

A SPIRITUAL FRAMEWORK OF ORGANIC ONENESS:
THE ECO-THEOLOGICAL SHIFT TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE ECOLOGICAL
CONSCIOUSNESS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Earth's environment has been undergoing unprecedented rates of degradation during the Anthropocene paradigm. Current projections for the near future show climate change producing grim outcomes for most habitable parts of the world. This thesis defends the argument that in order to adequately address the state of the environment, humanity must experience a shift in collective consciousness away from the current philosophical paradigm, and instead adopt a paradigm that enables a common mindset regarding the place of humans within the natural environment. Various forms of spiritual ecology are explored: deep ecology, biblical eco-theology, and eco-feminist theology. These positions are explored in order to introduce a framework necessary to achieve the collective shift in consciousness required to address environmental issues: a Spiritual Framework of Organic

Oneness, which includes components of spiritual ecology and earth-centered religious traditions.

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I. Introduction

For the past two hundred years or more, the physical state of the environment has been rapidly deteriorating. Most people accept the preponderance of scientific evidence establishing that the environment is, in fact, in grave danger due to human activity, while many others reject climate change science, and continue to believe that the current state of the environment is not human-caused. Regardless of the contrasting reactions to climate change, the bottom line is as follows: as long as global temperatures continue to rise and current trends in resource exploitation continue, the human race will face unprecedented political, economic, social, and environmental challenges. While global warming is one of the most pressing environmental issues the world currently faces, I intend to argue that the underlying factor of such degradation and thus the issue that must be addressed to significantly curb global warming is the way in which modernity exalts the status of humanity while disparaging the status of the environment.

In order to satisfy the consumption trends of predominantly developed and industrialized nations, natural resources are being depleted at a rate that is causing biodiversity loss in the form of ecosystem destruction, species extinction, the exhaustion of natural water supplies, and uncontrollable air contamination and pollution. Each of these factors has resulted in a human-caused global climate change, as well as a continual state of furthering environmental degradation. However, this change is not one that is simply *impending*; it is a change that life on Earth, including humans, is already experiencing.

For instance, the water crisis was once spoken of as a problem of the future, as if current generations will not have to worry about it in their lifetime. Unfortunately, this has proven to be no more than unwarranted optimism, as forty percent of the world's 2008 population was already lacking adequate amounts of fresh water.¹ Further, according to the World Health Organization in 2000, 1.1 billion people were already unable to meet their basic need for clean water.² Global clean, fresh water shortages, coupled with air that may very soon be unbreathable, adds up to a grim future not only for the human race, but for all life forms on Earth.

The traditional and long-term dependence of the human race on fossil fuels has resulted in heavy emissions of greenhouse gases, causing a global rise in temperatures, and although temperatures have risen a seemingly small 2.5 degrees Fahrenheit over the last century,³ the effects of this can be detrimental. Hotter temperatures means more extreme natural disasters, in terms of both frequency and intensity, as well as an increase in sea level rise due to melting polar ice caps, threatening to make islands and many coastal cities around the world inhabitable for any creature without gills. The planet is already beginning to see the effects of climate change, with some coastal cities—such as Miami—currently engaged in a constant battle against beach erosion and inland flooding.

The environment is simply in distress, and the scientifically proven truth (for which there is an overwhelming abundance of reliable data) is that humans are responsible.⁴

1. Celia Deane-Drummond, "Trends in ecology and environment," in *Eco-theology* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008), 3.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 5.

4. Ibid., 4.

While some organizations and individuals recognize the intrinsic value of the environment, there are many people whose minds are simply operating in the common philosophical paradigm that sees man as superior, and thus only interprets the environment as having instrumental value. This anthropocentric paradigm has led to unwarranted exploitation of the environment. Indeed, it represents the culmination of various interpretations of Christianity (perhaps misinterpretations)⁵ and the concomitant development of individualism in the political philosophies of various democratic nations. Specifically, some patriarchal interpretations of the Bible have placed man as the justified taker of resources, while political individualism tends to lead to an overarching focus on individual opportunity at the expense of interconnectedness.

In this paper, I will argue that the only way to achieve environmental progress is to introduce a new philosophical paradigm that can be accepted by many or, at the very least, tolerated by most, in order to enable humanity to collaborate on a scale large enough to allow the issues to be adequately addressed. To introduce this new framework, I will first discuss the place of man in relation to the environment from the perspectives of various forms of spiritual ecology, including deep ecology, biblical eco-theology and eco-feminist theology. I will then defend the necessity for a new and unifying eco-theological framework: a Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness. Lastly, I will examine and address some of the framework's possible critiques.

5. The phrase, "perhaps misinterpretations" is used here because there have been many successful movements to interpret Biblical excerpts in a way that favors environmental stewardship, as opposed to dominance in the forms of destruction and exploitation. These will be explored in a later section of this paper, titled "Biblical Eco-theology."

II. Spiritual Ecology

The Deep Ecology Platform

During the twentieth century, the United States began to see an increase in environmental awareness in many forms, from vegetarianism⁶ to publications urging readers to take action.⁷ In the latter half of the century, the Deep Ecology movement emerged. This movement recommended a shift in the philosophical norms of ecological science, namely, a concern for the greater biotic community as a whole, emphasizing the idea that all creatures on Earth share a holistic unity. The philosophical ideology underlying the movement consists of the following principles:

- The flourishing of human and non-human life has value in and of itself—that is, intrinsic value, independent of usefulness for human purposes, or instrumental value.
- The richness and diversity of life are values in themselves and contribute to human and non-human flourishing.
- Humans have no right to reduce diversity except for vital needs.
- Current human interference with non-humans is excessive, and getting worse.
- The flourishing of human life is compatible with a significant decrease in the human population; in fact, non-human life requires this adjustment.
- There are policy changes required in economic, technological, and ideological structures.
- There needs to be a deeper appreciation of the quality of life, rather than just measurement in economic terms.

6. Justin Worland, “How a Vegetarian Diet Could Help Save the Planet,” *Time Magazine Online*, Published March 21, 2016, <http://time.com/4266874/vegetarian-diet-climate-change/>. Worland discusses the research which proves that a large-scale trend of vegetarianism would have massive positive impacts on the environment, showing that vegetarianism is a form of environmental activism.

7. These highly influential books include Marjory Stoneman Douglas’ *The Everglades: River of Grass* (1947); Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* (1949); and Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962).

- There is an obligation to work either directly or indirectly to implement change.⁸

The insights provided by the Deep Ecology movement originate from the fact that it strays away from the previously accepted notion of ecology. Traditionally, ecology embraced the anthropocentric paradigm by underscoring that the instrumental value of the environment provided the sole incentives for its protection. In contrast, the Deep Ecology Platform maintains the intrinsic value of the environment as an incentive for its protection. Most significantly, this development results in a holistic approach to ecology, precisely because it includes the protection of other species. This change in perspective stems from a recognition of the intrinsic value of all life forms, while also promoting self-realization through “a discovery of interconnectedness with the larger Self or whole.”⁹ Although one of the main principles of the Platform states that humans can reduce diversity only to protect a vital need, many proponents of Deep Ecology support a belief in biocentric equality, a concept giving all forms of life intrinsic value and equal importance.

Deep Ecology has given rise to many concerns. For example, some critics have argued that, theoretically, it would be logically supportive of the killing of humans in a situation where other species are under the threat of extinction.¹⁰ However, shifting ecology away from individualism in order to create a holistic spiritual ecology that incorporates biocentric equality would bring humans much closer to the idea of organic oneness that’s necessary to address current environmental issues. Allowing humans to recognize the unity

8. Celia Deane-Drummond, “Eco-theology from the North,” in *Eco-theology* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008), 35.

9. *Ibid.*, 35-36.

10. *Ibid.*, 36-37.

of all life forms, and further, the intrinsic value and *importance* of all life forms, is a necessary realization for the adoption of the Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness.

Ecological Implications of Spirit

The role of Spirit is an idea that is frequently discussed in both theological and philosophical arenas. Whether Spirit is being defined as a driving force behind creation, Creation itself, Wisdom, a redemptive force for humanity, the Breath of God, or a powerful energy that sustains all life, each of these various interpretations of Spirit has its own implications for the nature of the relation between humans and the natural world.

The Holy Spirit

Spirit understood in Trinitarian terms of the Holy Spirit lends itself to many overlapping theological theories regarding the role of Spirit in earthly and human processes. Some distinctions between these theories include Spirit as Creator, Spirit as a bringer of communion, and Spirit as liberated creation. Varying sub-theories exist within the distinctions, proving the complexity of the theological arena regarding the role of Spirit in relation to human life, the natural world, and the universe.

For some, Spirit as Creator entails the understanding that Spirit is that which sustains all life and initially gave life to the universe and human beings.¹¹ For others, such as German Reformed Theologian Jürgen Moltmann, Spirit as Creator entails three modes of action in the human realm: that of being born again in a believer, the overcoming of natural and social divisions in a community, and the individual vocation of persons.¹²

11. Celia Deane-Drummond, "Ecology and Spirit," in *Eco-theology* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008), 130-131.

Moltmann's concept of Spirit has ecological implications when extended from Spirit's actions in the human community to that of all creation. For instance, Spirit's actions in the realm of creation involve 1) the principle force encouraging human community, cooperation, and harmony; 2) the principal force driving the creativity and life in all things; and 3) the principle force driving individuation. Moltmann argues that there exists a link between the experiences of Spirit in the human community and the experiences of Spirit as creation and life, "so that what believers experience in the Holy Spirit leads them into *solidarity with all other created things* (italics added)."¹³ A feeling of solidarity with all created things would certainly lead one to respect other living beings as well as nature itself, bringing one closer to a sense of oneness with and genuine respect for the natural world as something with which humans are interconnected—a necessary component of the Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness.

Another branch of Spirit theory, incorporating Spirit as a bringer of communion, evokes the work of the fourth century Cappadocian Father, Basil of Caesarea, whose conception involves Spirit as the Breath of God. This notion of the Holy Spirit lends itself to the unity of communion within each member of the Trinity, giving it both a divine and personal nature.¹⁴ According to Basil, Spirit as the Breath of God entails that "all things dwell in the Spirit and the Spirit dwells in all things."¹⁵ Denis Edwards expands on this

12. Ibid, 131.

13. Ibid. Here, Deane-Drummond discusses Moltmann's view of panentheism (God containing the world), which he believes is capable of distinguishing between different degrees of manifestation of Spirit in different created beings, which could possibly have negative ecological consequences and result in a type of ethical hierarchy of the value of species based on degree of Spirit.

14. Ibid., 137. Here, Deane-Drummond discusses Basil's belief that the divine nature (akin to the Father) and the personal nature (akin to the Son) are united in communion between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so that all three are honored equally.

ecological aspect of Basil's concept by introducing the notion of Spirit as the breath of life in the natural world, a parallel to Basil's Trinitarian communion-in-God understanding. Edwards argues that understanding Spirit as a bringer of communion is essential because it makes interrelatedness "the essence of the way things are, rather than merely a trivial characteristic."¹⁶ Ecological implications follow insofar as when one sees one's interrelatedness with the natural world as simply the *essence of the way things are*, a notion of oneness with the natural world will also be understood as part of this essence, bringing with it an innate sense of respect for all of nature's beings and resources, which will arguably prevent nature's degradation.

The third theological distinction of Spirit, Spirit as liberated creation, entails the most influential of ecological insinuations, in that it directly incorporates ecology into its theoretical principles. A prime example of this is Moltmann's incorporation of liberation theology into his understanding of Spirit as Creator, resulting in his suggestion that Spirit is responsible for creation, and that creation "cries out for the liberation from the progressive destruction of nature by human beings."¹⁷ This is a vital element when considering the ecological consequences of Spirit understood as the Holy Spirit. This is the case because, if creation as such is crying out for the liberation of nature's destruction and creation as such is imbued with Spirit, then it can be logically concluded that the Holy Spirit, when understood as Spirit as Creator, is exhibiting this devastation and desperation through creation. It could also be postulated that, because Spirit as Creator exists as an

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 139.

energy within all created things, when certain individuals express a desire for the liberation of nature from human destruction, these individuals are acting as a physical outlet for the energy of Spirit that exists within them.

The “Green Face” of God

Spirit understood outside of the context of traditional Christian theology typically incorporates to a greater extent the natural environment, particularly when understood in terms of practical theology. Mark Wallace, the author of such books as *Green Christianity: Five Ways to a Sustainable Future* (2010), and *Finding God in the Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, Nature* (2005), has committed his research to the sub-discipline of the intersection of Christian theology and ecology and, in particular, the role Christianity has played in regards to the planet’s current environmental state.¹⁸ Wallace’s work focuses on his eco-theological theory of Spirit as the green face of God and its influence on environmental justice and the possibility of reclamation from years of ecocide. Wallace argues that in order to address the environmental crisis modernity is currently facing, a rediscovery of God’s presence within all things on Earth is necessary:

I contend that an earth-centered reenvisioning of the Spirit as the “green face” of God in the world is the best grounds for hope and renewal at a point in human history when our rapacious appetites seemed destined to destroy the earth. From this perspective, hope for a renewed earth is best founded on belief in God as Earth Spirit, the benevolent, all-encompassing divine force within the biosphere who continually indwells and works to maintain the integrity of all forms of life... the enfleshment of God within every thing that burrows, creeps, runs, swims, and flies in and across the earth.¹⁹

18. Mark I Wallace, “Profile: Mark Wallace,” *Swarthmore College Online*, Accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.swarthmore.edu/profile/mark-wallace>. Wallace discusses that he focuses his research on both the positive and negative impacts Christianity has on the environment, as well as ways in which Christianity can be what saves the environment.

19. Mark I Wallace, “Earth God: Cultivating the Spirit in an Ecocidal Culture,” In *Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 211.

Wallace's eponymous methodology, green pneumatology, involves a shift away from the Western tradition of Spirit as a metaphysical entity of divine intellect or consciousness itself, to an understanding of Spirit as Earth Spirit, namely, a healing and subversive life-force that "engenders human flourishing as well as the welfare of the planet."²⁰ Accordingly, on this view, the understanding of Spirit is not limited to the philosophical notion of being. Instead, it includes a desire for the flourishing of all forms of life. By understanding Spirit as external to the philosophical questions of metaphysics, Wallace is able to preserve the absolute freedom of God as Spirit, while keeping this notion separate from the God of Western metaphysics, upon which many limitations are imposed:

In order to preserve divine freedom and novelty, I suggest that God as Spirit is not by any metaphysical necessity the Being of beings; rather, God as Spirit desires to be the life-giving breath who animates and maintains the whole natural order. God as Spirit is best understood as the Being of beings but, paradoxically, as *beyond* Being and still radically *immanent* to all beings within the natural order... the green love who nurtures and sustains all living things.²¹

Wallace's move to remove Spirit from the metaphysical questions regarding the Western notion of God is a testament to his commitment to the re-envisioning of the Holy Spirit as Earth Spirit, which he does in order to motivate his audience to convert their way of life into one of sustainability. Through the encountering of what he calls Christian earth wisdom, humanity will be able to live sustainably and in harmony with its natural environments, which is also a major goal of the Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness.

20. Ibid., 212.

21. Ibid., 213.

Biblical Eco-theology

It has long been argued from many schools of thought, such as environmentalism, feminism, and certain religious traditions, that an underlying factor driving humans' exploitation of and dominion over the environment is Judeo-Christianity. Although many can point to phrases in the Bible that seem to give humans the right to exploit nature,²² it seems as if this is largely a misinterpretation of the text due to the fact that there are, in fact, many points in the Bible which designate human beings as the *stewards* of creation—the beings responsible for respecting and nurturing other creatures as well as the earth itself.

In fact, Pope Francis defends an argument against the charge that Judeo-Christian thinking, giving man “dominion” over nature, has encouraged Earth’s destruction through the depiction of humans as this type of nature-dominator. Pope Francis argues that this belief is simply a “misinterpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church,” and that although the Bible tells humans to “till and keep” the Earth, this phrase has been misunderstood as mastery over nature, while the true meaning of it gives humans the responsibility to take care of *and protect* the planet and its creatures.²³

Biblical Arguments for the Stewardship of Creation

While many groups continue to regard Christianity as promoting environmental destruction, there are others who feel the need to counter these claims in order to show that

22. As will be discussed in a forthcoming section of this paper, these phrases which many people use to either blame the Bible for environmental destruction, or give themselves the right to contribute to environmental destruction, are largely misunderstood due to the fact that they are read completely out of the context in which the Bible was written, giving readers a misconstrued understanding of the message being put forth.

23. Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter, Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 48-49.

the Judeo-Christian Bible (when understood correctly) is not encouraging human mastery over nature, but rather the exact opposite: human protection of nature.

Many Christians support the belief that the Bible is a concrete source of positive initiatives for human stewardship of the Earth and its inhabitants. Calvin B. DeWitt connects the Christian faith to environmental activism, and has identified seven principles that follow the theme of using biblical arguments to promote and defend the stewardship of creation:

1. *We must keep the creation as God keeps us.* Human *earth-keeping* (Gen. 2:15) mirrors the providence of God in keeping human beings (Num. 6:24-26). Dominion is exercised after the pattern of Christ, so that humanity joins with the Creator in caring for the land (Deut. 11:11-12, 17:18-20).
2. *We must be disciples of the Last Adam, not the First Adam.* Just as in Christ all things are reconciled (Col. 1:19-20), so the human vocation is to participate in the restoration and reconciliation of all things.
3. *We must not press creation relentlessly, but provide for its Sabbath.* Exodus 20:8-11 and 23:10-12 show that Sabbath rest applies to the land as well as animals and human beings.
4. *We may enjoy, but not destroy, the grace of God's good creation.* The tendency for human greed to destroy the *fruitfulness* of the earth is documented in the biblical accounts of human behavior (e.g. Ezek. 34:18; Deut. 20:19, 22:6).
5. *We must seek first the kingdom, not self-interest.* The mandate for this comes from the Gospels, as in Matthew 6:33.
6. *We must seek contentment as our great gain.* This means being content with the gifts that creation brings, rather than always grasping after more. There are therefore *limits* placed on humanity's role within creation. Paul's letters here give some encouragement as in Hebrews 13:5 and 1 Timothy 6:6-21.
7. *We must not fail to act on what we know is right.* The marriage between belief and action needs to be fulfilled in stewardship practices. The need for a link between belief and action is a strong biblical theme, as in Ezekiel 33:30-32.²⁴

24. Celia Deane-Drummond, "Biblical Eco-theology," in *Eco-theology* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008), 83-84.

Although some groups do not agree with DeWitt's proposed relation between the idea of stewardship and its biblical precedents,²⁵ there is a tendency among Christian environmentalists to advance arguments with the same goal as DeWitt's—that is, to prove that the Bible can be a source of mandated human preservation of nature.

Pope Francis also belongs to the group of thinkers who promote environmental activism through biblical arguments. The Pope reasons that the Earth was given to us by God as a gift. Consequently, we should take care of it, implying a “relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature,” as well as the idea that groups of people can take from the earth to survive, but must then protect it and ensure its viability for future generations.²⁶ To support this view, Pope Francis references the biblical excerpts,

“‘The earth is the Lord’s’ (*Ps* 24:1); to him belongs ‘the earth with all that is within it’ (*Dt* 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: ‘The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers...’ (*Lev* 25:23).”²⁷

Eco-justice Principles in Relation to the Bible

It is clear that when one interprets the Bible through a particular framework (be it cultural, social or economic), one will come to an understanding of the meaning of the text

25. *Ibid.*, 84. Deane-Drummond discusses that use of the word ‘stewardship’ seems to appeal more to scholars of scientific fields of study because of its practicality, while scholars of fields that are more likely to be swayed by historical concern are opposed to its use, because it’s historically inaccurate when speaking on the original text of the Bible.

26. Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter, Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 49.

27. *Ibid.* Pope Francis is using these excerpts to show that the Bible and the Church encourage planetary care by human beings, and also to show that the Bible frowns upon the land as a sole profit tool.

shaped by that framework. Because of this, many critics have argued that the Bible is too often interpreted in terms of a historical, Western, and male perspective.²⁸

The Earth Bible is an international think-tank consisting of theologians, ecologists, and scholars from other fields of study. These scholars seek to interpret the Bible through the framework of eco-justice principles in order to show that the text supports the rights of organisms and the natural environment, *in addition to* the rights of human beings.²⁹ The noteworthy eco-justice principles are as follows:

1. The first principle of *intrinsic worth* relates to the importance of the status of creation. The worth of creatures is not just a simple fact of moral value; rather, it arises out of God's word.
2. The second principle of *interconnectedness* shows that some elements will always have more strength than others, and the food chain shows that life is dependent on other life for its survival. The Earth Bible team wants to strongly resist the idea that hierarchy is an adequate description of food-chain relationships. Moreover, it implies a hierarchy of rights that they would want to actively resist.
3. The third principle of *voice* claims that the earth is capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice. This is not the same as the human voice. Rather, it is seeking to pay attention to what the earth might have to say, to viewing the Earth in *kinship* with rather than in alienation from humanity.
4. The fourth principle of *purpose* claims that the universe, the earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design, where each contributes to that purpose. The design is taken to be theocentric in orientation; that is, the God-given purpose to which the cosmos inclines is one of renewal rather than replacement.
5. The fifth principle of mutual *custodianship* reflects on the role of humans in relation to the earth. Instead of being masters over the earth, humans should think of themselves as guests on it, custodians of their host planet. This does not deny responsibility, but it includes respect for the bonds between humanity and other creatures.

28. This is so because most of the scholars who have had the privilege to interpret the Bible, until modern times, have been Western males who have been primarily concerned with the text's historical implications.

29. Celia Deane-Drummond, "Biblical Eco-theology," in *Eco-theology* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008), 89.

6. The sixth principle of *resistance* claims that the earth and its components actively resist those injustices imposed by humans. This does not divorce eco-justice from social justice, but recognizes its claim on human beings by identification and being with the earth in a way that has some parallels with indigenous perspectives.³⁰

The significance of these eco-justice principles lies in their relation to the core principles of many nature-based religions and spiritual traditions, as well as numerous environmental movements, particularly those with a certain degree of devoted reverence towards the natural world. Interpreting the Bible through a framework of spiritually-charged eco-justice principles allows the two traditions—a spiritual environmentalism and a traditionally Western, male, historic Christianity—to overlap one another. This development allows practitioners of each tradition to see the common ground they share. Accordingly, an excellent starting point emerges which can serve as a platform of spirituality based on organic oneness. These principles also have the potential to be accepted by environmentalists who don't believe in a higher power, since they do not invoke God.

The Earth Bible project is beneficial not only to Christians, but also to members of other traditions, including non-believers. This is the case because it makes it possible to see the Bible in an entirely new light. Relating eco-justice principles to the Bible is a powerful and effective way to defend the view that this text actually encourages human care of the planet and its creatures.

30. Ibid., 89-90.

Pope Francis' Encyclical on the Environment and Human Ecology

Arguably one of the most profound modern environmental publications, Pope Francis' encyclical letter, *Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home*, calls attention to the vast destruction of the environment that has been escalating in recent decades, as well as the blatant disrespect humans display for the natural earth and all its lifeforms. The Pope draws on current environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, water shortages, biodiversity loss, and global inequality, to explain the causes of the overall decline in the quality of human life. He also calls attention to abuse of technology and the dominance of anthropocentrism. He writes:

The intrinsic dignity of the world is thus compromised. When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves... Neglecting to monitor the harm done to nature and the environmental impact of our decisions is only the most striking sign of a disregard for the message contained in the structures of nature itself... everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble, for “instead of carrying out his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature.”³¹

In order to repair the environmental damage that has been done at the hands of anthropocentric, profit obsessed humans, Pope Francis calls for transparency in decision-making, a dialogue between religion and science, and appreciation for the natural world.

Pope Francis is confident and decisive in his discussions concerning what we, as humans, need to do to address our problem of unabated environmental degradation. Using

31. Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter, Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 78-80. The quotation Pope Francis uses is from John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1991), 840.

language that is both elegant and stern, the Pope explains that the entire human population needs a change in lifestyle away from technology, consumerism, collective selfishness, and all-encompassing individualism, and affirms universal awareness of the deep reverence for life, peace, and other beings—in order to achieve sustainability.³²

In his encyclical, Pope Francis frequently references Saint Francis of Assisi, after whom he named himself, often for the spiritual relationship St Francis displayed with nature and its living beings, as well as its non-living entities. The Pope refers to Francis of Assisi's views as a *necessary* integral ecology:

Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human... He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers... If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits... If we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.³³

Intimate unity with all that exists is an idea that is unquestionably vital to the Pope's vision of humankind moving towards a sustainable future. Although the Pope is addressing all Christians in hopes that his "ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions [of Christianity]"³⁴ will be well-received, the message he is spreading is one that can be easily welcomed by practitioners of numerous traditions, including those who do not believe in

32. Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter, Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 135-136.

33. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

34. *Ibid.*, 140.

the existence of a higher power. In addition, the Pope holds such an elevated position in global society that, even for those who don't practice Catholicism or even Christianity, his message of a drastic and necessary change is extremely well-received by most of the world's population.

The underlying message that is apparent in the Pope's encyclical is that of an appeal to an integral ecology which has at its core the genuine awe, respect, and love for, and sense of oneness with all of God's creatures.³⁵ Pope Francis' integral ecology, coupled with a call to end individualism, consumerism, and collective selfishness, is a brilliant platform for environmental activism because the Pope is entirely correct in saying that any and all forms of environmental repair will only be achieved from within a novel framework shared by all human beings. This argument is similar to the argument I will put forth for a Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness, premised upon the necessity of a new worldview and paradigm capable of bringing to fruition any hopes of ecological repair.

Eco-feminist Theology

Feminist philosophy has long been involved with the concepts of power relations, socio-economic status, and cultural identity. These social concepts have been integrated into feminist care ethics. Feminist care ethics is concerned primarily with interpersonal relationships, and the virtue of benevolence as central to good moral character. Although care ethics alone can be used to support environmental action and protection,³⁶ eco-feminist

35. "God," here, can be substituted with "nature," "Earth," or another spiritual (or nonspiritual) element in order to fit the given belief system.

36. Care ethics is often referenced when discussing the responsibility humans have toward the environment. Because care ethics is focused on interpersonal relationships and benevolence, the argument put forth is that humans have a direct responsibility to take care of nature, rather than simply dominate,

theology offers a distinctive perspective on environmental stewardship from a theological viewpoint.

The field of eco-feminist theology is theoretically diverse, with some thinkers focusing on a re-envisioning of the traditional Christian views of God's relation to the Earth and its people, and others focusing on more spiritual aspects of nature. Although the context often varies from one scholar to another, a similar starting point among many eco-feminists, including those that incorporate theological notions, is that of beginning with an earth-centered approach that lends itself to an analysis of traditional paradigms, as opposed to the common theological approach of working within traditional paradigms.³⁷

Another common element of eco-feminist theology and spirituality is that of developing theories that are practical and applicable, rather than strictly theoretical. For example, eco-feminist Mary Grey uses biblical prophetic themes to develop her spirituality, which "arises from the margins and out of the concrete concerns linking the devastation of the earth and the suffering of vulnerable people."³⁸ Grey believes strongly that environmental devastations are invariably linked with the suffering of the world's most vulnerable individuals. Using her experience of building wells in India to enhance her writings, Grey discusses that the renunciation, simplicity, and sacrifice experienced by the

master, exploit, and control it. This is a similar conclusion to that reached by biblical eco-theology, but instead stems from a normative ethical framework.

37. Celia Deane-Drummond, "Eco-feminist Theology," in *Eco-theology* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008), 147.

38. *Ibid.*, 148.

suffering parts of the world occur at the hands of the Western and more developed nations, suffering that is similar to the suffering of the environment.³⁹

Secular eco-feminist Naomi Klein also argues that social injustice is inextricably linked to environmental issues—particularly global warming—and that the catastrophe of climate change could be the catalyst needed to shift the overall global capitalist worldview to one focusing on a collective, communal, and civic notion of interdependence.⁴⁰ It is this shift in worldview, according to Klein, that is necessary to address the issues of both environmental and social injustice.

Although eco-feminist theology is extremely varied in terms of theory, the two elements (which are not relevant to *all* facets of eco-feminist theology) that are the most relevant to the development of a Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness are the eco-feminist interpretations of the Gaia hypothesis and those of Divine Wisdom.

Incorporating the Gaia Hypothesis

Although some eco-feminists avoid goddess-centered religious interpretations,⁴¹ others assimilate the theory produced by John Lovelock known as the Gaia Hypothesis. Employing Gaia, the Greek goddess of the Earth (revered in ancient times as Mother Nature and the giver of life to Earth itself) as a metaphor for the planet's ecosphere, Lovelock's

39. Ibid.

40. Catherine Keller, "Encycling: One Feminist Theological Response," in *For Our Common Home: Process-Relational Responses To "Laudato Si',"* ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Ignacio Castuera (Minnesota: Process Century Press, 2015), 179.

41. Celia Deane-Drummond, "Eco-feminist Theology," in *Eco-theology* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008), 147. Deane-Drummond discusses that some eco-feminists avoid goddess-centered religious interpretations because it simply "serves to reinforce the identification between women and the earth that is inherent in the patriarchy that is opposed."

theory holds that the organic and inorganic components of Earth have evolved together as a single, living, self-regulating system. Because the Earth exists as this living system, it continues to maintain the conditions necessary for its survival.

One such eco-feminist theology is that of Rosemary Radford Ruether, who combines creationism with the Gaia theory in order to express the covenantal theme of Christianity through an ethic of care. For Ruether, Gaia represents the cosmological presence of the divine in the natural world, and the Christian notion of resurrection is reinterpreted as the continuation of bodily matter in future earthly life forms. Her notion of continuation contributes to a “spirituality of recycling that is only possible once humanity has experienced a deep conversion of consciousness,”⁴² which, for Ruether, means a conversion away from the consumerism that has contributed to the exploitation of nature.

Similarly, eco-feminist theologian Anne Primavesi also believes that the collective consciousness of humanity must shift away from lifestyles of consumerism and individualism towards one of cooperative connectedness. Primavesi incorporates Gaia in a much more scientifically-grounded manner than does Rosemary Radford Ruether, in hopes that science can be taken more seriously in the realms of feminism as well as theology.⁴³ Primavesi’s use of Gaia theory language enables her to translate her vision of eco-feminist theology into a scientific language that will then result in theology being intelligible to those who typically repudiate theological writings.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 153.

Primavesi's eco-theology involves the representation of human embeddedness in the natural world, as well as connectedness with and dependence on other species. She utilizes the Gaia theory in order to move human beings out of the current paradigm of anthropocentrism. Instead, she favors a holistic understanding of the human place in the world as seen from a co-evolutionary perspective.⁴⁴ She argues that this holistic understanding would result in the Earth being viewed as sacred, which would counteract the traditional theological notions that have, over time, resulted in the belief of humans as the superior species, which has led to our current situation of grave environmental destruction.⁴⁵

Incorporating the Gaia hypothesis into eco-feminist theology is beneficial in that it creates the notion of a God (or Goddess, depending on the theologian⁴⁶) that is entirely integral to all of Earth's natural systems and processes. Here, the notion of God is not contingent on whether the theology is strictly Gaian, or combines biblical notions with the ecological Gaia hypothesis. Perceiving a higher power embedded within nature and its processes will automatically result in a consciousness that is focused on the interconnectedness among all things on Earth—those things living as well as those which are nonliving, or inorganic—including Earth itself, as a self-regulating, living system.

44. *Ibid.*, 155.

45. *Ibid.*, 156.

46. *Ibid.*, 150. Here, Deane-Drummond discusses the work of eco-feminist theologian and pantheist, Grace Jantzen, who defends the idea of God as feminine divine, which expresses the idea of becoming, and therefore, for Jantzen, transcendence as well.

Divine Wisdom

Another eco-feminist interpretation of God is that which involves wisdom, which is “not simply an emergent property *within* nature, but rather is also given as gift from God, reflecting the Trinitarian community of persons, expressive of ultimate Wisdom.”⁴⁷ Interpreting God as ultimate Wisdom, according to eco-feminist liberation theologian Mary Grey, is a more fruitful endeavor than the Gaia theory, because the idea of God as wisdom carries with it a greater potential to be interpreted in the deep, mythological sense that is necessary for devotion.⁴⁸ Celia Deane-Drummond agrees with this notion, and argues that wisdom, which she refers to as Sophia,

provides an important link between the secular and the sacred... Wisdom provides a means for reaffirming the feminine in the Trinity so that all three persons are considered the feminine divine, rather than the femininity being exclusively confined to the Holy Spirit, as in much classical thought... Wisdom also allows for a panentheistic concept of God, one that is Sophiological and is just as concerned with practical immanent expressions of wisdom as transcendent images of God as Holy Sophia... Sophia also takes up the eco-feminist concern of seeking to provide alternative ways of thinking about the feminine and the divine in a way that, on the one hand, is closely connected to nature, but on the other hand, fully acknowledges differences.⁴⁹

The notion of interpreting God as wisdom, or sophia, can be extremely valuable to eco-feminist theology because this notion of wisdom is already deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Hence, sophia is a notion that would most likely be more widely accepted to practitioners of various religious traditions than that of the more scientific and

47. Ibid., 159.

48. Ibid. Grey defines embodied wisdom as a deep connectedness to the earth, and practical wisdom as inseparable from the wisdom of ordinary experience “embodied in the lives of the poor and uneducated.”

49. Ibid., 161.

earth-based Gaian hypotheses. Not only is the notion of sophia advantageous in a theological fashion, but it is also useful in an ecological manner. Interpreting all things as being within God—Deane-Drummond argues that God as sophia allows for this panentheistic worldview—and then interpreting God as sophia, implies that everything in the world, including the world itself, is a small component of a greater Divine Wisdom. This position would arguably diminish an individual’s inclinations to cause any damage, directly or indirectly, to the environment or any of Earth’s beings.

The Divine Wisdom theology is an important platform to explore when considering a Spiritual Framework for Organic Oneness. This is the case because the Organic Oneness framework, like the Divine Wisdom framework, attaches more value to everything on the planet, from jet streams to algae to redwood trees. It also results in a slight sense of oneness if seen from a panentheistic perspective; however, this oneness is only existent for the Divine Wisdom framework if the believer also happens to support a panentheistic worldview. In addition, the sense of oneness resulting from Sophia is different from that of the Spiritual Framework, in that *God as Sophia*’s oneness results from the belief that the universe is contained *within* God, whereas the Spiritual Framework supports the idea that the universe *is* God.⁵⁰

50. “God,” here, is not proposed as a rendering in the traditional sense. The Sophia God is an entirely differently understood entity than the “God” that is maintained by the Spiritual Framework.

III. A Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness

An Argument for a New, Unifying Eco-theological Framework

Each of the belief systems that have so far been addressed are undoubtedly supported by a large number of people. However, very few agree fully with all of them. The reason for this is that some tensions emerge if one attempts to combine every element of deep ecology, namely biblical eco-theology and eco-feminist theology. For instance, it would be quite a challenge to defend one's complete agreement with both of the interpretations of Spirit, the theological Holy Spirit as well as the green face of God or Earth Spirit. Of course, these two interpretations certainly share some elements in common, such as the idea of Spirit existing in all living things, whether it's strictly a biblical definition or a more mystical interpretation. However, although each of these three main frameworks purports some degree of human responsibility for the environment, each one does so in a different way and to a different extent, resulting in slightly different conclusions.

In order to begin to address the currently devastating state of the environment, each person involved must understand the world through the same, or a similar, philosophical paradigm. The place of humans in the natural world and the degree of responsibility that our species has for the natural world must be fully agreed upon by people from all walks of life. This is necessary in order for there to be enough collaboration to produce global, feasible, and practical solutions to our environmental crisis. Of course, the challenge is to

formulate a framework that extends beyond cultural boundaries in order to allow everyone to embrace it.

It is my contention that the Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness will provide environmental repair.⁵¹ I support this framework because I believe that it is the most appropriate perspective to accommodate agreement among large numbers of people. It would facilitate a compromise between theology and science because the framework is based on a spirituality of oneness and divine energy. Further, its malleability allows it to be more easily embraced by individuals who hold views not wholly compatible with it. For instance, those who do not believe in a higher power or higher energy can adjust the framework slightly by diminishing the sense of sacred wonder, while those who believe in an anthropomorphic God (or Gods) can enhance this sacred wonder by individually applying their God(s) to the framework.

In discussing this new framework, I will acknowledge each of the elements which I believe are essential for its success as a catalyst for ecological rescue. These elements include an interpretation of Spirit that understands all life as the physical embodiment of Spirit, and an expansion of the Gaia hypothesis that strongly emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things in the universe. I will also be including in the framework various elements found in philosophies such as the New Bottom Line of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, the World Pantheist Movement, and contemporary Eclectic Wicca.

51. The Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness will frequently be referred to simply as the framework, or the Spiritual Framework.

The ultimate goal of this Spiritual Framework is for all followers⁵² to recognize and understand the interconnectedness that is shared among all things that *are*, and revere this oneness as an *organic* unity that has existed as long as and alongside being as such. This sense of being one with and, therefore reverence for, all that is will have positive impacts on human moral character. This move extends the human circle of empathy to the treatment of the environment and non-human organisms as well. An expanding circle of empathy will cause a shift of collective human consciousness away from the self-interest and misguided superiority that justifies nature's destruction, to an innate sense of unity with and love and respect for the universe as a whole and everything contained within it.

Life as the Physical Embodiment of Spirit

The first element that I believe is essential to the Spiritual Framework's ability to prompt environmental rescue is interpreting life as the physical embodiment of Spirit. This Spirit can be interpreted in terms of the Holy Spirit if necessary; however, the intended definition is closer to that of Mark Wallace's Earth Spirit. My interpretation is similar to Wallace's Earth Spirit in that Spirit is the "driving force within the universe who brings each thing into its natural fruition."⁵³ This new interpretation understands Spirit not in terms of personification but in terms of a sacred and powerful energy that is, and always has been, intrinsic to the universe.

52. I say "all followers," instead of referring to all people in general, because although I'm attempting to make this Framework as acceptable as possible for a large number of people, I am certainly aware that not everyone who comes across this philosophy will be willing to accept its elements.

53. Mark Wallace, "Earth God: Cultivating the Spirit in an Ecocidal Culture," In *Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 211.

In comparison to Mark Wallace's Earth Spirit, the Framework's interpretation of Spirit is to be understood as a cosmic energy which is embodied physically in each living thing, as well as all things produced by nature (including inorganic substances and natural landscapes). Wallace understands the Earth Spirit to be a component of the Christian God. He states:

My case is that the Spirit is the enfleshment of God within every thing... The Spirit is the promise of God's material, palpable presence within the good earth God has made for the sustenance and health of all beings. God continually pours out Godself into the cosmos through Earth Spirit... In a word, God is *carnal*: through the Spirit, God incarnates Godself within the natural order... The Holy Spirit, therefore, is an enfleshed being, an earthly lifeform who interanimates life on earth as the outflowing of God's compassion for all things... I will try to re-envision the Holy Spirit as God's invigorating corporeal presence within the society of all living beings.⁵⁴

There are some similarities between the two notions. For example, both Wallace's Earth Spirit and the Framework's Spirit interanimate life on Earth, and are present within all living beings. However, the Framework's Spirit is to be thought of in a way that understands life as the physical embodiment *of* this force as well as being a spiritual force that exists outside of physical lifeforms as a powerful energy that flows throughout and exists in all of the universe, and is also responsible for being as such.

If all life is understood as the physical embodiment of Spirit, it would be impossible for one to argue that humans are superior to other life forms. While I am aware that some anthropocentric arguments of speciesism purport that humans simply have a higher degree of Spirit, making us superior and accounting for our differences from other forms of life, I am arguing that Spirit is not responsible for these differences. Since Spirit is a constant and

54. Ibid.

powerful energy which exists in all forms of life, in both the universe and planet Earth, it would be unjustifiable to argue that certain forms of life possess higher levels of Spirit than others.

The implications of interpreting all forms of life as the physical embodiment of Spirit are extremely positive. For example, not only human beings but all forms of life, as well as nature itself are equally deserving of the same reverence and awe with which humans continually praise themselves. Further, *life* as the physical embodiment of Spirit does not only refer to animals, but everything that can be said to have life—all organisms including those which live at the depths of the ocean floor, all species of plants, and fungi. Consequently, to cut down a thriving, native tree for unnecessary purposes of anthropocentric development⁵⁵ would be an act of destroying a physical embodiment of Spirit itself, the most powerful and sacred energy in the universe. To destroy a limb of Spirit for unnecessary anthropocentric development, no matter how small or large, would simply be morally prohibited.

Not only would understanding life as the physical embodiment of the most powerful, constant, and sacred energy in the universe give all forms of life intrinsic value, but it would also foster natural and organic interconnectedness, or oneness, between all things that have life as well as all cosmic and natural processes on Earth and in the universe.

55. “Anthropocentric development,” here, is defined as any act which has as its central aim the propagation (through industrial development) of the human species in a way that puts at risk any non-human forms of life as well as the natural beauty of un-touched landscapes.

Care through Interconnectedness: Incorporating the Gaia Hypothesis

Because Spirit exists in all things that have life, as well as the universe as a whole, there follows a sense of interconnectedness between all life forms and natural and cosmic processes. Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis—which holds that the organic and inorganic components of Earth's ecosphere have evolved together as a single, living, self-regulating system—can be interpreted through the lens of the Framework as the ecological result of Spirit existing in the universe. As a result of the universal and continual presence of Spirit as both a divine and cosmic energy, the interconnectedness that all things organic and inorganic share can be seen through the co-evolution of such components within Earth's ecosphere, maintaining the self-regulating system to which Lovelock refers.

The purpose of incorporating the Gaia Hypothesis into the Spiritual Framework is to introduce an element of holistic environmental philosophy. Neil Carter describes the holistic environmental philosophy as follows:

[It] holds that everything is connected to everything else, that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, that process takes primacy over the parts and that there is unity of humans and non-human nature. Broadly speaking, holistic theories are prepared to extend the boundaries of moral consideration well beyond individual humans by according intrinsic value to a range of non-human entities and to 'whole' categories, such as species and ecosystems.⁵⁶

Carter goes on to discuss some of the common goals of holistic environmental perspectives. Carter claims that they incorporate an ethical code of conduct founded on the intrinsic value of nature itself, and formulates a new ethics based on a shift in the collective state of being,

56. Neil Carter, "Environmental Philosophy," In *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19-20.

emphasizing what is commonly referred to as an “ecological consciousness.”⁵⁷ Both of these goals reflect objectives with which the Spiritual Framework directly shares—the overarching purpose of the Framework is to shift collective consciousness in such a way that adherents will become mindful of both the intrinsic value of nature and the interconnectedness of the universe as a whole.

The incorporation of a holistic environmental perspective such as the Gaia Hypothesis is essential to the underlying philosophical foundation of the Framework. Such a notion results in nature itself being granted intrinsic value. Similar to the first point of Arne Naess’ eight-point platform of deep ecology, the Framework, by incorporating the holistic Gaia hypothesis, assumes that “the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has value in itself” and that “this value is independent of their usefulness for human purposes.”⁵⁸ By extending the sphere of moral concern beyond the limits of *moral extensionism* in its traditional form of animal liberation,⁵⁹ an environmental ethic is introduced that considers the inherent value of nature as being grounded in the special significance nature provides to humans. One such “green theory of value” is proposed by Robert E. Goodin (1992), who argues that

natural objects have value because they are the product of a natural process rather than an artificial, human process. Naturalness has value because (1) humans want ‘some sense and pattern to their lives;’ (2) people want their own lives set in some

57. Ibid., 20.

58. Ibid. Carter discusses here that Naess, one of the primary founders of deep ecology, produced ideas that largely influenced the development of *ecocentrism*, which he defines as “a mode of thought that regards humans as subject to ecological and systems laws and whose ethical, political and social prescriptions are concerned with both humans and non-humans.

59. Ibid., 26. Carter defines *moral extensionism* as the broadening of the “moral community to include non-human entities, notably animals, based on the possession of some critical property such as sentience or the capacity to reason.” He goes on to discuss the traditional version of moral extensionism, *animal liberation*, championed by utilitarian Peter Singer and animal rights theorist Tom Regan.

larger context to which they are connected; (3) it is the products of natural processes, untouched (or lightly touched) by human hands which provide that larger context.⁶⁰

This sacredness of nature that Goodin is referring to in his green theory of value is the particular essence of the Gaia Hypothesis that is responsible for creating a sense of interconnectedness—both biologically and spiritually—among all things natural, be they organic or inorganic. Further, the ecological consciousness that the Spiritual Framework strives to obtain is grounded in the sacredness of nature that results in the interconnectedness displayed through the Gaia Hypothesis, allowing for the human circle of empathy to be expanded to all things in nature, including itself.

The Spiritual Progressives' "New Bottom Line"

The Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness has been highly influenced by a contemporary interfaith advocacy group known as The Network of Spiritual Progressives. The Spiritual Progressives describe their group as:

a broad network that seeks to transform our materialist and corporate-dominated culture into a loving and just society. We envision a world based on a New Bottom Line of awe and wonder at the universe where everyone is seen as fundamentally valuable regardless of their role in the marketplace. We call this framework “a spiritual progressive worldview.” Our network includes environmentalists, social activists and people of all walks of life who identify as religious, spiritual, atheist, and secular humanist.⁶¹

Following this line of thought, the group emphasizes interconnectedness through the interpretation of caring for other humans as well as the planet itself, as necessary for the

60. Ibid., 32-33.

61. “Who We Are,” In *The Network of Spiritual Progressives: A Path to a World of Love and Justice*, Accessed October 29, 2017, <https://spiritualprogressives.org/philosophy/>.

well-being of each individual. Through the New Bottom Line, the Spiritual Progressives aim to create a world that is shaped by peace, love, justice (social, environmental, and economic), environmental stewardship, kindness, nonviolence, generosity, respect for diversity, compassion, care for one another and the earth, empathy, and “celebration of the miraculous universe in which we live.”⁶² These last four components, in particular, resonate highly with the goals of the Spiritual Framework.

Although the goals of the Spiritual Progressives may be unrealistically optimistic in nature,⁶³ the movement deserves credit for its ambition and ability to provide practical means through which its vision of the ideal society—one based on the New Bottom Line—could actually be implemented. This New Bottom Line shifts the value scale used to determine the success of various sectors of society. Instead of attributing success to those sectors which maximize profit and power (referred to as the old bottom line), it will attribute success to those sectors which maximize

love and caring, kindness and generosity, empathy and compassion, social, economic and environmental justice, peace and nonviolence, and protection of the life support system of our planet, as well as encourage us to *transcend a narrow utilitarian approach to nature and other human beings and enhance our capacity to respond with awe and wonder to the universe and to see the sacred in others and in all sentient beings* (italics added).⁶⁴

One can see from the emphasized portion of the above quote that the Spiritual Framework

62. Ibid., “Philosophy.”

63. Ibid. The group openly admits the unrealistic optimism of their goals.

64. Ibid., “Visionary Strategies.”

and the New Bottom Line share an overarching objective of enabling the human capacity for awe and wonder in regards to the sacredness of nature and the universe.

The New Bottom Line, as outlined by The Network of Spiritual Progressives, contains the following ten platforms, each with its own plan of implementation:

1. Support families and build a caring economy—transform global economic and political arrangements such that they promote love and care
2. Personal responsibility—live a spiritually-grounded life in which personal responsibility is taken for ethical behavior
3. Environmental responsibility—building social and environmental responsibility into the normal operations of our economic and political life
4. A love and justice-oriented education system—teaching values of love, caring, generosity, intellectual curiosity, tolerance, nonviolence, gratitude, wonder, democratic participation, and environmental responsibility
5. A loving and just health care system—global free universal health care in a system that cares for the spiritual and psychological aspects (as well as physical) of human well-being
6. Global peace and homeland security through generosity—the implementation by major economic, political and military countries of a strategy of generosity, respect, nonviolence, and caring for the well-being of everyone on the planet
7. Separation of church, state, and science—protecting society from the imposition of one religion, as well as not falling into a First Amendment fundamentalism that keeps all spiritual values out of the public sphere
8. A cooperative and caring legal system—ridding economic and social systems and structures of oppression and inequality from society
9. Ending racism
10. Balancing identity group struggles and universal solidarity⁶⁵

By incorporating aspects of this New Bottom Line into the Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness, the shared goal of the two frameworks, namely, to enable the human capacity for awe and wonder in regards to the sacredness of nature and the universe, and 2) allowing humans to live in harmony with each other and nature as such, can be achieved. The components of the New Bottom Line that are relevant to this agenda are #2, #3, and #4.

65. Ibid.

Implementing a new education system that grounds teaching on love, justice, wonder, and environmental responsibility will result in the concept of environmental obligation eventually being integrated into the normal operations of economic and political life. Furthermore, the implementation of a new educational system will encourage personal responsibility for our ethical behavior. In total, if a mere three of the ten New Bottom Line components were to be implemented, modern society would experience a shift in human thinking away from collective anthropocentrism, to an ecological consciousness that places ecocentrism at the top of the ethical hierarchy.

Drawing from Earth Religions

By virtue of interpreting Spirit as a divine and cosmic energy that permeates all of the universe and results in the sacredness, oneness, and interconnectedness of nature and all of its components, the Spiritual Framework represents a way of thinking common to many earth-centered religions. In particular, the Framework relates most closely to a school of thought known as the World Pantheist Movement, and the modern form of Wicca referred to as Eclectic Wicca. Although there exists a wide array of variations of ideologies that can be categorized as earth-centered religions—including various interpretations of panentheism and neo-paganism, differentiations within pantheism, as well as the numerous variations of both traditional and contemporary Wicca—the World Pantheist Movement and Eclectic Wicca are of relevance to the philosophy underlying the Spiritual Framework.

World Pantheist Movement

The World Pantheist Movement (WPM), also referred to by its adherents as Scientific Pantheism, is founded and led by Paul Harrison.⁶⁶ The movement does not describe its Statement of Principles as a religious creed in the traditional senses of the term. Rather, the principles are collectively described as malleable, or as rational alternatives to supernatural beliefs. The basic core beliefs underlying the movement's Statement of Principles are loosely defined as:

1. Reverence for Nature and the wider Universe.
2. Active respect and care for the rights of all humans and other living beings.
3. Celebration of our lives in our bodies on this beautiful earth as a joy and a privilege.
4. Strong naturalism, without belief in supernatural realms, afterlives, beings or forces.
5. Respect for reason, evidence and the scientific method as our best ways of understanding nature and the Universe.
6. Promotion of religious tolerance, freedom of religion and complete separation of state and religion.⁶⁷

This naturalistic and scientific form of pantheism differs from other pantheist ways of thinking in that a belief in creator gods, supernatural beings, the afterlife of any kind, reincarnation, and spirits separated from the body, are non-existent to the WPM. Instead, the movement takes a fully scientific approach to pantheism and honors the universe as its only divinity through the reverence of nature with “intense emotional and aesthetic feelings that can be called religious.”⁶⁸

66. Paul Harrison, “Paul Harrison,” In *World Pantheism: Revering the Universe, Caring for Nature, Celebrating Life*, Accessed October 29, 2017, <https://www.pantheism.net/author/pharrison/>.

67. Ibid., “WPM Statement of Principles.”

68. Ibid., “Constitution and bylaws: background.”

The Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness incorporates specific aspects of Paul Harrison's World Pantheist Movement, while explicitly avoiding others. For instance, both the framework and the WPM stress religious-like feelings of awe towards and reverence for nature and the universe, with the goal of creating like-minded people with the desire to address the planet's environmental state. In addition, both frameworks share a belief in the inseparable, interconnected unity of all matter, energy, and life. However, while the WPM emphasizes reason and scientific discoveries as the only way to truly know reality and to realize religious feelings toward nature and the universe, the Spiritual Framework does not deny the possibility of such knowledge and feelings originating from sources that do not fit within the traditional parameters of reason and rational science.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the Framework emphasizes Spirit as an all-encompassing force existing in the cosmos and nature, as well as animating life; however, the World Pantheist Movement does not support the belief in divine beings, forces, or spirits of any kind, making it incompatible with the Framework's interpretation of Spirit as a natural, cosmic and, to a certain degree, divine energy.

Despite its incompatibility with Spirit, the World Pantheist Movement's overall goal of creating an attitude of reverence toward nature and the universe in order to address the environmental and humanitarian state of the planet is closely shared with the Spiritual Framework. Further, the World Pantheist Movement stresses its availability to people of all religious backgrounds. Specifically, the WPM stresses its full compatibility with philosophical Taoism, humanism, atheism, and some forms of paganism and Zen

69. Examples of such sources include religious experiences and other events that cannot be explained through rational science nor logical reasoning.

Buddhism.⁷⁰ This compatibility with many forms of religion, spirituality, and non-religion is similar to the Spiritual Framework in that, for both systems, the core beliefs can be modified to a certain extent to better suit the interests of each follower.

Eclectic Wicca

Wicca is a pagan earth-based religious tradition that is inspired by traditions that began long before Christianity, and has developed various strands of thought extending into modern times. In this section, I will discuss some of the various forms of Wicca and the ways in which contemporary Eclectic Wicca relates to the Spiritual Framework. First, the common foundational beliefs and principles of the tradition must be explored. The Wiccan Rede is an ethical code of conduct shared by all practitioners of Wicca, and in its traditional form reads as follows:

Bide the Wiccan law ye must
In perfect love, in perfect trust,
Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill;
An' ye harm none, do what ye will.
What ye send forth comes back to thee,
So ever mind the Rule of Three.
Follow this with mind and heart,
And merry ye meet, and merry ye part.⁷¹

In short, the “Wiccan law” is simply to live life as one wishes without harming oneself or another. The second line of the Rede refers to the love and trust Wiccans have toward the divinity of planet Earth, nature, and all that exists. The Rule of Three referred to in line six

70. Paul Harrison, “Constitution and bylaws: background,” In *World Pantheism: Revering the Universe, Caring for Nature, Celebrating Life*, Accessed October 29, 2017, <https://www.pantheism.net/author/pharrison/>.

71. Skye Alexander, “And Harm None: Philosophy and Ideology,” in *The Everything Wicca & Witchcraft Book* (Massachusetts: Adams Media, 2008), 9.

of the Rede, also known as the Threefold Law, is the Wiccan belief that every act comes back to the doer times three. A magnification of the Buddhist notion of karma typically results in practitioners of Wicca living in accordance with strict principles of morality, as well as positivity inasmuch as ill will is also believed to ricochet threefold.

Another common belief among all strands of Wicca is that God, or Spirit, resides in all things, as well as within in each individual human being. In contrast to the Judeo-Christian notion of a transcendent, omnipotent God, the Wiccan notion of God is a type of Spirit that is manifest in all things, from patterns of daily life to larger, more mystical patterns of the universe.⁷² Furthermore, there exists in Wiccan thought a dualism between masculine and feminine energies of the cosmos. These energies can be interpreted as the masculine and feminine aspects of universal energy, which is also commonly referred to as The All, The One, Ancient One, or simply the supreme divine power from which all that exists in space and time sprang.⁷³ According to Wicca, this Ancient One did not exist as a *deity* before it was acknowledged. Nevertheless the *energy* that is The All has always existed in that it created all that is.⁷⁴ Because this supreme power is ultimate and completely unknowable to the human intellect, it can only be understood through its personification into the archetypal God and the archetypal Goddess, equally divine and balanced categories into which all known deities fall.

72. Michele Morgan, "Out of the Broom Closet: The Wiccan Philosophy," in *Simple Wicca* (San Francisco: Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC, 2008), 8.

73. Scott Cunningham, "Theory," in *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2008), 9.

74. *Ibid*, 10.

The creative forces of the God and Goddess, for Wiccans, can be found throughout all of nature. The God is representative of, among other things, the sun and stars, wild animals, untouched natural landscapes, and bountiful harvests. The Goddess, on the other hand, is representative of the moon and ocean, the universal mother, the source of fertility, wisdom, and love, the giver of life as well as death (a force behind natural life cycles), as well as all of nature and the Earth itself.⁷⁵ In fact, most Wiccans see the Earth itself as a living manifestation of the Goddess, and because the God and Goddess are compatible, this means that the best way to honor the twin deity is to preserve and protect our natural environment and planet.⁷⁶

Although the common principles are shared by all Wiccan traditions, differences between the groups arise in the practice of ceremonial rituals. The use of ceremonial magic as a religious practice varies, as does the type of magic is used, the Gods or Goddesses who are invoked, as well as whether the practice is solitary or within a coven.⁷⁷ Some common strands of Wicca include Celtic, Gardnerian, Pictish, Strega, Nordic, Kitchen, and Eclectic.

Celtic Wicca focuses strongly on the Earth and its elements, and utilizes tree magic as well as other forms of “green” or natural magic while worshiping deities primarily of Celtic origin. Gardnerian Wicca is a highly structured tradition, which was founded by Gerald Gardner in Great Britain in the 1950s and which utilizes a hierarchical grading

75: Ibid., 11-13.

76. Michele Morgan, “Out of the Broom Closet: The Wiccan Philosophy,” in *Simple Wicca* (San Francisco: Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC, 2008), 8.

77. The word *coven* refers to group of Wiccans who practice their chosen tradition together and are led by a Priestess, while a *Solitary* is a Wiccan who practices their chosen tradition alone, and thus has more freedom to adjust rituals and create a personal worship experience.

system in the coven, in which initiations of new members are secretive.⁷⁸ In contrast, Pictish Wicca is a solitary Scottish practice that connects with nature through the animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms. It focuses almost entirely on practical magic at the expense of religious experience.⁷⁹ Strega is known as the oldest unchanged form of Wicca, beginning in Italy in 1353, and employs profound lyrical teachings. Nordic is a similarly historic strand of Wiccan thought, although its origin is the agricultural and warrior tribes of Scandinavia and northern Germany, and its deities are primarily of Nordic descent, such as the God Odin and the Goddess Freya.⁸⁰ Two particularly modern Wiccan traditions are the Kitchen Witch and the Eclectic Wiccan. The Kitchen Witch is a typically solitary practitioner of Wicca whose focus is primarily on domestic and work-places such as the hearth and home. This convention is referred to as the practical side of magic.⁸¹ Eclectic Wicca, however, is the most modern of all the customs and is primarily known for being nontraditional. This approach is typically adopted by solitary practitioners because it allows for complete freedom of expression and the ability to create a personal version of Wicca that best suits individuals, based on their own instinctual, sacred connection to Earth and to Spirit.⁸²

The Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness incorporates many elements from Wiccan thought. In regards to Eclectic Wicca in particular, both share the property of

78. Michele Morgan, "Yesterday, Today: The Traditions of Witchcraft," in *Simple Wicca* (San Francisco: Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC, 2008), 19-20.

79. *Ibid.*, 21.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*, 20.

malleability to the extent of the individual's personal connection to Earth and Spirit, while still maintaining the basic ethical and environmental core principles of interconnectedness and reverence for nature. Following this line of thought, the teachings of both the Spiritual Framework and the Wiccan tradition center around reverence for nature, which gives rise to the fundamental concept of Earth stewardship.⁸³ In the context of Wiccan thought, Earth stewardship is central to honoring and respecting the deities which represent masculine and feminine aspects of divine universal energy. Similarly, from the perspective of the Spiritual Framework, Earth stewardship is essential because Spirit, or divine universal energy, exists in all things that *are* and animates life. Hence, it supports the moral imperative to protect and preserve the environment, planet, and living beings.

Wicca's overall commitment to nature can be seen through the following excerpts, which can be understood as readings for devotional, meditational, or ritual purposes. They reflect the reverence for nature that the Spiritual Framework elicits and are read as follows:

Walk the fields and forests; be refreshed by the cool winds and the touch of a nodding flower. The moon and sun sing in the ancient wild places: the deserted seashore, the stark desert, the roaring waterfall. We are of the earth and should revere her, so do her honor...

Seek out wisdom in books, rare manuscripts, and cryptic poems if you will, but seek it out also in simple stones, and fragile herbs, and in the cries of wild birds. Listen to the whisperings of the wind and the roar of water if you would discover magic, for it is here that the old secrets are preserved...

Books contain words; trees contain energies and wisdom books ne'er dreamt of...

Honor all living things, for we are of the bird, the fish, the bee. Destroy not life save it be to preserve your own. And this is the nature of our way.⁸⁴

83. Scott Cunningham, *Living Wicca: A Further Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2016), 37.

84. Scott Cunningham, "Words to the Wise," in *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2008), 121-122.

The elegance with which the above Wiccan phrases refer to nature hints at three additional concepts shared with the Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness: immanence, interconnectedness, and community.

Immanence is essential to Wiccan thought not only because all humans are seen as manifestations of the archetypal God and Goddess, but also because all forms of life are interpreted as embodiments of the Divine, resulting in the sacredness of all living organisms.⁸⁵ Similarly, immanence exists within the Spiritual Framework due to the fact that Spirit animates life and *is* all things living and/or natural, resulting in a homogeneous sacredness of all lifeforms. Interconnectedness is at the heart of both Wicca and the Spiritual Framework. Both perspectives interpret this connection as the divine energy of all things in the cosmos and on earth. Belief in interconnectedness results, for both Wicca and the Spiritual Framework, in the belief that everything in existence is interrelated and, therefore, harming any form of life will have a negative impact on other forms of life, whether this impact is physical, spiritual, or both.⁸⁶ In regards to the notion of community, the Spiritual Framework adopts Wicca's concern for the well-being of the global community. This concern has as its goal humanity living in harmony with itself and other lifeforms.⁸⁷

Although there are many distinct ideas contained within the various Wiccan traditions that the Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness does not adopt, the core

85. Skye Alexander, "And Harm None: Philosophy and Ideology," in *The Everything Wicca & Witchcraft Book* (Massachusetts: Adams Media, 2008), 9.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

principles of Wicca constitutes a substantial amount of the Framework's ideological foundation. The Wiccan Rule of Three, for example, combined with the central concepts of immanence, interconnectedness, community, as well as viewing the earth as a living divinity and feeling a magical, mystical connection with nature results in a higher ethical standard of moral practices involving both humanity and nature as a whole. Revering and honoring nature as sacred and as imbued with the divine universal energy⁸⁸ that exists in all the cosmos entails the very sense of interconnectedness that the Framework is aiming to elicit from humanity.

Reply to Possible Critiques of the Proposed Framework

One possible critique of the proposed framework might focus on its lack of rational justifiability, primarily because the existence of Spirit as a divine energy cannot be empirically established. I argue that this criticism is similar to other overarching criticisms of religion in general and is, therefore, weak. Religious and spiritual traditions address questions of meaning and value and are grounded on the possibility of faith, which requires the willingness to believe in something greater than one's self without requiring empirical or rational justification. Further, investigative fields of scientific research are often developing new methods of inquiry, resulting in the discovery of new natural, cosmic processes. The frequency with which the scientific community is acquiring new knowledge via new research methods indicates that, theoretically, it may one day be possible to

88. This concept of *divine universal energy* is shared between the Framework and Wiccan theory, although for Wicca, the divine universal energy is personified into equally balanced masculine and feminine archetypal deities, while for the Framework, Spirit is the divine universal energy.

empirically prove the existence of a single energy that is responsible for all cosmic processes.

I argue strongly against skepticism regarding those things that are not amenable to rational explanation, simply because many aspects of reality cannot be explained through reason alone. To focus solely on those aspects of reality that are discoverable by reason would entail dismissing many elements of human experience that contribute to its richness and complexity. This is the case because although humans are said to be rational beings, many aspects of human nature do not fall into this category. Emotion, for example, is typically situated as opposite to reason, hence its common repression. Religion, in particular, is a highly influential aspect of human life and culture that does not conform to strict logical and rational principles but, rather, is justified through non-rational and intuitive means.

Another possible critique of the proposed framework might be that it is unrealistically optimistic. It could be argued that replacing the current anthropocentric paradigm with the paradigm that I propose will not remediate the damage to the environment. In response to this critique, I argue that altering value systems is the most efficient way to elicit widespread changes in human behavior. While the goal of unifying humanity through a shared ecological consciousness may seem optimistic, I strongly argue that a collective ecological consciousness is necessary in order to reverse the destructive relationship that human beings have with nature. A highly ambitious proposal for an overarching paradigm shift is the necessary means to a large-scale change of the human value system.

IV. Conclusion

The current ruination of Earth's environment is one of devastating proportions, and despite the facts that international agreements to cut greenhouse gas emissions are being upheld and the market of renewable energy is rapidly expanding, the grandchildren of emerging generations will likely face grim impacts of global warming produced by current and past generations. The unfortunate truth is that although many individuals, organizations, and even nations around the world are committed to reducing climate change and protecting the environment, there still exists a large portion of humans that either simply do not care or choose to live in denial of the scientific facts. A philosophical paradigm of human superiority which seems to underlie the Anthropocene is often used as justification for environmental degradation. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce a new paradigm that enables humanity to view nature as intrinsically valuable and that would foster collaboration on a scale large enough to address the state of the environment. The Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness has the ability to bring about this radical change.

Spiritual ecology as a movement encompassing a plethora of perspectives introduced a framework that sees nature as intrinsically valuable and worthy of being cared for by human beings. Deep ecology arguably introduced the notion of the sacredness of nature to a mainstream audience, though it was a bit too ecocentric and mystical for its audience to wholly grasp. The distinction between interpreting Spirit as the Green Face of God and as the Holy Spirit has widespread implications on the mainstream perspective of

the status of humanity in relation to nature. Because Spirit is traditionally interpreted as the Holy Spirit, it may seem that ethical considerations favoring nature are not relevant; however, when Spirit is interpreted as the Green Face of God, or as divine universal energy and the animator of all life (as it is in the Spiritual Framework), ethical implications of our actions for nature are inevitable and essential to the morality elicited by Spirit.

Although traditional biblical eco-theology provides significant arguments for the stewardship of creation and principles for ecological justice, each of these positions still exists within a framework that differentiates humans from other forms of life. Pope Francis' Encyclical on the Environment and Human Ecology introduces a new way to view biblical eco-theology, in which he argues for the unity of all living things and natural processes as a necessity to addressing the various climate problems the world is currently facing. Incorporating feminist eco-theology—in the forms of interpretations of the Gaia hypothesis as well as Spirit as Divine Wisdom—allows for a more interconnected perspective capable of aiding Pope Francis' Encyclical.

While each aspect of spiritual ecology undoubtedly has its merits, the only way to truly enable people from all walks of life to come together and recognize the interconnectedness shared by all life on Earth—in order to enable the kind of large-scale collaboration necessary to adequately address current environmental issues—is to introduce a new, unifying eco-theological framework. The Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness has as its goal the unification of humanity over a shared mindset of interconnectedness and reverence for nature which results in a paradigm that adequately allows for environmental remediation.

By incorporating the Gaia hypothesis and elements of the Spiritual Progressives' "New Bottom Line," the Spiritual Framework evokes ethical responsibilities not only for nature, but also for all forms of life. As a result of interpreting Spirit as the divine, universal energy which permeates all that exists, as well as interpreting life and all things natural as the physical embodiments *of* Spirit, the Framework allows for the expansion of moral empathy to other forms of life, to the Earth as an organic unit, and potentially even to all things natural. Drawing elements from earth-based religions such as the World Pantheist Movement and Eclectic Wicca allows the Spiritual Framework to focus on the deepest possible reverence for nature and the universe due to the inherent sacredness existent in said entities.

I have introduced the Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness as a possible medium for the development of a modern, unifying eco-theological framework that will allow humanity to view the human's status relative to that of nature in such a way that encourages sacred reverence toward the environment. Understanding and connecting with the organic energy of the universe through which everything is interrelated will allow humanity to collectively shift toward the ecological consciousness that is an absolute necessity for addressing the current state of the environment and for producing a sustainable future. Adopting the Spiritual Framework of Organic Oneness as the modern environmental-philosophical paradigm will allow the human race to emerge from the Anthropocene as a more ethical being with a healthy environment and a holistic understanding of the energy connecting all things in the cosmos and on Earth.

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