is also on the side of nonhuman life and its fulfillment is added to the construction of God.

4.2.3.2 God as Embodied

Second, the universe as the body of God suggests God as embodied. This is the central claim in McFague's ecotheology. This is a God who is panentheistic; God is in all things and all things are in God, but God is not exhausted by all things.[475] While all is

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[474] McFague, *Body of God*, 80.

[475] McFague writes:

> In the universe as a whole as well as in each and every bit and fragment of it, God's transcendence is embodied. The important word here is 'embodied': the transcendence of God is not available to us except as embodied. We do not see God's face, but only the back. But we *do* see the back.

- Note continues on next page. -

dependent upon God, God is not dependent upon all things. As I noted in Chapter Three, the understanding of God as panentheistic has a long trajectory within Christian traditions.

We can understand God as embodied by exploring the centrality of embodiment in McFague's work. There are four main points regarding the importance of embodiment: the character of embodiment; an embodiment ethic; a new paradigm for belief, language and action; and the importance of divine embodiment. The first, the character of embodiment, suggests that embodiment is characterized by commonality and diversity; while all that is exists as a body, all things have the characteristics of sharing commonalities with others and being radically diverse at the same time. In understanding God as embodied in this way, God is perceived, understood and experienced in ways common to each other (for example, God as relational and on the side of life), and in diverse ways at the same time, based upon our own human contextual locations.

Second, there is an ethic of justice rooted within the concept of embodiment. A God who is embodied is a God of justice. This is a God who is centrally concerned about the oppressed and marginalized. This includes, in the context of global ecological devastation, divine concern for the nonhuman world.

Third, the concept of embodiment presents a new paradigm for understanding the relationship among belief, language and action. God as embodied offers a larger framework which incorporates more of human action, for example, bringing concerns regarding human action in relation to the ecological crisis into sharp relief. God as embodied highlights, in a

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The world (universe) as God's body is also, then, a radicalization of divine immanence, for God is not present to us in just one place (Jesus of Nazareth, although also and especially, paradigmatically there), but in and through all bodies, the bodies of the sun and moon, trees and rivers, animals, and people. McFague, *Body of God*, 133.

more constitutive and nuanced way, the implications of how our belief, language and action are interrelated.

Finally, embodiment in McFague's work refers to divine embodiment. God as embodied makes the very fact of our embodiment a sacred aspect of our existence.[476] This holds for the nonhuman world (in its living and nonliving aspects), as well as for human beings.

4.2.3.3 Implications

The implications of interpreting God in a parabolic understanding of discipleship with the insights from McFague's ecotheology are several. First, the reminder that human constructions of God affect our actions in the world makes clearer the need for indirection and tentativeness in any claims about God. The 'is' and 'is not' character of God-talk is emphasized. Second, additional criteria are added for determining the adequacy of models of God for the relationship between God and the world. In addition to the requirements of tentativeness and openendedness, there are the requirements of coherence with science, a valid interpretation of Christian faith, reflection of human experience, and leading to the well-being of the whole Earth, not just human beings.

Finally, the most important implication is that new ways of understanding God in the model of praxis can lead to new experiences *of* God in the world. That is because one can learn to recognize God in the world in ways not previously considered. God as

[476] Ibid., 84.

embodied and as the God of all creation are extending metaphors in that they offer new means for recognizing and experiencing the divine in the world.

In summary, God in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship can now be defined as follows. God is understood as relational, embodied, and on the side of life and its fulfillment in all its forms. God is understood as the God of all creation in a central, not incidental, way.

4.2.4 Experience

In the model of praxis, experience is recognized as rooted in ordinary experiences as well as life's seminal moments. Such experience is always embodied and contextually specific. With the insights from McFague's ecotheology, what experience means in the model is widened. There are two main ideas: an expanded understanding of experience as embodied and the relationship between knowing and experience.

4.2.4.1 Experience as Embodied

In McFague's early work, she recognizes the importance of embodiment to experience; we are bodies that experience.[477] In her ecotheology, to say that experience is embodied is to add some critical points. The first is the recognition that experience occurs not just in our bodies, but through our bodies. McFague understands "bodily experience as

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[477] McFague's early work addresses two aspects of experience and embodiment. First, she discusses embodied language, which reflects interpretations of our experiences. McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 15. Second, in her metaphorical theology the discussion revolves around the contextuality of our experiences. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 2-3.

a primordial reality."[478] This is the beginning point and returning reference point for understanding experience. McFague explains:

> Experience is *felt* experience, the experience of bodies at the most elemental level. Experience begins with feelings of hot and cold, hunger and satiety, comfort and pain, the most basic ways in which all creatures live in their environments.[479]

This primordial reality is the reality of physical experience.

The second point to be made is that the centrality of embodiment in McFague's ecotheology merges with her position on an Earth-based starting point. Understanding experience as embodied from an Earth-based starting point offers new insights into how human beings are connected, through experience, with the other-than-human world. The basic level of bodily experience, McFague suggests,

> connects us in a web of universal experience making possible an ever-widening inclusive sympathy for the pains and pleasures of creatures like and unlike ourselves. . . . Through our bodies, in their agonies and ecstasies that lie behind and beyond all linguistic expression, we are bound into a network of relations with our natural environment and experience ourselves as bodies with other bodies."[480]

So then we are connected, through our experience, with the rest of the natural world. Although, as I discussed earlier, experience is always interpreted through metaphor, human connection with the natural world through experience occurs before the interpretation of the experience.

The third point regarding experience as embodied extends the contextual specificity of experience. In McFague's early work she recognizes that experience is socially, historically and ecologically located. Understanding embodied experience to include

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[478] McFague, *Body of God*, 86.

[479] Ibid.

[480] Ibid.

human connection and continuity with the other-than-human world further nuances the contextual specificity of our experience. It is important to recognize how our experience is contextually located within the natural world. The very fact that we are human contextualizes our experience as *human* experience. Experience is also rooted in specific ecological locations on the Earth. Our own ecological contexts colour the interpretations we make of our experiences.[481] Ultimately, the social, historical and economic locations of our experiences need to be interpreted within the larger ecological contexts of those realities.[482]

4.2.4.2 Relationship between Knowing and Experience

McFague's work on the need to know and love nature offers contributions to developing the idea of experience in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. There is a relationship between knowing and doing that is brought to light in McFague's ecotheology. What we know and what we experience are intimately related.[483] There is a dialectical relationship between knowing and experience; we know what we do through our experiences of the world (and how we interpret those experiences). In turn, our experiences

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[481] Whether we live in the sub-Saharan desert, the boreal forest of eastern Canada or the rainforests of Brazil, each affects our experience and the interpretations of our experiences.

[482] Elsewhere, I argue that contextual theology needs to take into consideration the ecological contexts in which theology is engaged, particularly when responding to the ecological crisis. See Jessica Fraser, "Knowing our Context: Ecological Literacy and Movement Toward a Canadian Ecofeminist Theology," in *Feminist Theology with a Canadian Accent: Canadian Perspectives on Contextual Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary Ann Beavis with Elaine Guillemin and Barbara Pell (Ottawa: Novalis, 2008), 255-272, 420-423.

[483] Although the relationship between knowing and experience does not have to depend on the subject-subjects model that McFague presents, her argument is that relating in a subject-subjects manner expands and nuances both knowledge and experience better than a subject-object model. McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*.

are based upon our knowledge of the world. Our knowledge of the world encompasses our worldviews, contextual locations and specific disciplinary studies of the world around us.

McFague calls for the need to know and love nature as our neighbour, in an echo of the Christian demand to love our neighbour. The importance of knowing in relation to experience suggests that the need to know and love nature is extended as an imperative to both educate and nurture experience in a manner that reflects what postmodern science teaches us about the natural world. In turn, our own embodied, contextually specific experience can help foster knowledge of the natural world and the human place in the world.

4.2.4.3 Implications

There are several implications of experience as embodied and as related to knowing in the model of praxis. The first is that there is a physicality at the base of all experience, even when experience is not recognized as physical. In whatever way experience is interpreted through metaphor, primordial bodily experience is its foundation. Bodily experience in relation to discipleship is ripe for further exploration.

The second implication is that experience can be educated. Our knowledge can be educated by our experience, and in turn we can nurture experience through specific knowledge. By acknowledging and developing our understanding of the contexts of our lives; by learning more about the other-than-human world; by educating ourselves specifically in relation to the ecological crisis: each of these examples and others can lead to experiences that have parabolic implications for discipleship. McFague's work on an Earth-based starting point, the need to know and love nature and the importance of an ethic

of care all point to the significance of nurturing experience in response to the demands of the ecological crisis and the need for a religious response.

The third implication is that of considering the purpose of experience in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. Human experience has been the implicit, and sometimes explicit, base of the key insights in McFague's ecotheology. McFague has been influenced by the emphasis that Kaufman and Gustafson place on the priority of human experience over the metaphors, models, doctrines, and dogmas that follow from such experience. Late in her scholarship, McFague queries the purpose of experience for theology. Experience, McFague says, "is the channel, not the content, of Christian theology."[484] The focus is not on the inner experience of individuals for the attainment of happiness or material success. Instead, it is about how human experience of the world, God and others reflects upon and influences experiences of God's love in the world.[485]

So the point then of human experience in McFague's model of praxis is not the experience itself. The point is the revelation of God through experience. McFague keeps such experience grounded when she states:

> This does not mean 'religious' experience. It means ordinary experience: the revelation of God's liberating love comes to us in the ordinary round of our lives as we comfort an elderly neighbor who has lost his wife, think about the value of the work we are doing, campaign for a politician who backs public transit, worry about a child's drug use. Through these experiences, we glimpse, now and then, God's liberating love at work.[486]

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[484] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 52.

[485] Ibid.

[486] Ibid., 53.

Experience, thus, is the channel of Christian faith. In the triad of belief, language and action, experience functions as the continuing fund of belief that is transformed by and through language and action.

To summarize, what is experience in the model of praxis, as it is now understood through insights from McFague's ecotheology? Experience is primordially embodied and contextually specific within an Earth-based starting point. It encompasses quotidian reality as well as the great moments in life; such experience is the channel for God's liberating love in the world.

4.2.5 The Model of Praxis and the Ecological Crisis

Let me return to the definition of the model of praxis that I constructed in Chapter Two. Constructed from the insights offered in McFague's early scholarship, it refers to a radical disorientation of the self in response to experiencing God in the world, leading to a permanent reorientation of the self in the world, evidenced in dramatic and enduring lifestyle changes. Based upon the main contributions in McFague's ecotheology, I have developed this model by exploring the terms self, God, world, and experience. Based upon these key words, a developed model of praxis that can respond to the ecological crisis is one characterized by radical relationality, primordial embodiment and contextuality within a meaningful Earth community that is constitutively and permanently marked by global ecological devastation.

I believe that the original definition that I created can hold this more developed understanding. Not only can it function in response to the ecological crisis, I suggest that it can make human action in response to other demands of the contemporary era more

fruitful, meaningful and effective. That said, a way to define the model of praxis, developed with McFague's own contributions in ecotheology, might be as follows:

- The deep disorientation of a radically relational self in relationship with all that exists,
- experiencing the embodied God of all creation in a world marked by mystery and crisis,
- and the subsequent permanent reorientation of the self in the world,
- evidenced in dramatic and enduring lifestyle changes that reflect the hope for healing and reconciliation with a devastated Earth.

Given the developed understanding of the model of praxis, I would now like to reflect on two central features to the model: the disorientation and reorientation that is at its heart and the basis of the model in belief, language and action.

4.2.5.1 Disorientation and Reorientation in Light of the Ecological Crisis

I suggest that, in light of the ecological crisis, the horizon of meaning within which the destabilizing process of the model of praxis occurs is enlarged. There are three ways in which this is so: 1) by the location of the human within an Earth-based starting point; 2) by a new understanding of what sin means; and 3) by the reality of the ecological crisis itself.

First, an Earth-based starting point enlarges the context within and the ground upon which the destabilization occurs. Human beings are now part of an ecological context; the question of who we are in the scheme of things and what is required of us radically reorients the human on the Earth. The disorientation and reorientation schema first described by Ricoeur and adopted by McFague is precisely about the perturbation of who

we are and what is required of us in response to experiencing God in the world.[487] The new answers provided by an Earth-based starting point offer new points for both a radical disorientation of the self and a resulting reorientation of the self in the world.

Second, an Earth-based starting point in relation to a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship suggests a new understanding of sin, a comprehension that can help trigger the process of this model of praxis. Insight into that which distorts our relationships with God can instigate the deformation of regular existence within an extraordinary context. Within McFague's ecotheology, sin is understood as the refusal to accept our place in the world, or the deliberate limitation of our understanding of the self despite the ecological insights coming from postmodern science.[488]

As we become more aware of this notion of sin and allow it to seep into our consciousness, I believe that it can function as instigation for the disorientation and reorientation of the self in response to experiencing God. A deep feeling of a broken or distorted relationship with God can lead to the changes required in a parabolic understanding of discipleship.

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[487] Although both Ricoeur and McFague discuss disorientation and reorientation in the context of the parables, they are aware of the implications for human life in the world. Ricoeur writes:

> Political discourse therefore is no less oriented, disoriented, and reoriented than any other form of discourse; and the specific way in which it is disoriented and reoriented is that it becomes the place for the insertion of an impossible demand, a demand that we can validly interpret in utopian terms, meaning by this a question that cannot be exhausted by any program of action. Paradox then does not strike *praxis* any less than it does *theoria*, political *praxis* any less than the *praxis* of private morality. It just prevents us from converting religious discourse entirely into political discourse – for the same reasons that it forbids its conversion into moral discourse, even if this morality is elevated to the dignity of proverbial wisdom. Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 126-127.

[488] In *Body of God*, McFague describes sin as "the refusal to accept our place" in the world (112). She is more specific in *Life Abundant*: "Sin for twenty-first-century middle-class Christians is simply 'living the way everyone does' – in silent complicity with the structures of evil that grow from the insatiable desires of millions of privileged individuals" (117). Both definitions are based upon the idea of sin as a distortion of one's relationship with God.

Third, I also believe that the reality of the ecological crisis can lead to the disorientation and reorientation at work in the model. As its effects hit home more directly and immediately for individuals and communities, these effects might *be* the very placement of the ordinary within the extraordinary. Many examples abound: extreme weather events that accumulate faster and faster; increasing rates of environmentally-related childhood diseases; an upsurge in the number of environmental refugees; and greater threats to national and international security caused by natural disasters and human desperation. These and other examples might be what cause people to experience the deformation of ordinary existence within extraordinary contexts.

4.2.5.2 Belief, Language and Action

In the model of praxis as I have now developed it, how are we to interpret the methodology of the model? In Chapter Two, I stated that the methodological basis of the model of praxis is the function of metaphor in the relationship among belief, language and action. Belief, language and action form and inform each other in a movement between the 'is' and 'is-not' of metaphor. In a developed model that may be effective in responding to the ecological crisis, the methodological basis of the model is unchanged. The metaphorical movement among belief, language and action continues. Now though, the opportunity is for this process to be deliberately and deeply influenced by the insights offered by McFague's ecotheology. There is opportunity for the relationship among belief, language and action to become infused with the qualities discovered through McFague's work on ecotheology, such as primordial creaturely and divine embodiment; radical relationality among all living and nonliving things; the importance of an Earth-based starting point within an emergent

universe; the pervasive and constitutive nature of the ecological crisis; and the demand for an ethic of care for all creation.

To recognize these aspects in the dynamic of belief, language and action is not a certain reality. This is because of the interpretative nature of the dynamic itself. The function of metaphor, as I discussed in Chapter Two, operates through humans' interpretation of the world around them. As I noted in Chapter Three, it has been a problem of interpreting the meaning of the natural world, the role of human beings, and the nature of God that has led, among other things, to the ecological crisis. Although McFague bases the insights that she develops in her ecotheology upon postmodern science, it needs to be the conscious choice of human beings to incorporate such ideas into their belief, language and action. I will use the example of the self to illustrate this point. We are *already* radically interrelated and interdependent selves with the other-than-human as well as human communities in which we are immersed. Postmodern science offers this viable interpretation of the data. The opportunity is to come to recognize this interpretation and allow it to be reflected in our belief, language and action.

A final point to be made is that deciding to incorporate these ideas into our belief, language and action and the metaphors within which they operate is merely the first step. The extent to which factors such as our primordial bodiliness in relationship with the natural world and the understanding of a God of all creation play into our beliefs, language and our actions is just being intuited now. Despite years of work in science, religion, ecology, and other disciplines, the ideas reflected in McFague's ecotheology and elsewhere

have not yet shifted cultural worldviews.[489] We do not understand, at a sufficient depth, what it means to be part of the Earth community. At the moment we merely have intimations, intuition into what it might mean.

However, the reach and scope of the ecological crisis presents a demand that cannot wait for human worldviews to shift. The demand is to operate from the intuitions we have gained and develop ecological praxes that may be appropriate responses to worldwide ecological devastation. This is where the dynamic nature, as well as the hope, of the model of praxis comes into play. The model is open-ended; it calls for the placement of the ordinary within the extraordinary through experience of God in the world. Since the model is about experiencing God in the world, we are not depending upon ourselves alone to figure it all out. Intimation and intuition can be enough to lead to the disorientation and reorientation that characterizes a parabolic understanding of discipleship.

4.3 Praxis in McFague's Ecotheology: A Shift in Language

It is time now to consider the model of praxis, as I have developed it with insights from McFague's ecotheology, in relation to the praxis language that she employs in her ecotheology. As I stated in Chapter Two, McFague does not use the term *praxis* in her early work but has a complex understanding of the relationship among belief, language and action that reflects a nuanced comprehension of praxis. It is this early understanding that

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[489] This is not to say that individual worldviews have not changed, or that a worldview such as that promoted by McFague and other theologians does not appear in civil society. The Earth Charter is a civil society document that reflects a worldview of the human embedded in the life systems of the Earth. However, the worldview presented in McFague's ecotheology and elsewhere is not yet reflected in dominant cultural, political or economic structures. See, for example, Earth Charter Initiative, "The Earth Charter" (San Jose, Costa Rica: Earth Charter Initiative, 2000), http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/echarter_english.pdf (accessed September 14, 2012).

actually informs the entire corpus of her theology, although the word is a recent addition. The actual *language* of praxis, the use of the term as a specific action concept, only becomes present in McFague's work when she begins her investigations in ecotheology.

McFague's choice of the term 'praxis' at this point in her scholarship is interesting for two reasons. First, her use of the word reflects an increasingly explicit concern for action in response to contemporary problems. Second, McFague's employment of the term to denote behaviour in response to the ecological crisis varies as she develops different aspects of her ecotheology. As I will discuss, it is important to understand how the meaning of praxis changes in her ecotheology so that we can reflect on what this implies regarding a parabolic understanding of discipleship. As I will explain, the choice to use the term 'praxis,' and the fluctuating meaning of the term as she uses it, reflect ways in which McFague's comprehension of the term increases in the context of theology and ecology.

But why switch to praxis language in the first place? As I have analyzed, McFague's understanding of praxis is based upon the relationship among belief, language and action to reflect a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. This is present throughout McFague's work. Why *now* does she finally start to use the term?

4.3.1 Choosing to Talk about Praxis

As I stated earlier in the dissertation, the methodological root of McFague's understanding of praxis is located within her work on parabolic theology and the function of religious autobiography. However, McFague's *choice* in using the term in her ecotheology reflects two streams of thought that emphasize the consequences of our models and concepts about God and the world. The first is a pragmatist view of truth and

rationality offered by Richard J. Bernstein and others,[490] and the second is the emphasis on praxis in liberation theology. McFague writes:

> The heavily pragmatic view of truth suggested here is similar to that of some liberation theologians and rests on an understanding of 'praxis' not simply as action vs. theory, but as a kind of reflection, one guided by practical experience. Negatively, praxis is the awareness that human beings cannot rely on ahistorical, universal truths and positively, it is the realization that human life is fundamentally practical. Hence, in this view, knowledge is not the correspondence of some understanding of reality with 'reality-as-it-is,' but it is a continual process of analysis, explanation, conversation, and application with both theoretical and practical aspects. Such knowledge is grounded in concrete history within the norms, values, and hopes of communities. While I would not identify my position with the extremes of pragmatism, it is, nonetheless, a healthy reminder that religious truth, whatever may be the case with other kinds of truth, is intrinsically concerned with issues of value, of consequences, of the quality of lived experience.[491]

McFague's new use of the term praxis reflects her increasing conviction that a theology that advocates on the side of the poor and vulnerable is essential, and must now include

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[490] McFague is influenced by the work of Richard J. Bernstein on the question of rationality and truth in epistemology. Drawing upon his thinking, McFague suggests some characteristics of rationality as

> an historically-situated, nonalgorithmic, flexible understanding of human rationality; one which highlights the tacit dimension of human judgment and imagination; one that is sensitive to the unsuspected contingencies and genuine novelties in particular situations; one that is animated by a practical-moral concern with the threats to and prospects for human judgment and imagination – in other words, overall, a basically practical understanding of truth and rationality. McFague, "The Theologian as Advocate," *Theological Education* 25 (Spring 1989): 86.

See Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

Another way that McFague apprehends a pragmatic understanding of truth, one that reflects McFague's interest in metaphor, is offered by Mary Hesse:

> We need a quite different theory of truth which will be characterized by consensus and coherence rather than by correspondence, by holism of meanings rather than atomism, by metaphor and symbol rather than by literalism and univocity, by intrinsic judgments of value as well as of fact. Mary B. Hesse, "Cosmology as Myth," in *Cosmology and Theology*, ed. David Tracy and Nicholas Lash (New York: Seabury Press, 1983): 54; quoted in Sallie McFague, "Cosmology and Christianity," 31 n13.

[491] McFague, "Theologian as Advocate," 88. This quote also reflects the thought of Rebecca Chopp. See Chopp, *Praxis of Suffering*.

concern for the Earth within its orbit. By choosing the term, she is recognizing the links between the concerns of liberation theology and those of ecological theology:

> It seems to me that this latest shift in 20th-century theology is not to a different issue from that of liberation theologies, but to a deepening of it, a recognition that the fate of the oppressed and the fate of the earth are inextricably interrelated, for we all live on one planet – a planet vulnerable to our destructive behavior.[492]

Ecological theology, like liberation theology, must be a prophetic voice emphasizing the consequences of our thinking about God, the world and ourselves.[493] Although McFague has always been concerned about the consequences of metaphors for life and liberation, her choice to use the word 'praxis' reflects the specific context of ecology within the realm of her consideration.

4.3.2 Praxis: Changing Meaning

Once McFague shifts her language within her ecotheology, she begins to utilize the concept of praxis within her methodology. 'Praxis' becomes the term around which McFague works with her ideas on an Earth-based starting point, embodiment, the need to know and love nature, and the importance of an ethic of care. In doing so, the meaning of praxis within McFague's work fluctuates as she works through subsequent ideas. There are three meanings of praxis in McFague's ecotheology: 1) praxis as right action; 2) praxis as loving nature as one's neighbour; and 3) ecological praxis as consumption reduction.

As I have stated, it is McFague's understanding of ecological praxis as consumption reduction that is the direction of change to which she wants people to head. It is this

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[492] Sallie McFague, "An Earthly Theological Agenda," 12.

[493] Ibid., 14.

understanding of dramatic lifestyle changes that is at the foundation of the model of praxis. I will be exploring its theological dimensions and implications in light of the model in the next section. Here I will discuss the three meanings as they reflect a deepening complexity in McFague's work on what praxis means in relation to a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, particularly in the context of the ecological crisis.

4.3.2.1 Praxis as Right Action

In the beginning of McFague's foray into ecotheology, she utilizes the term 'praxis' to situate the goal for her theology. McFague's goal is to have privileged individuals – white, middle-class, first-world, et cetera – begin to think and act differently in response to the ecological crisis.[494] Unlike her careful parsing of the word 'action' in her early work,[495] McFague does not spend time defining the term 'praxis'; she simply refers to it as "right action."[496] Praxis is the overarching agenda for her work at this time. She is introducing readers to a theology of nature out of a concern for human behaviour. "This agenda, then . . . is concerned with how one conducts the main business of one's day."[497]

Praxis as right action is centered upon the relationship between knowledge and action. As McFague works through the centrality of embodiment for ecotheology, she recognizes embodiment as central to praxis. McFague suggests that "right action or praxis

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[494] McFague, *Body of God*, viii.

[495] See Section 2.3 of Chapter Two.

[496] McFague, *Body of God*, 48.

[497] Ibid., 10.

begins from embodiment as well."[498] In this, McFague is beginning to intuit what I developed in the first part of this chapter: that embodiment plays a central role in a parabolic understanding of discipleship in response to the ecological crisis.

It is, however, merely an intuition at this point. Although McFague pays a lot of attention to developing the idea of embodiment for ecotheology, she does not develop it in relation to the question of praxis at this stage. In my opinion, this can lead to an insufficient understanding of the complexity of praxis in McFague's work. A reading of praxis as right action, without an appreciation for the model of praxis that grounds her understanding, can lead to a simplistic understanding of a linear trajectory between thought and action. Once we change our thinking on issues such as the value of the natural world, the interconnectedness of human and other-than-human nature, and the devastation of the Earth, then our behaviour will change. The suggestion at this point in McFague's use of the term praxis is to think differently, then act differently. The dynamic relationship among belief, language and action in the model of praxis belies this assumption.

I do not believe that it is McFague's intent to present such a simple conception of praxis. She spends more of her time at this point in developing the ideas and models behind a praxis of response to the ecological crisis rather than the concept of praxis itself. It is with the move to the second meaning of praxis that McFague begins to work explicitly with the idea.

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[498] Ibid., 48.

4.3.2.2 Praxis as Loving Nature as Neighbour

The second meaning of 'praxis' in McFague's work is that of loving nature as our neighbour. As McFague works with the importance of knowing and loving nature, she argues for a Christian nature spirituality as "Christian praxis extended to the natural world."[499] Located within an Earth-based starting point, McFague draws upon the Christian demand to love our neighbour to argue for an extension of that demand to the nonhuman world. How should Christians love nature? McFague asks. By paying attention to it, is her answer. She says, "[W]e must pay attention – detailed, careful, concrete attention – to the world that lies around us but is not us."[500] McFague uses the subject-subjects model of knowing to describe how we can pay attention, and thus come to love, nature as our neighbour.

McFague's claim, as I explored in Chapter Three, is that human beings will not take care of what we do not know, and that we cannot know something without experiencing it. Therefore, she says, a praxis of loving nature requires that people experience nature in a manner that allows for the subject-subjects model of knowing. She suggests that experiences of "wildness" are necessary, in which we experience the other-than-human world on its own terms. In wildness, which can be in a vacant lot in the city, suburban parks, or what is considered wilderness, nature others can be observed. McFague also

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[499] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 9.

[500] Ibid., 29.

suggests that learning to love nature through this model can happen by reading the work of nature writers who are able to capture the subjectivity of nature others in their work.[501]

Through this attention to wildness and the work of nature writers, I think that McFague is intuiting the possibilities for a parabolic experience of God in the world, experienced through paying attention to Earth others. She has a sense of how belief, language and action can be transformed through a subject-subjects model of knowing and loving nature.

However, I have a problem with how McFague is utilizing the term ‘praxis’ here. She seems to have taken a turn away from the earlier definition of right action. By explicitly referring to the form of Christian nature spirituality she advocates as praxis, McFague is setting up a dichotomy with action. In defining Christian spirituality, McFague states:

> Christian spirituality is not, then, principally, a ‘religious’ relationship. It is not mainly or only about a relationship with God: the individual alone with God, as some popular views of it would suggest. In these views, spirituality is opposite of ethics, whereas it should actually be seen as the *preparation or grounding for action.*”[502]

McFague also states that, “Prayer and action must go together.”[503] Although she is right to refuse a dichotomy between spirituality and ethics, McFague has distinctly separated praxis

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[501] McFague discusses with approval the writings of Sharon Butala, Annie Dillard and Sue Hubbell, whose work, McFague believes, can instill a love of nature. Ibid., 137-147. Sharon Butala, *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994); Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*; and Sue Hubbell, *A Country Year: Living the Questions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

[502] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians,* 10; emphasis mine.

[503] Ibid.

from the action that is to follow. This contradicts the function of a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship.

This is a real weakness in McFague's use of the term 'praxis' in her ecotheology. It not only contradicts the function of McFague's model of praxis, it also contradicts social scientific understandings of praxis such as that of Paulo Freire.[504] This is a material error.

I think that the corrective to this error lies within McFague's understanding of Christian discipleship. The confusion lies not so much in how McFague now understands praxis, but in her inconsistent use of the term here. The call for a nature spirituality that is prepared to regard Earth others and love them as nature fits into the disorientation-reorientation schema. Through a subject-subjects model of knowing and loving nature, a radical disorientation and reorientation of the self is possible. This is not the praxis *per se.* The praxis will be how one's behaviour is changed as a result of such spirituality.

4.3.2.3 Ecological Praxis as Consumption Reduction

In fact, McFague recognizes and corrects her error in referring to Christian nature spirituality as praxis when she moves to discuss an ecological praxis of consumption reduction. It is in her book *Super, Natural Christians* that she calls for the praxis of loving nature as neighbour. McFague makes a new realization after its publication:

> After completing *Super, Natural Christians* I realized love was not enough. I realized that we middle-class North American Christians are destroying nature, not because we do not love it, but because of the way we live: our ordinary, taken-for-granted high-consumer lifestyle. I realized that the matter of loving nature was a deep, complex, tricky question involving greed, indifference, and denial.[505]

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[504] See Section 1.5.2 of Chapter One.

[505] McFague, *Life Abundant*, xi.

McFague apprehends that a specific praxis of consumption reduction is what is necessary as a theological and religious response to the ecological crisis. Praxis takes on a very specific definition. A Christian ecological praxis, in the North American middle-class context, is a sharp and lasting reduction in our normal, everyday patterns of consumption. McFague is not calling for minor changes in our habits of consuming, changes that might relieve our guilt over our contributions to ecological devastation but otherwise leave the institutions and mechanisms for such damage intact. Neither is she advocating what social ecologist Chaia Heller calls "consumer ecology," whereby moral and spiritual meaning is loaded onto a "green" consumerism.[506] Instead McFague is calling for a dramatic and permanent change to how millions of ordinary, middle-class Westerners live their lives. Not just a change in what we buy, but in how much. This is what praxis now means for McFague.

As I stated at the outset of this dissertation, the phrase 'ecological praxis' refers to the radical reduction in consumption that McFague is advocating. Quite simply, that is what ecological praxis means for McFague. I am, therefore, using the term in the same vein. There are certainly other forms of praxis that can be a response to the ecological crisis. In this case, however, I am adhering to what ecological praxis means for McFague.

McFague's work on ecological praxis reflects many of the insights and intuitions she has developed over the course of her scholarship on the relationship among belief, language and action, as well as her insights in ecotheology. Ecological praxis is an example

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[506] Heller, *Ecology of Everyday Life*, 22.

of the 'dramatic and enduring lifestyle changes' that she advocates as a result of a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. Such praxis has a number of theological dimensions and implications for the development of McFague's model of praxis so that it might offer an adequate response to the ecological crisis. Thus, a fuller discussion of the meaning and dimensions of ecological praxis in McFague's work is needed.

4.4 Interpreting Ecological Praxis Through a Parabolic Understanding of Christian Discipleship

To recall, a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship forms the basis of McFague's comprehension of and call for ecological praxis. Such understanding forms the methodology at the foundation of McFague's work. Since McFague's comprehension of praxis is only implicit throughout McFague's *oeuvre*, a model of praxis based upon her ideas needed to be constructed in order to highlight her ideas and demonstrate their richness for McFague's grasp of ecological praxis. I did so in Chapter Two. The model then needed to be developed so that it could be responsive to the theological and ethical demands of the ecological crisis itself. Because McFague's own work on ecotheology is rich and substantive, I used the main insights from her ecotheology, presented in Chapter Three, to develop the model in the first part of this chapter.

It was then instructive to explore where McFague does use the term 'praxis,' which first emerges in her ecotheology. The use of the term, and its shifting meanings as she works through the major insights in her ecotheology, reflect upon the meaning of a parabolic understanding of discipleship in light of the ecological crisis.

I am now moving to a discussion of ecological praxis itself. Having constructed and developed a model of praxis that is behind McFague's call for ecological praxis, I am now able to highlight the theological and ethical dimensions of such praxis. As I shall analyze in the following pages, an ecological praxis of consumption reduction has theological implications that go beyond a mere exhortation for using less stuff. Ecological praxis is about one's participation in the love and reign of God in the world.

4.4.1 The Purpose of Ecological Praxis: Christian Discipleship

I have stated in this dissertation that McFague's concern, throughout nearly four decades of scholarship, is for Christian discipleship. Discipleship is the living out of Christian belief in the world. For McFague, the purpose of ecological praxis is Christian discipleship.[507] Discipleship, in this understanding, is not meant to be a contrast to or superseding of the goal of limiting human harm of the natural world. Instead, within a Christian context, especially for the North American middle-class, ecological reparation is ultimately an issue of discipleship.

McFague's concern for discipleship takes various directions in her work, as I have identified in Chapters Two and Three. She returns explicitly to the idea of discipleship when she examines the theological implications and demand for ecological praxis. Another way that McFague explains Christian discipleship is to suggest that it "is loving the world."[508] She continues, "Made in God's image, we are to grow into that reality by doing

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[507] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 15.

[508] Ibid., 13.

what God does: love the world."[509] Loving the world is a concrete, practical, everyday matter. It is about how we act in the world, as opposed to a contemporary vision of love as an amorphous feeling. McFague is influenced by Dorothy Day and others who write about love in concrete terms. Day says in *The Long Loneliness*, "But the final word is love. At times it has been . . . a harsh and dreadful thing, and our very faith in love has been tried through fire."[510]

So then, McFague explores ecological praxis as a concrete manifestation of God's love in the world. This is Christian discipleship, McFague avers:

> Christian discipleship in our time, if it is to express love for God and for the earth, must be one of self-limitation, sacrifice, and sharing so that the neighbors, all God's creatures, might flourish. Christians are called, I believe, not only to embody an alternative vision of the abundant life, but also to help move our social, political, and financial institutions in this direction.[511]

This is an understanding of discipleship that is contextually specific in response to the demands of the world today. It is also embodied; it is a model of Christian belief that reflects a notion of the self as radically relational with the human and other-than-human communities on the Earth. It also reflects a vision of God as the God of all creation. It is an understanding of Christian discipleship that, while echoing McFague's early concern at the beginning of her scholarship, also reflects the insights McFague has developed in her metaphorical and ecological theologies.

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[509] Ibid.

[510] Day, *Long Loneliness*, 285.

[511] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 23.

McFague also refers to discipleship with two other terms, right action and cruciform living. As I will note below, the ideas of discipleship as love, right action and cruciform living are interconnected.

4.4.2 Discipleship as Right Action

McFague equates Christian discipleship with right action in her ecotheology.[512] While it appears to be a simple equation, it is far from simplistic. McFague's understanding of right action is that it is making "our action as close to God's will as we can discern."[513] Theology is to help in this endeavour. When considering discipleship as Christian belief lived out in the world, the emphasis is on the action:

> While a Christian hopes that his or her real beliefs will be Christian, one cannot fall back on avowed beliefs in fear of what the real ones may or may not produce. The Christian tradition is wide and deep, with more room for genuinely held and carefully thought through positions than many suppose. And, as the saints often remind us, right action is more essential than right doctrine, or as John Woolman . . . put it, "Conduct is more convincing than words." Indeed it is.[514]

As discussed in Chapter Two, McFague is influenced by John Woolman and Dorothy Day in her understanding of discipleship as right action and as love. For these religious revolutionaries and for McFague, love is lived out through right action. This is the meaning of discipleship.

I write in the discipline of ethics, and the question of praxis as a religious response to the crises of the current era is often relegated to that domain. Yet McFague's

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[512] Ibid., 15.

[513] Ibid.

[514] Ibid.

understanding of Christian discipleship places concern for ecological praxis as a central theological matter, not to be sidelined to one subsection of theology. It is, for example, a matter of Christian anthropology: "The question for Christian anthropology is how human beings should live *in this world*."[515] It is also a soteriological issue: ecological praxis is a matter of our salvation. McFague argues:

> [T]heology by relatively comfortable North American Christians ought not to focus on personal salvation, in this world or the next, but on lifestyle limitations . . . making sacrifices so that others might live."[516]

Through McFague's understanding of ecological praxis, salvation must be focused on contemporary life lived in community, rather than an individualized, otherworldly sense.[517]

The issue of right action in ecological praxis is also a question of sin. One of the theological implications of ecological praxis is what it means if it is not engaged. In *Life Abundant*, McFague discusses consumption reduction within the context of free market capitalism. In what I consider to be one of McFague's most profound and challenging statements regarding the need for ecological praxis, she writes:

> Christians, in our time, should see market capitalism as presently practiced as one of the most explicit and recognizable forms of sin. Sin for twenty-first century North American middle-class Christians is simply 'living the way everyone does' – in silent complicity with the structures of evil that grow from the insatiable desires of millions of privileged individuals.[518]

In this definition, sin is understood to be relational; it is about our relationship with God, the world and others. As a relational, or communal, concept, the systemic nature of sin can

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[515] Ibid., 21.

[516] Ibid., 33.

[517] Willis Jenkins explores the terrain of soteriology within ecotheology and environmental ethics in his work. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 2.

[518] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 117.

be recognized. Sin becomes built into our institutions, rites and rituals around which we relate to others and to the Earth.[519] This idea challenges the contemporary idea of sin as a principally individual matter, to be dealt with solely between the person and God.[520]

So then, if living the way that everyone does, the way that we have always done, comprises sin, and that sin is systemic in nature, what is the alternative? For McFague it is the ecological praxis of consumption reduction. Such praxis, she suggests, can challenge the sinful structures that encourage rampant consumerism, destruction of the Earth, and extreme poverty around the world. Such praxis can restore our relationships with God and our human and other-than-human neighbours.

Ecological praxis, as I discussed earlier, is extremely difficult for individuals to pursue, requiring enormous levels of energy and restraint. McFague recognizes the challenge of this.[521] She notes that Christians have often felt called to discipleship through a christological vision. Such a vision could help with the ecological praxis required of us. McFague writes:

> An ecological economic Christology summarized by the phrase 'God with us' focuses on the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth for the content of our praxis toward oppressed people and deteriorating nature and on the incarnation and resurrection for its range and promise.[522]

McFague, thus, also interprets Christian discipleship as cruciform living.

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[519] Ibid., 132.

[520] Marjorie Suchocki, "Original Sin Revisited," *Process Studies* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 233-243.

[521] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 18.

[522] Ibid., 166-7.

4.4.3 Discipleship as Cruciform Living: Consumption Reduction

The idea of cruciform living is what drives McFague's early work in parabolic theology. She turns to the parables to understand how Christian belief can be lived out in the world. Since McFague's call for ecological praxis is based upon this comprehension of discipleship, it should not be surprising that McFague interprets ecological praxis as a form of cruciform living.

Cruciform living is action in the world modeled on the life, ministry and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Because we do not live in first-century Palestine, the model of Jesus is interpreted in the current context of global ecological devastation and worldwide poverty. Cruciform living is a low christology that interprets ecological praxis beyond its ethical demand. It revolves around the command to love our neighbour. We saw McFague work with this idea earlier in her expansion of neighbour to include the other-than-human world. Cruciform living is understood as limitation and sacrifice of material goods for the sake of others. McFague explains:

> It is a life that for us North Americans may well involve limitation and significant change in our level of comfort. Christians might see it as a form of discipleship, a cruciform life of sacrifice and sharing burdens.[523]

Ecological praxis, thus, is presented as Christian discipleship in the form of cruciform living.

[523] Ibid., 210.

4.5 Dramatic and Enduring Lifestyle Changes: A Parabolic Understanding of Christian Discipleship and Ecological Praxis

An ecological praxis of consumption reduction is an example of the "dramatic and enduring lifestyle changes" necessitated as a result of a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. It is a particular, context-specific response to the radical disorientation and permanent reorientation of a deeply relational self in response to experiencing God in a world marked by both wonder and crisis.

Ecological praxis, as an outcome of a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, can be appreciated by revisiting the examples of John Woolman and Dorothy Day. In the autobiographies of these major religious figures, the disorientation and reorientation of the self in experiencing God in the world happened in particular places and times. Furthermore, what they experienced was quite specific, such as Woolman's realization that slavery is wrong through his experience of preparing a bill of sale for a slave, and Day's understanding that God's universal love was manifest in the slums of New York City. In turn, these experiences led to similarly specific changes in Woolman's and Day's behaviour. They were reoriented not merely to a general sense of love for all God's people; they were oriented to specific actions and lifestyles that expressed this love commensurate with how they had discovered it.

It is McFague's conviction that a similar specificity can occur in response to the ecological crisis. There is a context to McFague's call for ecological praxis that cannot be avoided. I noted a part of this earlier when I discussed the population within which and to which McFague writes: middle-class North American Christians who are part of the 20 percent of the Earth's human population consuming 90 percent of its resources.

Out of the context that is intrinsic to McFague's understanding of ecological praxis, we are being called to a distinct response, a very precise form of behaviour change, in response to the demands of the ecological crisis. Among other things, we are required to dramatically reduce our consumption levels. If we do not do this, little else will matter.[524]

If the model of praxis is going to lead to such a specific response, then it needs to be understood in light of the ecological crisis and insights from ecotheology. By first constructing the model based upon McFague's early work, and then developing it with her own insights in ecotheology, I hope to have presented a framework that will lead to ecological praxis.

However, it should be remembered that the final goal of the model, based as it is on McFague's work, is not ecological praxis, however powerful such praxis could become for responding to the ecological crisis. McFague's understanding of praxis is not just about an ethical response to the crises of the day. It is about a deep religious response of the human person in response to experiencing God in an amazing yet broken world. McFague writes:

> 'Loving nature,' which many people claim to do, or even simplifying one's lifestyle at the individual level will not bring about the systemic, individual changes necessary for planetary justice and sustainability. Loving nature and living frugally are excellent ways to prepare for *the* change that our society needs and that the

[524] A critique was suggested to me about the possible limits of McFague's work by the fact that she has limited the context of her argument. I have three responses to this critique. First, McFague's context is very large; there are millions of middle-class North American Christians. Therefore, even if there were no widening of the context to, say, the relatively affluent in the global first world, it is still a context that is widely applicable. Second, by understanding contextuality as an intrinsic part of the model of praxis, as I have suggested elsewhere, it behooves others, for whom this contextuality is not appropriate, to reflect on what a suitably contextual ecological praxis would be like for them. Third, and most important, understanding the contextuality as intrinsic to McFague's call for ecological praxis demands that we face what we are being called to do. We, meaning those of us to whom this call to praxis is addressed, cannot rationalize away precisely what is being demanded of us. We cannot move away from the call to change our behaviour to an interpretation of abstraction. If we are not addressing the specific issue of consumption reduction, we are missing the point completely.

> religions can help bring about: a paradigm change. This must be a change in our most basic sense of the good life.[525]

Two other theologians who have examined the importance of consumption reduction in their own ways have raised similar points. James Nash notes that "[Frugality] is a means, an instrumental value, not an end in itself."[526] For Mary Grey, a voluntary culture of simplicity and austerity "forms part of a joyous affirmation of life for all."[527]

The parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship that informs McFague's work is about a notion of the abundant life for all. The abundant life, a biblical term that McFague adopts from Day, is a rich, multi-levelled concept:

> What is emerging, then, . . . is a different notion of the abundant life, not the abundance of consumer goods, but the possibility, the promise, of a new life in God for all. This abundant life uses the template of the ecological economic worldview in which individuals live in community on a sustainable earth and with the just distribution of necessities for all. But it goes beyond this worldview, insisting that the *way* to this new life will be difficult, painful, and sacrificial, especially for those who are presently taking more than their share and thus depriving other people and the earth of a good life.[528]

This definition offers a markedly different understanding of abundance than most of us are familiar with.

4.6 Conclusion

When we review the paradigmatic examples of Woolman and Day, we can recognize the difficulty of the way to the abundant life. An ecological praxis of

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[525] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 199.

[526] James A. Nash, "Toward the Revival and Reform of the Subversive Virtue: Frugality," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1995): 144.

[527] Grey, *Sacred Longings*, 178.

[528] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 179.

consumption reduction is a vital way to an abundant life for human and other-than-human communities. The point that McFague makes regarding the specificity of ecological praxis is that we will not get to a vision of abundant life for all unless we dramatically reduce our consumption levels. Yet such a praxis is, indeed, exceedingly difficult.

The key to being able to engage in ecological praxis, it seems to me, is that it come from a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, that it come from a radical disorientation and reorientation of the person in response to experiencing God in the world. Only such a deep shift in the self in relation to God, the world and others can sustain the kind of radical action that is required in the face of ecological calamity. It took that kind of shift for Woolman and for Day; similar shifts occurred for Paul and for Augustine,[529] as well as for Dietrich Bonhoeffer,[530] Mahatma Gandhi[531] and others.

The question then becomes, *how* does one experience what is presented in the model of praxis? Is there a way to activate such radical disorientation and reorientation? This is a difficult question that I do not know that I can answer. However, there are hints and suggestions within the work of McFague that point to the possibility of *educating* people in such a way that might spark a parabolic response such as I have been discussing throughout this thesis. In the next chapter, I will explore the domain of ecological literacy as a tool by which the model of praxis could be engaged in response to the ecological crisis, and thereby lead to the praxis of consumption reduction.

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[529] McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 158-165.

[530] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Collier Books, 1971).

[531] Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai, foreword by Sissela Bok (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

Chapter 5

Educating Discipleship: Ecological Literacy as a Tool for Eliciting Ecological Praxis

5.1 Introduction

Having constructed a model of praxis based upon McFague's comprehension of praxis in her early work, and then developing the model further with insights from McFague's ecotheology, I am left with this question: How do we help to move people to actually engage in the ecological praxis McFague is calling for? The previous discussion regarding cruciform living and discipleship suggests how an ecological praxis of consumption reduction can be interpreted, but we are still left with the question of how to *elicit* the praxis advocated by McFague. With that in mind, I have decided to explore ecological literacy, another discipline that is also interested in behaviour change in response to ecological degradation. Within the field of ecological literacy are commitments that mirror McFague's, the primary one being concern for human responses to the ecological crisis based upon specific knowledge of the world in which we live.

I see a fit between the model of praxis and ecological literacy that is centered upon the importance of the world to both. The model reflects a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, which reflects Christian belief lived out in the world. Ecological literacy, as I will present in the following pages, is also concerned with behaviour in the world. Ecological literacy is knowledge of ecology and the ecological crisis in such a manner that it causes changes in the behaviour of those who have gained that knowledge. Environmental educator David Orr describes it this way: "Ecology, like most learning

worthy of the effort, is an applied subject. Its goal is not just a comprehension of how the world works, but, in light of that knowledge, a life lived accordingly."[532]

Since Christian discipleship is concerned about actions in the world based upon Christian belief, and ecological literacy is concerned with behaviour change as a result of increased knowledge of the world, then how might specific knowledge of the world, learned within the framework of ecological literacy, help to shape Christian discipleship? What will it take for individuals to have experiences of God in the world, to the extent that these experiences cause a parabolic disorientation and reorientation of the self in the world? What will it take for this to present itself in one's behaviour in sustaining and dramatic ways? The title of this chapter, "Educating Discipleship," is a metaphorical way of wondering whether greater knowledge of the world, learned within the framework of ecological literacy, might inform and enrich Christian discipleship to the extent that ecological praxis becomes activated in response to God and the ecological crisis.

5.1.1 Outline of the Chapter

The intent and form of this chapter is exploratory. Engaging the question of how we change our behaviour in response to ecological degradation is a complex and difficult challenge that is being tackled on many fronts.[533] Sallie McFague's work presents a theological engagement with the question.

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[532] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 87.

[533] Scholarship addressing the issue of ecology and behaviour change exists within a wide range of disciplines. In addition to Chaia Heller and Doug McKenzie-Mohr, introduced in Chapter One, are other scholars. A small sampling includes G.T. Gardner and P.C. Stern, *Environmental Problems and Human Behavior* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1996); Anna L. Peterson, *Everyday Ethics and Social*
- Note continues on next page. -

In this chapter I am employing a heuristic methodology, bringing ecological literacy into dialogue with the model of praxis to query whether ecological literacy might be a tool for evoking ecological praxis. The task is not to prove that it can, nor to suggest that ecological literacy is the best model for educating discipleship. The task is simply to ask, What insights do we gain into the goal of activating ecological praxis when we employ ecological literacy as a tool? What do we learn about the model of praxis, and the self in the world, that can guide discipleship in light of the ecological crisis?

To do this, I am drawing primarily on the work of David Orr. Orr, credited with coining the term 'ecological literacy' to refer to a particular framework of environmental education, is one of the foremost proponents of ecological literacy.[534] I will also refer to other thinkers as appropriate, who provide additional insight into concepts that are central to ecological literacy.

Change: The Education of Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Thomas Prugh, Robert Costanza, and Herman Daly, *The Local Politics of Global Sustainability* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000); and F. Marina Schauffler, *Turning to Earth: Stories of Ecological Conversion* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

[534] David W. Orr is the Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College, Ohio, as well as a James Marsh Professor at the University of Vermont. He is the recipient of numerous honorary degrees, academic and community awards for his work on ecological literacy and the greening of university campuses. His achievements include the design of the Adam Joseph Lewis Center at Oberlin College, which runs entirely on solar power and purifies 100 percent of its wastewater. The story of the Center is recounted in David W. Orr, *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Orr, *Design on the Edge: The Making of a High-Performance Building* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

Orr is a prolific writer on many topics, including ecological education and design, climate change, and politics and the environment. His stance on education is detailed in Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, and Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect*, 10th anniv. ed. (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004). For Orr's thoughts on politics and the environment, see David W. Orr, *The Last Refuge: Patriotism, Politics, and the Environment in an Age of Terror* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005); and Orr, *Down to the Wire: Confronting Climate Collapse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Orr's work, as well as that of other thinkers, will be helpful in the first part of this chapter. I start by defining ecological literacy within the domain of environmental education. I will then present Orr's thinking on ecological literacy in a shape useful for my project. I have identified and isolated eight key principles of ecological literacy that emerge from his writings, and will present them to provide the reader with an overview of the domain.

It is in the second part of this chapter that I engage ecological literacy specifically with the model of praxis. To do this, I will continue with the method I have used throughout this dissertation of addressing key aspects of the model. Once again, I will explore the components of self, world, God, and experience through contributions from ecological literacy. My hope is that in doing so, insights will emerge regarding the potential for educating discipleship, the potential for ecological literacy to help individuals engage in the ecological praxis of consumption reduction.

5.2 Overview of Ecological Literacy

Ecological literacy refers to the knowledge required in order to understand the Earth's ecosystems and the relationship of human actions to the causes and consequences of the ecological crisis. It is the undertaking of education with concern for the ecological crisis and care regarding the human place on Earth. A specific understanding of the role of the human person in relation to the Earth as well as ethical implications for human action are embedded in the definition of ecological literacy. In order to effectively consider how ecological literacy can provide insights into the model of praxis and induce ecological

praxis, it is necessary to have a clear understanding, then, of what ecological literacy is. The following pages present a concise overview.

5.2.1 Ecological Literacy and Environmental Education

Ecological literacy is a form of environmental education. The term ‘environmental education’ was adopted at the Tbilisi Declaration in 1977, in recognition of the importance of knowledge of the world and ecological problems so that solutions to environmental degradation could be found. The report reflects a comprehensive, holistic and even political model of environmental education that is meant to encompass many aspects of concern. The goals are large yet hopeful:

> The ultimate aim of environmental education is to enable people to understand the complexities of the environment and the need for nations to adapt their activities and pursue their development in ways which are harmonious with the environment. In this way, it adds a new dimension to the efforts being made everywhere to improve living conditions. Environmental education must also help create an awareness of the economic, political and ecological interdependence of the modern world so as to enhance a spirit of responsibility and solidarity among nations. . . . Environmental education must adopt a holistic perspective which examines the ecological, social, cultural and other aspects of particular problems. It is therefore inherently interdisciplinary.[535]

The report refers to this as a “problem-oriented and action-oriented approach.”[536]

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[535] UNESCO, *Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education* (October 1977) [Tbilisi Declaration] (Paris, 1978) http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0003/000327/032763eo.pdf (accessed October 3, 2012), 12. The Tbilisi Declaration, in some ways, foreshadows *The Earth Charter*, written in response to the global ecological crisis. It provides a set of ethical principles that orient human beings within the life processes of the Earth and demonstrates that the goals of ecological sustainability, human rights, democracy, peace, and the ending of poverty are interrelated. Woven throughout *The Earth Charter* are the values and aspects of ecological literacy. See Earth Charter Initiative, *The Earth Charter*.

[536] UNESCO, *Tibilisi Declaration*.

Like all United Nations declarations, this report is open to interpretation by each nation. Environmental education, as it is practised in North America, has not necessarily factored all of the aspects considered essential by the Tbilisi Declaration into pedagogical programs.[537] Within ecological literacy, as I will indicate below, it is understood that there is a system of logic that has led to, among other things, the ecological crisis. It is by no means consistent within environmental education to identify and critique this system of logic.

Andrew Stables and Keith Bishop address the differences between environmental education and ecological literacy in their article "Weak and Strong Conceptions of Environmental Literacy: Implications for Environmental Education." They examine the concept of literacy in relation to environmental studies and highlight that environmental education tends to be about understanding and taking action on environmental issues. However,

> understanding of ecological issues comprises one strand of a strong form of environmental literacy. Many issues connected with the environment have, of course, little direct relevance to ecological sustainability, yet are of crucial concern to individuals and societies, such as much of what constitutes town and country planning. Though environmental educators have long acknowledged the interdependence of many social and environmental concerns . . . the role of the arts and humanities has been generally underplayed in environmental education. . . . The basis of environmental education has generally been scientific ecology, with social change an additional dominant theme in the thinking of many environmental educators.[538]

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[537] Not all environmental educators consider social and cultural factors, for example, nor do all share a vision of the human person as integral to the bioregions and ecosystems of the Earth.

[538] Andrew Stables and Keith Bishop, "Weak and Strong Conceptions of Environmental Literacy: Implications for Environmental Education," *Environmental Education Research* 7, no.1 (2001): 95.

What Stables and Bishop stress is that ecological literacy has a much wider scope than environmental education, incorporating a range of concerns that are outside the domain of ecological (and other physical) sciences.[539] For them, environmental education, as distinguished from ecological literacy, is insufficient in the face of what needs to be done. They argue:

> An environmental education which runs independently of an exploration of cultural, aesthetic, personal and even irrational views of the environment will prove insufficient to our needs, as it will harness not 'hearts and minds' but merely part of the mind, in a limited range of contexts, and with a limited view of the Earth as essentially mechanical and liable to breakdown (the catastrophic view of nature) but not to improvement.[540]

Orr highlights the range of subject areas that one needs to study in order to be able to call oneself ecologically literate. The range includes a basic comprehension of

- the laws of thermodynamics,
- the basic principles of ecology,
- carrying capacity,
- energetics,
- least-cost, end-use analysis,
- limits of technology,
- appropriate scale,
- sustainable agriculture and forestry,
- steady-state economics, and
- environmental ethics.[541]

Elsewhere, Orr includes the importance of understanding "something of the speed of the crisis that is upon us. It is to know magnitudes, rates, and trends of population growth,

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[539] Ibid., 94.

[540] Ibid., 96.

[541] Orr, *Earth in Mind*, 14.

species extinction, soil loss, deforestation, [et cetera].”[542] To this, add a broad understanding of the function of religion, social structures, economics, politics, technology, sexism, classism, racism, cultural history, and ecological consciousness. Only then, might one be considered truly ecologically literate.[543]

This is an admittedly daunting list. Ecological literacy requires an entire structure of education that is centered upon love, respect for and knowledge of the Earth that is embedded within all levels of schooling and disciplines. How is one to learn all of this to become ecologically literate? While ideally such learning would begin in childhood, for those adults engaged with the question now, and the adults to whom the model of praxis is directed, there is less time and energy available than there would be if we began this form of education as children.[544] My suggestion is that the ecological literacy Orr and others advocate begins, for adults, as a form of remedial education that, hopefully, enjoys an accelerated process of learning. Ecological literacy is a *process* of learning that can begin to be applied rather quickly to the scientific, physical, ethical and moral issues facing the Earth and its inhabitants.

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[542] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 93.

[543] Ibid., 93.

[544] Ecological literacy, Orr avers, begins in childhood. Ibid., 86. He is joined by others who believe that ecological literacy is founded upon experiences of the natural world that begin in childhood. Literature that explores the realm of children, nature and experience includes Peter H. Kahn and Stephen R. Kellert, ed. *Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); Stephen R. Kellert and Julie Dunlap, eds., *Companions in Wonder: Children and Adults Exploring Nature Together* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2008); Michael K. Stone and Zenobia Barlow, eds., *Ecological Literacy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World*, preface Fritjof Capra (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2005); and David Sobel, *Mapmaking with Children: Sense of Place Education for the Elementary Years* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998).

It should be pointed out that the bringing together of the sciences, social sciences and humanities in ecological literacy can go a long way toward creating a comprehensive, educated vision of Earth healing. Religion scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker has denounced the solitudes of these traditional areas in university education:

> A major obstacle to achieving an effective and comprehensive global environmental ethics is the inadequacy of an educational system in which the sciences and the humanities are two separate and often unrelated entitles. The lack of communication between scientists and humanists in the universities with regard to issues of planetary survival is endemic.[545]

The assembling of a range of disciplines under the umbrella of ecological literacy is one of the things that distinguishes ecological literacy from environmental education more generally.

5.2.2 Ecological Literacy and Related Terms

Ecological literacy is by no means the only term used to refer to this more comprehensive form of environmental education. Some terms are interchangeable, such as 'environmental literacy,' which Frank B. Golley describes as "more than the ability to read about the environment. It also involves developing a sense of the spirit of place."[546] Tucker likes the evocative phrase 'Earth literacy,' which suggests human intimacy with the Earth

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[545] Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Education and Ecology: Earth Literacy and the Technological Trance," in *Teilhard in the 21st Century: The Emerging Spirit of Earth*, ed. Arthur Fabel and Donald St. John (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 94.

[546] Frank B. Golley, *A Primer for Environmental Literacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), ix.

within a cosmological context.[547] Thomas Berry offers an even more luminous phrase, 'integral Earth study.' An integral Earth study

> provides an integrating context for all our particular studies. It provides a way of understanding and managing the complexity and tensions that exist amid the vast array of forces that enable the Earth to be the wonder planet that it is. It enables the human community to begin thinking more adequately of its own role.[548]

Other terms emphasize varying aspects of ecological literacy, and so suit specific contexts of discussion. Darlene E. Clover advocates for 'environmental adult education.' This model draws on the previous experiences and knowledge learners bring to their subject and emphasizes the integration of ideas learned into "environmental discourses and actions . . . [as an] activist-based political pedagogy."[549] C.A. Bowers uses a similarly political term, 'eco-justice pedagogy,' which he prefers because

> it highlights the interconnections between viable, interdependent ecosystems and viable, interdependent communities – and that our future depends on maintaining the widest possible diversity in cultural approaches to sustainable living.[550]

His central concern is that many Western theorists of emancipatory education "ignore the cultural roots of the ecological crisis."[551]

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[547] Tucker writes, "[I]t can be said that a primary premise of effective education in the future must be the appreciation of our intimate relationship to the Earth. This is the basis of Earth literacy, for this is the ultimate matrix for both survival and sustainability of life." Tucker, "Education and Ecology," 95-96.

[548] Berry, *Great Work*, 90.

[549] Darlene E. Clover, "Introduction," in *Global Perspectives in Environmental Adult Education*, ed. Darlene E. Clover (New York: P. Lang, 2004), xvi.

[550] C.A. Bowers, "How the Ideas of Paulo Freire Contribute to the Cultural Roots of the Ecological Crisis," in *Rethinking Freire: Globalization and the Environmental Crisis*, ed. C. A. Bowers and Frédérique Apffel-Marglin (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 148.

[551] C.A. Bowers, *Educating for Eco-Justice and Community* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), vii. Bowers is a prolific author in the area of education and eco-justice, emphasizing the importance of taking into account ways of knowing and acting from traditional societies and of the function of cultural homogenization
- Note continues on next page. -

Place-based education is a related field to ecological literacy, incorporating many of the central ideas of ecological literacy. The emphasis is on locating education and knowledge within the specific places people live.[552] David A. Gruenewald's articulation of a "critical pedagogy of place" can be considered a conception of ecological literacy that holds together the importance of ecological and cultural contexts in education. Gruenewald explains:

> The critical synthesis posed by a critical pedagogy of place posits that the questions of what needs to be transformed and what needs to be conserved are equally critical and necessary, that cultural and ecological contexts are always two parts of the same whole, that decolonization and reinhabitation are mutually supportive objectives, that outrage toward injustice must be balanced with renewing relationships of care for others – human and non-human – and that the shared experience of everyday places promotes the critical dialogue and reflection that is essential to identifying and creating community well-being.[553]

Both Gruenewald and Bowers share with Orr the concern that social justice and ecological reparation are intimately and inextricably connected.

5.2.3 Ecological Design

Ecological design is a concept explored by David Orr as an expansion of ecological literacy into practices for creating buildings, products and communities that reflect the core aspects of ecological literacy. Orr explains its purpose as follows:

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in liberal systems of education. He also challenges consumerist mentalities and the uncritical use of technology.

[552] Research into place-based education for all ages, from preschool to the university, is prolific. The work of David Sobel is often used as reference material for practitioners and theorists of place-based education. See Sobel, *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities* (Great Barrington, MA: Orion Society, 2004).

[553] David A. Gruenewald, "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place," *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 4 (May 2003): 10.

> The goal [of ecological design] is not total mastery but harmony that causes no ugliness, human or ecological, somewhere else or at some later time. And it is not just about making things, but rather remaking the human presence in the world in a way that honors life and protects human dignity. Ecological design is a large concept that joins science and the practical arts with ethics, politics, and economics.[554]

He also provides the following definition: "Ecological design describes the ensemble of technologies and strategies by which societies use the natural world and the study of those patterns and flows to inform human actions."[555]

Orr's work in ecological design reflects his conviction that how we are taught directly informs what we learn and how we perceive human-nature relationships.[556] Ecological design is, in many ways, the practical application of the key principles of ecological literacy, which I describe below. Because of this, I refer to ecological design throughout my discussion of the main principles of ecological literacy and their application to the model of praxis.[557]

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[554] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 4.

[555] Ibid., 14.

[556] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 90.

[557] Like environmental education, thinkers, educators and designers think about ecological design in various ways, not all of which reflect the principles of ecological literacy. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, I have limited any discussion of ecological design to the work of Orr. For other work on ecological design, see Peder Anker, *From Bauhaus to Ecohouse: A History of Ecological Design* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Matthias Gross, *Ignorance and Surprise: Science, Society, and Ecological Design* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010); and Sim van der Ryn and Stuart Cowan, *Ecological Design*, 10th anniv. ed. (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1996).

5.3 Main Principles of Ecological Literacy

The key to ecological literacy, as discussed, is the undertaking of education with concern for the ecological crisis and care regarding the human role on Earth.[558] From Orr's work, I have identified eight key principles that together comprise ecological literacy.[559] While other educators have emphasized or highlighted some of these principles at different points, Orr's work is the most comprehensive. Together, these principles help to demonstrate the relation of care and concern to knowledge regarding the role of the human and the ecological crisis.

1) The first principle represents the starting point for ecological literacy: there is a form and system of education that helped to create the ecological crisis. Part of the problem is what people have been taught about the nature of the world and the relation of the human being to the world. Since such education is part of the problem, a new kind of education is necessary.[560] C.A. Bowers shares this concern with Orr; he argues that cultural ways of knowing are ignored in mainstream pedagogies, even those that are designed to be emancipatory. For Bowers, eco-justice pedagogy can transform and replace forms of

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[558] One concern that I have is that ecological literacy may be seen only as a model of education, to the exclusion of other disciplines of scholarship. One would be mistaken in thinking that ecological literacy is unrelated to how we engage in economics, ethics, psychology, engineering, et cetera. Ecological literacy, if it is to effect the changes in human behaviour required in the face of the ecological crisis, must inform and transform all disciplines of knowledge. Ecological literacy is not merely an issue of pedagogy.

As for the relevance of ecological literacy to the discipline of theology, this is an issue that moves beyond theological or religious education. The scale and scope of the ecological crisis is so wide and deep that knowledge of the world, and behaviour changed as a result, is, in my opinion, a prerequisite and requisite of all areas of thought. My purpose in exploring ecological literacy in this chapter is not just to ask how this form of education might help engender ecological praxis. It is also to present the potential of ecological literacy, the knowledge and insight into the world that is required, for theology as a whole.

[559] I first identified these principles in my essay on ecological literacy and ecofeminist theology in Canada. See Fraser, "Knowing Our Context."

[560] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 3.

education that have led to ecological and social injustice.[561] Bowers emphasizes the valuing of traditional ways of knowing in eco-justice; Orr's work has a larger scope within which Bower's ideas fit.[562]

2) The second principle of ecological literacy is that it is not merely about knowledge, it is, centrally, about human action. Orr argues, "Ecology, like most learning worthy of the effort, is an applied subject. Its goal is not just a comprehension of how the world works, but, in light of that knowledge, a life lived accordingly."[563] To learn about the world is not enough; one must then move to change it. There is a dialectic of theory and praxis inherent in ecological literacy.[564] Science educator David Layton recognizes the importance of this dialectic in the classroom. He writes:

> As for the centrality of science to practical action in everyday life, the researches [sic] indicate that the scientific knowledge offered or accessible to people is rarely usable without being reworked and contextualised. This involves, at least, its integration with other, situation-specific knowledge, often personal to individuals, as well as with judgments of various kinds.[565]

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[561] Bowers, *Educating for Eco-Justice and Community.*

[562] Bowers discusses the cultural dimensions of ecological literacy, noting that Orr's cognition that all education is environmental education (Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 90) can be misinterpreted to imply that all education contributes to sustainability or to imply that education only occurs in schools. He goes on to discuss the relationship between education and culture and the importance of sustaining traditional cultural systems as a part of creating ecosystem sustainability. Bowers' argument addresses a specific dimension of ecological literacy that is referred to, more broadly, by Orr in *Ecological Literacy*. C. A. Bowers, "The Cultural Dimensions of Ecological Literacy," *Journal of Environmental Education* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 5-10.

[563] Orr, *Ecological Literacy,* 87.

[564] Orr has been directly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire, who developed the model of theory-praxis dialectic. For more on this, see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

[565] David Layton, "Science Education and Praxis: The Relationship of School Science to Practical Action," *Studies in Science Education* 19 (1991): 58.

Layton, while discussing science pedagogy in university, illustrates that the dialectic of theory and praxis in ecological literacy is important at all levels of schooling, not just at the post-secondary stage.

3) Not only is action required in ecological literacy, in-depth engagement with the material being learned is essential. This is the third principle. Orr argues, "Knowing, caring, and practical competence constitute the basis of ecological literacy."[566] Orr is suggesting that one must care about the world in order to sufficiently gain a literacy regarding that world. Further, striving for ecological literacy must be driven not only by horror at what humans are doing to the planet but by awe and wonder over the beauty and mystery of the Earth and its processes.[567] Ecological ethicist and religious studies scholar Lisa Sideris explores the work of Rachel Carson and notes a central theme: "A common thread running through Carson's writings is that cultivating a sense of wonder is the best way of curbing destructive impulses toward the natural world."[568]

4) The point about the importance of care in ecological literacy indicates another dialectic that is embedded in this model of education. The fourth principle is that just as there is a dialectic between knowledge and action embedded within ecological literacy, there is also a dialectic of care and concern. Caring about the world may not come first in ecological literacy, given the detachment from the natural world that many people feel and the depth of ignorance about the human place on the planet. For many people,

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[566] Orr, *Ecological Literacy,* 92.

[567] Ibid., 86.

[568] Lisa H. Sideris, "Environmental Literacy and the Lifelong Cultivation of Wonder," in *Teaching Environmental Literacy: Across Campus and Across the Curriculum*, ed. Heather L. Reynolds et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 86.

caring for the world comes out of some kind of specific concern, usually through direct experience. It can be apprehension over something specific, such as the disappearance of an animal species, a child's asthma, or the loss of a local woodlot that is home to numerous butterflies, that leads to an education in ecological literacy and then in turn to caring for the world in a larger sense. In certain ways this dialectic makes sense, for as Orr says, "We are likely to save only what we have first come to love."[569] Direct experience is what usually fosters such love, and leads to the conditions for becoming ecologically literate. Gruenewald confirms, "[T]he values of ecologically literate and politically motivated adults are shaped by significant life experiences that foster connection – in this case connection with the natural world."[570]

5) The question of care and concern in ecological literacy directs us to the question of ethics. The fifth principle of ecological literacy is that it has an implied ethical component. In ecological literacy understanding and judging the good, and how to achieve the good, are based upon an interconnected and interdependent comprehension of the natural world and the role of human beings in light of the ecological crisis. The question revolves around the commitment to building a more sustainable world for all, human and other than human. In this commitment the good is judged as that which leads to life and the preservation of life. As Orr argues, "Anything less is morally indefensible."[571] Further, he explains:

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[569] Orr, *Nature of Design,* 217.

[570] Gruenewald, "Best of Both Worlds," 7.

[571] Orr, *Ecological Literacy,* 133.

> Where a commitment to life is both genuine and potent, its nurturing instincts require a thorough knowledge of the natural world based on the recognition that we are only a part of a larger whole, and that our health and prosperity are contingent on that of the entire system.[572]

Thus, the commitment to life and its preservation requires ecological literacy.

6) The sixth principle of ecological literacy recognizes one of the implications of an ethics of ecological literacy, which is how it impacts our understanding of citizenship. Orr argues that "environmental degradation and the decay in our concept of citizenship occurred simultaneously and as mutually reinforcing trends."[573] There is, thus, a correlation between knowledge of the natural world and good citizenship. Ecological literacy, understood as knowledge leading to action, coming from in-depth engagement with the world, and with recognition of its ethical dimensions, can lead to a more informed, active citizenry that helps to bring about ecological restoration. Indeed, a wider comprehension of citizenship is possible. Orr states:

> Real ecological literacy is radicalizing in that it forces us to reckon with the roots of our ailments, not just with their symptoms. For this reason, I think it leads to a revitalization and broadening of the concept of citizenship to include membership in a planetwide community of humans and living things.[574]

7) Our capacity for citizenship reflects, among other things, our ability to think deeply about the world and the things that matter to us and the larger world. The seventh principle of ecological literacy is that the knowledge people have of the world in which

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[572] Ibid., 134.

[573] Ibid., 2.

[574] Ibid., 88.

they live has an effect on their ability to think. The ecological crisis reflects and contributes to a corrosion in human thought:

> The disordering of ecological systems and of the great biogeochemical cycles of the earth reflects a prior disorder in the thought, perception, imagination, intellectual priorities, and loyalties inherent in the industrial mind. Ultimately, then, the ecological crisis concerns how we think and the institutions that purport to shape and refine the capacity to think.[575]

Orr refers to the relationship between knowledge of the world and our capacity for critical thought as the relationship between landscape and mindscape.[576] Lack of deep awareness of where we live impoverishes, to use Orr's term, our mental awareness.

8) The final principle of ecological literacy ties all of the previous ones together. Knowledge of who we are is intricately tied with the knowledge of where we are – the particular places within which we live.[577] Knowing where one lives is vital to knowing who one is. In traditional education, we are taught to be indifferent to our immediate places.[578] Yet if our reality as humans beings is that we are deeply interrelated with and interdependent upon the natural world in which we are immersed, then understanding that world, including comprehension of its immediacy in the places in which we live, is essential to understanding who we are.

Each of these principles is complex and has varying relationships with each other. Central to them all is that behaviour change based upon knowledge gained about the world

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[575] Orr, *Earth in Mind*, 2.

[576] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 86.

[577] Ibid., 130.

[578] Ibid., 103.

is privileged. With this in mind, and as a way to create a lens through which we can apply the principles of ecological literacy to the model of praxis, I have identified three themes that collectively embody the principles I have outlined. They are the importance of place in education, the value of experiences in nature and the role of *biophilia*, a sense of kinship with the natural world.[579] More will be said about these themes as I examine the component parts of the self, world, God, and experience in light of ecological literacy.

5.4 Ecological Literacy and the Model of Praxis

This next section is a heuristic exploration of ecological literacy as a tool for eliciting ecological praxis. To begin, I want to pair the definitions of ecological literacy and the model of praxis together. As I have demonstrated, ecological literacy can be defined as follows:

> Ecological literacy is knowledge of ecology and the ecological crisis in such a manner that it causes changes in the behaviour of those who have gained the knowledge.

In turn, a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship refers to

> A radical disorientation of the self in response to experiencing God in the world, leading to a permanent reorientation of the self in the world, evidenced in dramatic and enduring lifestyle changes.

The development of the model in Chapter Four emphasizes the points of radical relationality, human and divine embodiment, a world of mystery and crisis, and focus on lifestyle changes in relation to a devastated Earth.

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[579] 'Biophilia' is a term coined by E. O. Wilson, See E. O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

What is apparent in reading these definitions together is that McFague and Orr share an emphasis on human behaviour change as a result of knowledge or experience gained. This emphasis is augmented by other suppositions shared by these diverse scholars: concern regarding the ecological crisis, the significance of human relationships with the natural world, the role of experience, and the importance of engaging with the mundane, everyday world in which we live. As well, McFague and Orr recognize the complexity and dialectics of knowledge and action.

It is because of these joint convictions on the part of McFague and Orr that I have decided to explore ecological literacy as a potential device for activating the model of praxis toward ecological praxis. Can ecological literacy be a catalyst for the parabolic disorientation and reorientation of the self in response to experiencing God in the world, to the extent that it leads to an ecological praxis of consumption reduction?

To explore this question, I will examine the various aspects of the model in light of the main principles of ecological literacy. I will investigate what insights ecological literacy might provide into the self, world, God, and experience as they are understood in the model.

5.4.1 Self and Ecological Literacy

The self in the model of praxis is a mystery that is comprehended through one's speech and actions. The person is radically relational with all that exists. Rather than an individualistic interpretation, the person is understood as the self-in-the-world. She or he is an ecological self, located within an Earth-based context.

What insights are presented into the self by ecological literacy? The role of the self in understanding the world is key to ecological literacy. The human person is seen as part of and integral to the ecosystems of the Earth. The self is deeply relational with all that exists. This is a prerequisite understanding for ecological literacy, according to Orr:

> Ecological literacy presumes that we understand our place in the story of evolution. It is to know that our health, well-being, and ultimately our survival depend on working with, not against, natural forces. The basis for ecological literacy, then, is the comprehension of the interrelatedness of life grounded in the study of natural history, ecology, and thermodynamics.[580]

Thomas Berry deepens this conviction:

> We cannot know ourselves in any adequate manner except through an account of the transformations of the universe and of the planet Earth through which we came into being. This new story of the universe is our personal story as well as our community story.[581]

Berry and Orr impress the point that through ecological literacy we discover that learning about ecology, evolution, cosmology, and other aspects of the phenomenal order is also learning about ourselves. Further, Berry's argument that the emergent universe reflects a community identity as well as a personal one directs us to the larger dimensions of the relational self.

The idea of the relational self that is intrinsic to ecological literacy has been termed the 'ecological self' by Arne Naess.[582] It is an idea also explored by Paul Shepard and

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[580] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 92-93.

[581] Berry, *Great Work*, 83.

[582] Arne Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess*, ed. Alan Drengson and Bill Devall (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008).

others.[583] It is the idea that who we are is not separate from the natural world around us, and that recognition of this can make way for a broader sense of identity.[584] Mitchell Thomashow refers to this as ecological identity:

> Ecological identity refers to how people perceive themselves in reference to nature, as living and breathing beings connected to the rhythms of the earth, the biogeochemical cycles, the grand and complex diversity of ecological systems.[585]

For Orr, the idea of the relational or ecological self has direct implications for our capacity to become ecologically literate, and for the implications of ecological ignorance. He avers: "[K]nowledge of a place – where you are and where you come from – is intertwined with knowledge of who you are."[586] Ecological *ill*iteracy, the lack of knowledge and understanding about the world and our place within it, has devastating consequences for our understanding of ourselves, individually and collectively. Indeed, these consequences are very concrete. Orr insists:

> The inhabitant and a particular habitat cannot be separated without doing violence to both. The sum total of violence wrought by people who do not know who they are because they do not know where they are is the global environmental crisis.[587]

This is one of the central claims of ecological literacy. Humans have wreaked environmental devastation because we have lost sight of the fact that we are interrelated

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[583] Paul Shepard, "Place in American Culture," in *North American Review* 262, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 22-32; Shepard, *Nature and Madness* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1982); Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991); and Freya Matthews, *The Ecological Self* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[584] Schauffler, *Turning to Earth*, 44.

[585] Mitchell Thomashow, *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), xiii.

[586] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 130.

[587] Ibid., 102.

with the entire natural order. In turn, we have caused physical and psychological harm to ourselves and others.[588]

Ecological literacy offers a way to reduce the harm caused to the self and to begin ecological reparation. The study of place within ecological literacy refers to learning about ecology within the context of the specific places in which the learners reside. Not only is this an appropriate, context-specific way to make the lessons of ecological literacy more tangible and accessible, place-based learning holds the relation of the self with the natural world together.[589] Place-based learning can help us better understand who we are and how the ecological crisis came about. It can also make us more cautious in our endeavours to make ecological changes. Orr states:

> The environment outside us is also inside us. We are connected to more things in more ways than we can ever count or comprehend. The act of designing ecologically begins with the awareness that we can never entirely fathom those connections. This means that humans must act cautiously and with a sense of our fallibility.[590]

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[588] The field of ecopsychology explores the psychological implications of human relationships with the natural world, including the damage caused to our psyche as a result of ecological deterioration. For research in this area, see Andy Fisher, *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002); Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner, eds. *Restoring the Earth: Healing the Mind* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995); and Deborah DuNann Winter and Susan M. Koger, *The Psychology of Environmental Problems* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004).

[589] For David Gruenewald, the importance of understanding the socio-economic contexts of places is equally vital to ecological literacy and the understanding of the self. Gruenewald argues for a “critical pedagogy of place” that holds critical theories of power differentials among members of communities in hand with the need for environmental place-based education. He argues that “human communities, or places, are politicized, social constructions that often marginalize individuals, groups, as well as ecosystems. If place-based educators seek to connect place with self and community, they must identify and construct the ways that power works through places to limit the possibilities for human and non-human others.” Gruenewald, “Best of Both Worlds,” 7.

C.A. Bowers adds the importance of considering the cultural contexts in which eco-justice pedagogy is engaged. Bowers, *Educating for Eco-Justice and Community*. Orr’s work reflects Gruenewald’s and Bowers’ concerns more generally in his argument that ecological literacy requires a grounding in social change theory, ethics and political theory in order to be ecologically literate. Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 93.

[590] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 29.

The relationship between who we are and where we are, then, behooves us to slow down, pay close attention to the connections between things, and attempt to make ecological changes that reflect the individual, communal and cosmological connections among people and the natural world.

In recognizing the relational self within ecological literacy and placing emphasis upon place-based learning, the work of Orr and others reflects the model of knowing that is embedded in McFague's understanding of the self. There are parallels in ecological literacy with the subject-subjects model of knowing that is reflected in the model of praxis. In his understanding of the self, Orr rejects the Cartesian split between subject and object in ecological literacy:

> Cartesian science rejects passion and personality but ironically can escape neither. Passion and personality are embedded in all knowledge, including the most ascetic scientific knowledge driven by the passion for objectivity. Descartes and his heirs simply had it wrong. There is no way to separate feeling from knowledge. There is no way to separate object from subject. There is no good way and no good reason to separate mind or body from its ecological and emotional context.[591]

Accordingly, Orr uses the metaphor of dialogue to demonstrate how the study of place in ecological literacy should occur. In suggesting several foundations for a program of ecological literacy, he argues for something very similar to McFague. One of the foundations, he suggests, is that learners engage with a place as one would in a good conversation. In a good conversation both parties share their insights, and language is carefully chosen to reflect what each is hearing and trying to articulate. "But true

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[591] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 31.

conversation can occur only if we acknowledge the existence and interests of the other. In conversation, we define ourselves, but in relation to another."[592]

Gruenewald models a similar subject-subjects model, with an emphasis on the mystery that is the self: "Learning to read the landscape becomes learning how to open to the presence of otherness and how to form relationships of mutuality with others we can never fully know."[593] Ecological philosopher David Abram explores how one's own subjective experience can allow one to recognize the subjectivity of others.[594]

If the relational self is to be recognized in the context of place, ecological literacy and the ecological crisis, there needs to be a way of becoming aware that we are intrinsically relational. For Orr and others, experience in the natural world is absolutely critical to becoming ecologically literate and understanding the self. Orr suggests that "ecological literacy begins in childhood," when we have primal experiences with wild others in the natural world and begin to form our sense of ourselves.[595]

The self is formed through our contact, or lack of contact, with the natural world or with wild others such as McFague discusses. The destruction of the natural world from human activity has a devastating effect not only on flora and fauna that lose their habitats and become extinct but also on the development of the self. Berry explains:

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[592] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 90.

[593] David A. Gruenewald, "At Home with the Other: Reclaiming the Ecological Roots of Development and Literacy," *The Journal of Environmental Education* 35, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 40.

[594] David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

[595] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 86.

> There is no inner life without outer experience. The tragedy in the elimination of the primordial forests is not the economic but the soul-loss that is involved. For we are depriving our imagination, our emotions, and even our intellect of that overwhelming experience communicated by the wilderness.[596]

Although there are many books that exist regarding nature, ecological literacy is becoming more difficult for people to acquire because there are increasingly fewer opportunities to have direct experiences in the natural world.[597] Reading without experience will not bring about ecological literacy. Golley concurs:

> Experience is the trigger for environmental literacy. It ignites the curiosity and tests the muscles. It teaches us that we live in a world that is not of human making, that does not play by human rules. We call this world *nature*. To build environmental literacy, it is necessary to go beyond books and libraries and experience nature directly. Only then do we gradually come to recognize a depth and complexity in nature that continually challenge and surprise us.[598]

Environmental ethicist Lisa Sideris shares a similar concern with Orr, Golley and others: "Most young people today can recite a list of global threats, but fewer and fewer have sustained physical contact with the world of nature."[599] This is a mistake, since, as Berry exhorts, the natural world is the primary educator.[600] To become ecologically literate, experiences in nature, for both children and adults, must be fostered. This has tremendous implications for the development of the relational self.

Orr's thinking on the relational self in ecological literacy reflects another conviction that is shared with McFague regarding the nature of the self. As the model of praxis

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[596] Berry, *Great Work*, 82.

[597] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 88-89.

[598] Golley, *A Primer for Environmental Literacy,* x.

[599] Lisa H. Sideris, "Environmental Literacy and the Lifelong Cultivation of Wonder," 87.

[600] Thomas Berry argues this throughout his work. See *Dream of the Earth* and *Great Work.*

illustrates, there is a relationship between how one understands the self and human behaviour. Orr argues:

> The society created in the belief that people are incapable of rising above narrow self-interest will differ from one in which other assumptions prevail. In other words, our beliefs about our nature become self-fulfilling prophecies which produce the behavior they purport only to describe.[601]

The relationship between how one perceives the self and one's actions in the world, a central concern for McFague, is also the driving concern for Orr. His conviction is that ecological literacy, as a specific paradigm of education, can help to shift people's actions in relation to the ecological crisis.

The central organizing principle in ecological literacy is the importance of behaviour change as a result of knowledge gained. Orr is aware that this is a complicated goal. As with McFague, he recognizes that the relationship between knowledge and action, especially in relation to the ecological crisis, is very complex. What is relevant here is Orr's understanding that changing human behaviour is, among other things, about the understanding of the self in relationship to the natural world. In discussing ecological design, Orr explains that "it is not just about making things, but rather remaking the human presence in the world in a way that honors life and protects human dignity."[602] Ecological literacy, through scientific (and other) study of the world, is about helping people to recognize themselves as deeply relational with all that exists, and to allow such recognition

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[601] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 26.

[602] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 4.

to change their behaviour in light of the ecological crisis. In this way, ecological literacy offers a means of educating the self in the model of praxis.

5.4.2 World and Ecological Literacy

The world that is reflected in the model of praxis is a concrete place of mystery and crisis that is always interpreted and constructed through metaphor. This means that our constructions of the world matter to how we see the world and thus how we act within the world. There is a complex relationship between how we perceive the world and human behaviour. McFague's insights from her ecotheology suggest that the world is the Earth located within universe history. Because of the scale and scope of the ecological crisis, the world is irrevocably changed. Therefore, that the world is in crisis is a constitutive part of understanding the world today.

What insights can ecological literacy provide into the world as it is defined in the model? First of all, ecological literacy gives us fundamental information about the world. While ecological literacy is not all that there is to say about the world, it has much to say about how we understand and interpret the world, and thereby how we act in relation to the world.

There are many definitions of the 'world,' some of which include the Earth in its gambit, some of which focus only on human societies and how we order ourselves. Some definitions use the term in relation to the afterlife, as in whether we are referring to 'this' world or to the next. McFague's understanding of the world in the model of praxis has gradually developed to center upon the Earth as the ground and sustainer of human life, as well as the forms of collective and individual organization of human relationships. Within

ecological literacy, the world is understood in a similar fashion. The Earth in its diversity, mystery and complexity is what is meant by the world; the basic premise of ecological literacy is that lack of knowledge of how the Earth works has led to the ecological crisis. Understanding ecology should be the common denominator for all subjects, Orr insists:

> The failure to develop ecological literacy is a sin of omission and of commission. Not only are we failing to teach the basics about the earth and how it works, but we are in fact teaching a large amount of stuff that is simply wrong. By failing to include ecological perspectives in any number of subjects, students are taught that ecology is unimportant for history, politics, economics, society, and so forth.[603]

Becoming ecologically literate, therefore, should be the priority for all people.

Orr and others such as Bowers and Gruenewald recognize the relationship between the various forms of human organization and knowledge of the Earth. Each of them emphasizes that knowledge of social sciences, economics, ethics, and other disciplines are vital to understanding the world. Orr writes:

> Ecological literacy, then, requires a thorough understanding of the ways in which people and whole societies have become destructive. The ecologically literate person will appreciate something of how social structures, religion, science, politics, technology, patriarchy, culture, agriculture, and human cussedness combine as causes of our predicament.[604]

Bowers argues that issues of social justice must be framed within "a more comprehensive theory of eco-justice."[605] Gruenewald recognizes the interpenetration of cultural and

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[603] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 85.

[604] Ibid., 93.

[605] Bowers, *Educating for Eco-Justice and Community*, vii.

ecological realities.[606] For each of these educators, the world necessarily includes both ecological and cultural dimensions.

Within ecological literacy then, the world is the Earth, in its physical reality and diversity, located within the trajectory of the emergent universe. How human communities function, historically and in contemporary times, is a part of the world. The priority, however, is on understanding the physical Earth in its various dimensions.

There is a distinction in ecological literacy between what is meant by the world and what is meant by place. As I stated earlier, there is a privileging of place-based education as a cornerstone of ecological literacy. Not only is place the contextually specific way that we come to know ourselves, as I discussed in the previous section, but it is how we come to know the world. The big categories of, for example, cosmology, evolution, thermodynamics, and entropy are each interpreted through the particular places in which we live. Place is how such concepts become *real* in our own experiences. Place-based education is required so that the study of ecology (and other ways of studying the Earth) can have direct bearing on our lives. Gruenewald explains, "Place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit."[607]

For Orr, part of the problem in resolving the ecological crisis and becoming ecologically literate is that we have lost connection with the places in which we live:

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[606] Gruenewald, "Best of Both Worlds," 10.

[607] Ibid., 3.

> Place is nebulous to educators because to a great extent we are a deplaced people for whom our immediate places are no longer sources of food, water, livelihood, energy, materials, friends, recreation, or sacred inspiration.[608]

Yet Orr is not trying to romanticize the conception of place. His ideas reflect the insight that human capacity to comprehend and predict the affect of our actions is quite limited. By focusing on place as the context in which we apply ecological knowledge, we may be able to limit the more destructive outcomes of large-scale thinking.[609]

Scholars in various disciplines have identified the importance of place in critical and ecological thought. The field of place theory asks diverse questions regarding the relationship between human flourishing and place.[610] Other writers explore life and their relationships with the natural world by staying in one place.[611] Bioregionalism is the concept that emphasizes natural boundaries of topography, flora and fauna, and human culture as ways of delineating places and coming to know those places.[612] Theologians are also reflecting upon the role of place.[613] The insight that ecological literacy brings to the

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[608] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 126.

[609] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 29.

[610] A good primer on place theory is Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004). See also Emily Askew, "Toward a Just Landscape," 19-70.

[611] Robert Michael Pyle, *The Thunder Tree: Lessons from an Urban Wildland* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993); and Scott Russell Sanders, *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

[612] Michael Vincent McGinnis, *Bioregionalism* (London: Routledge, 1999); and Robert L. Thayer Jr., *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[613] Sigurd Bergmann et al., eds., *Nature, Space and the Sacred: Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Daniel T. Spencer, "Ecological and Social Transformations and the Construction of Race and Place: A View from Iowa," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 85-99; and Kimberly Whitney, "Greening by
- Note continues on next page. -

concept of the world in the model of praxis is that the world is experienced by us in specific places. The idea of experiencing God in the world becomes the reality of experiencing God in specific places in the world, with their own ecological and cultural contexts that make each place distinct.

The point that Orr and others make is that place will not matter, and ecological literacy is not possible, without having experiences in the natural world. Experience in nature is vital to knowing the world in ecological literacy. To learn about the engines that drive evolution, or about the details of the climate crisis, is not enough without experience. Clover emphasizes that "ecological knowledge comes from daily lived experience and is based on a comprehensive understanding of a variety of co-varying environmental features and changes over long periods of time."[614]

Indeed, it is experience in the natural world that is the basis of human thought and language.[615] Orr recognizes this, and believes that because we have less access to the natural world, and limit ourselves from experience in nature, we are undermining our capacity for human intelligence. "This issue is not so much about what biodiversity can do for us as resources as it is about the survival of human intelligence cut off from its source."[616]

Place: Sustaining Cultures, Ecologies, Communities," *The Journal of Women and Religion* 19/20 (2003): 11-25.

[614] Darlene E. Clover, "Introduction," xiv.

[615] Thomas Berry is one of the more eloquent thinkers on this subject.

[616] Orr, *Earth in Mind*, 51-52.

The question for me, then, is what kind of world can it be in which we are experiencing God, and in turn changing our behaviour, if we do not know that world through ecological literacy, and do not experience the world, through knowledge of place and experiences in nature? Orr understands a complex relationship between the world and human behaviour change. To remind ourselves, the point of ecological literacy is human actions changed as a result of knowledge gained about the world. Ecological literacy provides insight into the relationship among all things, and the ability to act accordingly:

> The ecologically literate person has the knowledge necessary to comprehend interrelatedness, and an attitude of care and stewardship. Such a person would also have the practical competence required to act on the basis of knowledge and feeling.[617]

So then, understanding of the world, in a place-based context and based upon direct experience in nature, can lead to human behaviour change by providing or instilling three key attributes: awareness of how the Earth is interconnected, a moral orientation of care and the practical skills to create ecologically sustainable means of existence. Each of these is needed if actions that support ecological restoration and reparation are to be begun and maintained in human communities.

In ecological literacy, behaviour change is understood as something more than physical or material transformations in our actions. Such change, modeled under the concept of ecological design, is meant to reflect a reorientation of the human person in light of ecological literacy. Orr believes that what we learn and how we construct things reflect how we see ourselves and in turn changes human perception. “When we design

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[617] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 92.

ecologically," he suggests, "we are instructed continually by the fabric of everyday life: pedagogy informs infrastructure, which in turn informs us."[618] Ecological design is about reforming the human presence on the Earth in such a way that changes who we are. Bringing together science with the "practical arts" – ethics, economics, politics, et cetera – human behaviour change in response to knowledge about the world has the opportunity to reorient the human person toward something larger, to a greater sense of community and responsibility.[619] Perhaps, in Berry's estimation, it can lead to a greater intimacy with the whole Earth community.[620]

Ecological literacy, thus, helps us to recognize that the world in the model of praxis is known through specific places and experiences in nature. From this standpoint, behaviour change can occur because such contextualization of the world can lead to greater awareness of human-nature interconnection and help feed the will and competence to care for the world.

5.4.3 God and Ecological Literacy

McFague's understanding of God, reflected in the model of praxis, is of an embodied God of all creation who is understood as relational and on the side of life and its fulfillment. McFague is careful to make tentative assertions about God, reflecting her belief that we can only understand God metaphorically.

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[618] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 31.

[619] Ibid., 4.

[620] Berry, *Great Work*, xi, 98.

What insight can ecological literacy provide into McFague's understanding of God as reflected in the model? Ecological literacy is a form of pedagogy, not theology or religious studies, and so not in the business of making assertions about God. Nevertheless, ecological literacy provides insight into three areas from which we can consider the concept of God in McFague's model of praxis: the value of certain ethical convictions in ecological literacy, the importance of *biophilia* and the human need to create meaning.

First, Orr holds ethical convictions in his understanding of ecological literacy that mirror McFague's understanding of God. Orr writes:

> Education relevant to the transition to a sustainable society, demands first, *an uncompromising commitment to life and its preservation.* Anything less is morally indefensible. By commitment to life I mean a commitment, pervading learning and research at all levels, to health, harmony, balance, wholeness, and diversity as these qualities apply to both human and natural systems. Following [Albert] Schweitzer, a commitment to life rests on a deep sense of the sacredness of life expressed as love, nurture, creativity, wonder, faith, and justice.[621]

Ecological literacy, in Orr's mind, is not morally neutral. Given that "all education is environmental education" through inclusion and exclusion of information, worldviews on the human place in the world, et cetera,[622] then ecological literacy has an ethical role to play in educating people toward life.

Orr's conviction that ecological literacy is on the side of life and its preservation mirrors McFague's assertion that God is on the side of life and its fulfillment. Orr's interpretation that a commitment to life is grounded in a sense of the sacred, reflected in such qualities as love, wonder and justice, also reflects McFague's view. There is

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[621] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 133. Original emphasis.

[622] Ibid., 90.

coherence between Orr's views in the domain of environmental education and McFague's theological considerations into the construction of God in light of praxis.

The moral orientation of ecological literacy is also grounded in an awareness of human evil and suffering. "Whatever a sustainable society may be," Orr avers, "it must be built on the most realistic view of the human condition possible."[623] Orr recognizes the importance of theological voices in discussions around this.[624] In his ethical convictions regarding the value of ecological literacy, Orr is aware of the role that evil, finitude, tragedy, greed, and other aspects of human perversity play, and thus the complexity and difficulty in shifting human knowledge and action toward ecological restoration.

Orr is also aware that beliefs into human nature are reflected in our behaviour.[625] This echoes what McFague believes, as seen in Chapter Two. How we perceive human beings in relation to the rest of the natural world is reflected in human patterns of acting and organizing.

These two points in Orr's ethical convictions, about recognizing evil and finitude, and the relationship between our beliefs regarding human nature and behaviour, are in line with McFague's thinking regarding God. McFague's model of God as embodied and on the side of life and its fulfillment is based upon the interpretation of the human person as embedded within an Earth-based starting point. She believes that any construct of God, if it is to be viable and to reflect human experience, must be based upon the best of science,

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[623] Ibid., 18.

[624] Ibid.

[625] Ibid., 26.

reflect the reality of embodiment and lead to positive consequences for the Earth and its inhabitants.[626] Ecological literacy, then, provides a means for educating on these aspects so that a life-enhancing model of God can be constructed.

The second insight that ecological literacy offers to understanding God in the model of praxis is the importance of *biophilia*. Orr believes that biophilia, a human affinity for the living world, is essential to ecological literacy: "[E]ven a thorough knowledge of the facts of life and of the threats to it will not save us in the absence of the feeling of kinship with life of the sort that cannot entirely be put into words."[627] Biophilia, a deep sense of connection with all things, holds within it a sense of spirituality. Fritjof Capra, a physicist, systems theorist and founder of the Center for Ecoliteracy, writes:

> Pedagogy oriented toward connecting actions with full appreciation of nature's processes – the breath of life – is therefore more than just a matter of teaching about biology and chemistry. The Latin *spiritus*, breath, is also the root of 'spiritual.' In the schools and programs that the Center for Ecoliteracy supports, we want to create possibilities for developing abiding relationships with the natural world.[628]

It is the connection of the human spirit to the Earth that grounds biophilia. It is this connection that, in part, motivates Orr, as well as what draws scholars on worldview and ecology, like Mary Evelyn Tucker and Thomas Berry, to a needed vision of biophilia for

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[626] See Chapter Two, page 80.

[627] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 87.

[628] Fritjof Capra, "Sustainable Living, Ecological Literacy, and the Breath of Life," *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 12, no. 1 (2007): 17. The Center for Ecoliteracy is an organization that supports ecological education in schools in the United States and around the world. David Orr is on the board of the Center. Their website provides an overview, articles and resources on promoting ecological literacy and designing programs for schools. See Center for Ecoliteracy, http://www.ecoliteracy.org (accessed May 28, 2012).

ecological healing.[629] The related concept of wonder contains within it a sense of mystery that is an important component of spirituality.[630]

Biophilia is related to the third insight of ecological literacy for understanding God. Orr recognizes within ecological literacy, and its corollary, ecological design, the human need to create meaning. This need is a primal religious urge. Orr writes:

> [W]ith a certain awareness of our mortality, we are inescapably religious creatures. The religious impulse works like water flowing up from an artesian spring that will come to surface in one place or another. Our choice is not whether we are religious or not as atheists would have it, but whether the object of our worship is authentic or not. The gravity mass of our nature tugs us to create or discover systems of meaning that places us in some larger framework that explains, consoles, offers grounds for hope, and, sometimes, rationalizes.[631]

The task, then, is to nurture the human need for meaning and educate it with scientific insight into ecology and other scientific disciplines, foster it with experience in nature and place-based learning and direct it through an understanding of the moral as well as physical implications of the ecological crisis.

The model of praxis reflects this same human need and the insight that humans act upon the meanings that they create. Once again, ecological literacy offers the chance to

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[629] Orr writes, "In the century ahead we must chart a different course that leads to restoration, healing, and wholeness. Ecological design is a kind of navigation aid to help us find our bearings again. And getting home means recasting the human presence in the world in a way that honors ecology, evolution, human dignity, spirit, and the human need for roots and connection." Orr, *Nature of Design*, 30.

See Tucker, "Education and Ecology"; Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase*, comm. Judith A. Berling. Second Master Hsüan Hua Memorial Lecture (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2003); Thomas Berry, *Dream of the Earth*; and Berry, *Great Work.*

[630] Lisa Sideris writes, "Wonder is often understood to exist alongside a set of virtues or dispositions that include generosity, gratitude, humility, restraint, and appreciation of difference or otherness. Often it accompanies a sense of mystery, an awareness of something that lies just beyond our comprehension." Sideris, "Environmental Literacy," 87-88.

[631] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 24.

nurture meaning and suggest actions based upon such meaning. The emphasis on biophilia can suggest a form of meaning that individuals can discover through ecology and other aspects of Earth science.

When we lose a sense of our deep kinship with all life, and a sense of wonder at the created world, there are deep implications for the Earth, as witnessed with the ecological crisis. There are also implications for our relationship with God. Orr argues, "As our sense of wonder in nature diminishes, so too does our sense of the sacred, our pleasure in the created world, and the impulse behind a great deal of our best thinking."[632] Ecological literacy, then, with its emphasis on experience in nature, place-based learning, and behaviour change as a result of knowledge gained, has implications for how we understand God in the model of praxis.

5.4.4 Experience and Ecological Literacy

I have discussed the importance in ecological literacy of experience in nature in relation to the other component parts of the model of praxis. However, what can ecological literacy offer to understanding experience in the model? Is experience in a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship necessarily experience in the natural world? What other forms of experience might the model be referring to?

In the model of praxis, experience is understood as that which exists before language but is brought into human awareness through language. Therefore, experience is interpreted and constructed through metaphor. Experience is contextually located and

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[632] Orr, *Earth in Mind*, 24.

inextricably related to human behaviour. Experience is an ongoing event; the focus is on the continuum of experiencing God in the world, rather than on specific, discrete happenings. For McFague, there is a priority of human experience over the models and concepts that we create. Experience is embodied and directly related to how and what we know.

Experience is not so explicitly defined in ecological literacy. It is, as I have stated before, focused on the particular, specific experiences people have in relation to their education, the natural world and the ecological crisis. The emphasis in ecological literacy is on experiential and participatory learning.[633] The focus is on method:

> [I]t follows that *the way education occurs is as important as its content.* Students taught environmental awareness in a setting that does not alter their relationship to basic life-support systems learn that it is sufficient to intellectualize, emote, or posture about such things without having to live differently. Environmental education ought to change the way people live, not just how they talk.[634]

Thus, the importance of experience in nature, for proponents of ecological literacy, is not merely about what is learned. Experience in the natural world, claims Orr, also helps develop good thinking. There is a relationship between experience and intellectual capacity.[635]

Experience in ecological literacy also helps to build moral capacity. Educational programs that deny the importance of direct experience teach students that it is enough to learn about social injustice, ecological devastation and other moral ills without having to do

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[633] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 91.

[634] Ibid. Original emphasis.

[635] Ibid., 91-92.

anything about them.[636] Gruenewald argues that a critical pedagogy of place that is rooted in experience "encourages teachers and students to reinhabit their places, that is, to pursue the kind of social action that improves the social and ecological life of places, near and far, now and in the future."[637] Clover agrees: "Environmental adult education works to help people begin to include active political expression into their everyday perceptions, work, and lives."[638] Theologian Daniel Spencer recognizes the importance of experience in eco-justice models of teaching theology:

> Transformative or praxis-based models that teach about justice, faith, and ethical issues through active involvement and experiential learning challenge more traditional, passive, content-oriented pedagogies.[639]

Building intellectual and moral capacities through experience are essential aspects of ecological literacy. It is recognized that doing so is not easy. It is a complicated task to cultivate experience that will lead to right action in response to the ecological crisis.[640] One contends with many aspects, including apathy, the split of mind from body, and the distortion of experience that has occurred in consumer society. Orr avers, "The consumer society . . . requires that human contact with nature, once direct, frequent, and intense, be mediated by technology and organization."[641]

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[636] Ibid., 104.

[637] Gruenewald, "Best of Both Worlds," 7.

[638] Clover, "Introduction," xvi.

[639] Daniel T. Spencer, "Pedagogical Issues and Teaching Models for Eco-Justice," in *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 209.

[640] Sideris, "Environmental Literacy," 91.

[641] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 175.

Experience, thus, needs to be educated. In the current era, deliberate attention needs to be paid to what and how we experience. In advancing the value of place-based learning, Orr writes that "the study of place cultivates the habit of careful, close observation, and with it the ability to connect cause and effect."[642]

The education of experience, however, is not unidirectional. Certain forms and models of experience, such as those that are place-based, rooted in nature, modeled on social justice, et cetera, can lead to the kind of thinking and moral orientation needed for ecological restoration and new human relationships with the Earth. Orr writes:

> Growing food on local farms and gardens, for example, becomes a source of nourishment for the body and instruction in soils, plants, animals, and cycles of growth and decay. Renewable energy technologies become a source of energy as well as insight about the flows of energy in ecosystems. Ecologically designed communities become a way to teach about land use, landscapes, and human connections. Restoration of wildlife corridors and habitats instructs us in the ways of animals. In other words, ecological design becomes a way to expand our awareness of nature and our ecological competence.[643]

In turn, then, experience can be educated by the means we take for restoration. Ecological literacy can foster experience. In this measure, it offers to the model of praxis insight into the importance of educating experience, and of privileging certain kinds of experience, particularly in relation to the ecological crisis.

5.5 Ecological Literacy and Ecological Praxis: Toward Transformation

Ecological literacy offers insights into the model of praxis that suggest ways in which our understanding of the self, world, God, and experience can be interpreted in light

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[642] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 104.
[643] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 31-32.

of ecological education, and ways in which a program of ecological literacy can foster aspects of the model so that the model itself might be activated in response to the ecological crisis. Through such specific aspects of ecological literacy as place-based education, experience in nature, and fostering of biophilia, all understood within the larger principle of behaviour change, my exploration suggests that ecological literacy could help trigger a parabolic understanding of discipleship that leads to, among other possibilities, an ecological praxis of consumption reduction.

We are left with several questions, however. *How* might ecological literacy trigger the model in this way? How do Orr and others understand the mechanism for human change within ecological literacy? There is a mechanism of disorientation and reorientation of the self embedded within the model of praxis. What mechanism exists within ecological literacy, and to what extent does it correlate with that found in McFague's thinking?

5.5.1 Disorientation, Reorientation and Ecological Literacy

The model of praxis, based upon McFague's understanding of praxis, represents a destabilizing process of the self in relationship to God. Beginning with a dramatic disorientation of the self in response to experiencing God in the world, there is then a resultant reorientation that leads to radical behaviour changes. The model of praxis, which reflects a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, is about a transformation of the person that is reflected in that person's actions in the world.

Likewise, the goal of ecological literacy is transformation, of the self and of community. Orr says it in various ways throughout his work:

> "Environmental education ought to change the way people live, not just how they talk."[644]
>
> "The aim of education is life lived to its fullest."[645]
>
> "Ecology, like most learning worthy of the effort, is an applied subject. Its goal is not just a comprehension of how the world works, but, in light of that knowledge, a life lived accordingly."[646]
>
> "This is a design challenge like no other. It is not about making greener widgets but how to make decent communities that fit their places with elegant frugality."[647]

The impetus for change in ecological literacy is very similar to the disorientation and reorientation described by McFague. The goal in ecological literacy is transformation – changes in behaviour based upon knowledge gained.

Orr's emphasis on changes in behaviour as a result of becoming ecologically literate is consistent throughout his work. He also has a sense of how a progression to change might work. He writes:

> [A] decent environmental studies program could acquaint students with the major issues . . . and still fail because its graduates were unable to make the leap from 'I know' to 'I care' to 'I'll do something.' The first stage results from programmatic thoroughness, the second from a bonding process involving the integration of analytic intelligence, personhood, and experience, and the third from empowered get-up-and-go. Evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that all three are essential to learning.[648]

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[644] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 91.

[645] Ibid., 99.

[646] Ibid., 87.

[647] Orr, *Nature of Design*, 11.

[648] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 147.

Despite this sense of progression, Orr rarely discusses the mechanism behind such transformation. Yet his comprehension of learning echoes aspects of transformative learning theory. What Orr is advocating is reflected in the thinking of transformative learning theorist Stephen Brookfield, who writes, "I believe an act of learning can be called transformative only if it involves a fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts."[649]

I will turn very briefly, then, to transformative learning theory to provide some of the theory behind the mechanism of transformation embedded in ecological literacy.[650] Within transformative learning, there are several main ideas into the nature of transformation as it applies to the behaviour change that Orr is privileging.

The main idea is that learning occurs in one of four ways: "by elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view, or by transforming habits of mind."[651] A frame of reference is the structure of assumptions and expectations that we use to filter primary experiences; it is referred to as a "meaning

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[649] Stephen D. Brookfield, "Transformative Learning as Ideology Critique," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, Jack Mezirow and assoc. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 139.

[650] Although I criticized transformative learning in Chapter One for its lack of emphasis on behaviour change, the insights of the theory into the transformation of the self are valuable. When combined with ecological literacy, the specific relevance of transformation to behaviour change becomes more apparent.

[651] Jack Mezirow, "Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory," in Mezirow and assoc., *Learning as Transformation*, 19.

perspective."[652] Habits of mind are how we interpret the meaning of our experiences, and become "expressed as a point of view."[653]

It is the fourth way of learning, transformations in habits of mind, that is most similar to the disorientation and reorientation advocated by McFague, and which is what Orr is aiming to achieve in ecological literacy. Theorist Jack Mezirow explains how such transformation can come about:

> Transformations in habit of mind may be *epochal*, a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight, or *incremental*, involving a progressive series of transformations in related points of view that culminate in a transformation in habit of mind.[654]

Mezirow offers an important insight into transformation here; it can be sudden, or it can be gradual, through layers of changes in thinking. Ecological literacy seems to depend upon the latter form, suggesting that through various aspects and stages of learning, we gradually develop new habits of mind or points of view regarding the Earth and human behaviour. In the model of praxis, the potential for either an epochal or an incremental transformation exists. Returning to the examples of John Woolman and Dorothy Day from Chapter Two, one might suggest that Woolman's transformation reflects an epochal shift as a result of signing the bill of sale for the slave.[655] By contrast, the transformations in Day's actions seem to have arisen from a series of formative experiences in her life.[656]

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[652] Ibid., 16.

[653] Ibid., 18.

[654] Ibid., 21.

[655] Woolman, *Journal*, 15.

[656] These experiences include Day's love for the common people, her relationship with her common-law husband, and her conversion to Roman Catholicism. Day, *Long Loneliness.*

Regardless of which form it takes, within transformative learning there are four conditions that must be present for transformation to occur, according to Laurent Parks Daloz. They are the presence of the other, a reflective discourse, a mentoring community, and opportunities for committed action.[657] These four conditions mirror what is necessary in both ecological literacy and in the model of praxis. For Orr and McFague, the other is recognized as being a subject in its own right, and a reflective discourse is created in dialogue with the human and other-than-human aspects of the community in which the learners are engaged. [658] The mentoring community can be understood to be educators and other elders who are acting on behalf of the Earth, as well as wisdom from the nonhuman world. The fourth condition, opportunities for committed action, reflect the belief of Orr and of McFague that without the opportunity for human action based upon insights gained, transformation is not possible.

Ultimately, critical reflection is not enough. This is what distinguishes some theories of change (as seen in Chapter One) from the model developed in this dissertation, and of what Orr is convinced. Parks Daloz explains:

> [C]ritical reflection is a necessary but not sufficient condition of transformative learning. In other words, transformative learning cannot happen without critical reflection, but critical reflection can happen without an accompanying transformation in perspective or habit of mind.[659]

Without the deep shift that occurs within the self as a result of knowledge gained, in Orr's context, or experiences of God in the world, in McFague's, critical reflection is insufficient.

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[657] Laurent A. Parks Daloz, "Transformative Learning for the Common Good," in Mezirow and assoc., *Learning as Transformation*, 112.

[658] Orr, *Ecological Literacy*, 90; McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 98-99.

[659] Parks Daloz, "Transformative Learning," 125.

Critical reflection, no matter how challenging, radical or insightful, is not enough for the changes that are required in response to the ecological crisis. There must be a transformation, a disorientation and reorientation that occurs in the person and leads to dramatic changes in one's behaviour.

5.6 Conclusion: Ecological Literacy, Ecological Praxis and Christian Discipleship

Ecological literacy as a discipline is not in the business of Christian (or any other religious) discipleship. However, like Christian discipleship, it is in the business of transformation. Discipleship is Christian belief lived out in the world. The model of praxis, as a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, is about transformation. It is about the transformation of the self in the presence of the divine, to such an extent that the very way the self acts in the world is permanently altered. Ecological praxis is one manifestation of such transformation, particularly in response to the devastation of the natural world. For McFague, such praxis refers to the specific practice of consumption reduction on the part of the middle-class in North America. Understood theologically, this is interpreted as a practice of Christian discipleship.

It is in transformation, then, that I find potential for ecological literacy to help invoke ecological praxis. Ecological literacy is about dramatic changes in individual (and collective) behaviour as a result of knowledge gained about the world, through the study of ecology, cosmology, evolution, and other disciplines. Ecological literacy, it seems to me, is a *way* to a praxis of consumption reduction. By becoming ecologically literate through specific educational practices, with an emphasis on place-based education, experience in nature, and biophilia, there can be a route to the disorientation and reorientation of the self

in the model of praxis. Ecological literacy can be a route to transformation, which thereby can lead to an ecological praxis of consumption reduction in the North American context. The desire to change things without the competence to do so is defeating. Ecological literacy offers people the ability to gain the competence needed, so that they are able to move forward from the experiences they gain of God in the world. Ecological literacy, by exposing people to the intricacies and mysteries of the world, may even provide avenues for Christians to have such disorienting and reorienting experiences of God in the world.

Conclusion

Exploring ecological literacy as a means by which an ecological praxis of consumption reduction can be elicited is one way of asking questions about the model of praxis at its base. In doing so, I discovered that ecological literacy has a wealth of insight and tools to offer to the model of praxis and the challenge of actually engaging in the ecological praxis McFague advocates. I also determined that the mechanism for change in ecological literacy is very similar to the parabolic disruption that occurs in McFague's understanding of Christian discipleship. It is this similarity that makes ecological literacy an appropriate dialogue partner with the work of McFague.

Discipleship is at the heart of McFague's theology; it is what has driven her scholarship for nearly fifty years. An ecological praxis of consumption reduction represents a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship in response to a loving God and a world in crisis. Yet uncovering the roots of such praxis is not a straightforward task. That is because while McFague's interest in and concern for praxis has been centered in her understanding of Christian discipleship, this is not always explicit in her work. Further, the methodology behind McFague's understanding of and call for praxis is not identified in her scholarship. My task in this dissertation, thus, was to uncover and further develop the understanding of praxis that underlies McFague's demand for ecological praxis, how she understands human action in the context of belief. I also wished to consider how the praxis McFague advocates can be activated into real behaviour change.

The first step was to situate McFague's work within the trajectory of ecotheology that has developed over nearly fifty years. McFague is a leading ecotheologian whose ideas

regarding ecology, theology and ecological praxis emerge from and are situated within a range of conversations regarding worldview, constructions of God, embodiment, and the various ethical issues raised by ecological (and social) injustice. I provided a sketch of the history and major developments within ecotheology in order to provide the reader with an understanding of where McFague is located.

In turn, McFague's work has been studied and utilized by numerous scholars. A survey of the scholarship that has followed in McFague's footsteps was helpful in demonstrating how her ideas have been utilized by a later generation of scholars, and in showing that, to date, the praxis element in her work has not been picked up. My contribution offers something new to the corpus.

In turn, it was helpful to examine my own research path in considering ecological literacy as a dialogue partner with the work of McFague. By surveying different theories of behaviour change, I highlighted what is valuable about ecological literacy. Primarily, this consists of the commitments this field of education shares with McFague, which include the priority of behaviour change as a result of knowledge gained, recognition of the complex relationship between knowledge and action and the importance of considering the uniqueness of the ecological crisis in frameworks of action. The first chapter, thus, consisted of the survey of ecotheology, an overview of other scholars' projects and an outline of my research path toward ecological literacy.

The second step in my research was to identify the methodological basis of McFague's call for ecological praxis. Surprisingly, while McFague's recognition of the need for consumption reduction as a theological response to the ecological crisis emerges from her and others' work in ecotheology, McFague's understanding of how people move

to action is located in her early work, in the parabolic and metaphorical theologies that she develops before her turn to ecotheology. There, McFague has a rich and complex – albeit unstated and implicit – comprehension of human action. It is founded upon the function of metaphor in the relationship among belief, language and action in people's lives. Further, it is best represented in religious autobiographies, such as those of John Woolman and Dorothy Day, people who were moved by a profound sense of faith and compassion for the suffering of others to live out that faith and compassion in radical lifestyle changes.

While McFague's comprehension of praxis is found in her early work, it is not present in a form that can be analyzed or interpreted in light of her call for ecological praxis. It was necessary for me to construct her understanding into a model of praxis that emphasizes how belief, language and action operate in relation to experiences of God in the world. This model represents McFague's understanding of Christian discipleship. Defined by McFague as Christian belief lived out in the world, for her discipleship is a parabolic understanding that emphasizes the disorientation and reorientation in the self expressed in people's actions as a result of experiencing God's love.

I constructed this model by exploring key parts of McFague's understanding of human action: how the self, world, God, and experience are interpreted in relation to the dynamic among belief, language and action. I then summarized the construction into the following definition. The model of praxis, understood as a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship, is defined as

> A radical disorientation of the self in response to experiencing God in the world, leading to a permanent reorientation of the self in the world, evidenced in dramatic and enduring lifestyle changes.

The identification and construction of the model of praxis was the task of Chapter Two.

As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the magnitude and scope of the ecological crisis is unprecedented in human history. Therefore, it is prudent to consider how the model of praxis can be developed within the specific context of the ecological crisis. The consideration in my research was about how the model can become more specifically relevant to the changes in behaviour that need to occur in response to environmental degradation. Since McFague's own ecotheology is rich and substantive, I decided to develop the model using those insights. This would allow, in my opinion, for a developed model of praxis that considers the very factors that play into the ecological praxis that McFague later calls for.

This required, then, an analysis of McFague's ecotheology to elucidate its main insights. Through the construction of a model of the universe as the body of God, McFague develops four key insights to her ecotheology: the importance of an Earth-based starting point; embodiment as a central construct for a theology of nature; the need to know and love nature; and the importance of an ethic of care. After identifying the methodological influences on McFague's work that help explain the turn she makes to ecotheology and the subsequent emphasis she places on these insights, I explain each of them in turn.

It is important to be aware of what limitations might exist in McFague's scholarship, particularly as they relate to her understanding of praxis, her call for an ecological praxis of consumption reduction and my own use of her ecotheology to develop the model of praxis. Therefore, I then identified three important criticisms of McFague's ideas that had possible implications for the model of praxis. Each of these critiques offers a corrective lens to McFague's theology; at the same time, it was noted that in her book *Life*

Abundant, where McFague advocates for ecological praxis, her epistemology has changed in such a way that helps to mitigate these weaknesses in her ideas.

The analysis of the main insights in McFague's ecotheology, as well as a critical assessment of her thought, together comprised Chapter Three. With this material, I was able to move to Chapter Four, in which I developed the model of praxis. Using the definitive aspects of the model – the self, world, God, and experience – I examined how each aspect can be expanded in light of McFague's ecotheology. There were many contributions; they held in common two points. The first is that the component parts of the model did not need to be changed; their function in the model, and thereby the model itself, could hold the additional insights contributed by McFague's later scholarship. Second, each insight was expanded in light of the values of an Earth-based starting point, embodiment, the need to know and love nature, and an ethic of care. So while the definition of the model of praxis still holds, it was able to be enlarged through the lenses of ecology and theology.

McFague's call for ecological praxis in her later book, *Life Abundant*, is part of a lifelong interest in praxis that only becomes articulated as such with her turn to ecotheology. At this point, after constructing and then developing a model of praxis based upon McFague's comprehension of metaphor in the relationship among belief, language and action, it was helpful to look at what McFague says specifically about praxis in her ecotheology. Praxis language is new at this point in McFague's scholarship, and an examination highlighted that her definition of the word 'praxis' changed in each book of ecotheology. However, I discovered that the fluctuations in McFague's use of the word 'praxis' reflect a deepening awareness of the function of praxis in discipleship. The purpose of an ecological praxis of consumption reduction, McFague exhorts, is Christian

discipleship. It is about a deep response to a loving, incarnational God by loving the world as God does. For McFague, this is a parabolic understanding of the person being radically disoriented and permanently reoriented in her or his actions in response to experiencing God in the world.

As I have demonstrated, McFague's call for an ecological praxis is grounded in an incredibly rich and complex way of understanding human action in the context of belief; it represents a parabolic understanding of Christian discipleship. In this understanding, McFague challenges people to a theological response to the ecological crisis that is concrete in its application and effects. It is a response that *must* change one's behaviour.

At this point, my concern turned toward how to actually elicit or activate the ecological praxis McFague is advocating. By using ecological literacy as a tool, I explored how this form of pedagogy might educate discipleship – that is, how ecological literacy, with its focus on behaviour change as a result of knowledge gained, might be a tool with which to activate the model of praxis at the base of an ecological praxis. In Chapter Five, my heuristic question was whether knowledge of the world, gained through the framework of ecological literacy, could precipitate the parabolic experiencing of God to the extent that it would lead to the behaviour change of consumption reduction. To explore this question, I presented a detailed overview of the field of ecological literacy and then applied its core principles to the component parts of the model of praxis – self, world, God, and experience – to see what possibilities arise. I discovered that, like the model of praxis, ecological literacy is concerned with the transformation of persons in their values and their actions, with priority given to the actions taken in the world. Although ecological literacy is not in the business of discipleship, its construct for transformation dovetails with a parabolic

understanding of discipleship, and so can offer a way or means to get at the methodology behind ecological praxis.

It remains to be seen whether this can work. Future directions, based upon this research, include taking into account ecological literacy as an aspect of theological or pastoral literacy in the context of the ecological crisis. Some of this work is already being done at the grassroots level. Sarah McFarland Taylor has documented the work of "green sisters," religious women in North America and elsewhere who have incorporated principles of ecological literacy into their worship, community lives and educational programs.[660] An examination of the role of ecological literacy in local congregations and parishes would be helpful. Development of pastoral theology with ecological literacy in mind is also vital.

Yet, none of these directions, while valuable, get at what McFague is arguing in *Life Abundant*. Neither do they satisfy the question I raised in the introduction: What is needed to get me, and people like me, to change our behaviour? McFague's comprehension of praxis, which I constructed as a model of praxis based upon the role that metaphor plays in our belief, language and action, is indispensable to our thinking about behaviour change. She presents an alternative framework for praxis that moves beyond critical reflection to consider the whole self in response to God in the world. Yet even the most religious among us can find it very difficult to change our behaviour to the extent that the ecological crisis demands. Only a few are able to sustain the kinds of lives that Dorothy Day and John Woolman have done. Of course, many issues are involved, including despair in the face of

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[660] Sarah McF
arland Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

ecological devastation and physical and mental exhaustion when considering the work ahead. There are systemic dimensions to the ecological crisis and changes that need to occur at the levels of social and political action.

One thing is certain: we cannot do this work on our own, merely as individuals. Individual action, it can be argued, is best sustained when it occurs alongside and with others. While my project engages the question of individual behaviour change, which is a critical part of the equation, there is a further question about considering McFague's call for ecological praxis within a community context. Christianity is, by definition, a religion of community, whereby we are meant to gather and worship, repent and love with and among others. My suggestion, then, is that more work needs to be done regarding the relationship between the self, spiritual discipline, ecological literacy, and the role of community in making the hard, radical behaviour changes that we need to make. A next step will be to consider the community dimensions of the model of praxis, of Christian discipleship.

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