

# **EARTH HEALING: A Resurrection-Centered Approach**

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## Foreword 2011

**Our Earth is in Trouble.** This simple statement is as valid today as when spoken on the first Earth Day in 1970. In fact, since the book *Earth Healing: A Resurrection-Centered Approach* was written two decades ago, the troubles have not subsided but actually became worse in many ways: climate change, glaciers melting, oceans rising, coral reefs being destroyed, fossil fuel consumption expanding with its pollution aftereffects, continued forest decline, and severe weather in parts of the world. All of these are partly caused by human intervention.

Over the past four decades we have asked the basic question: How can we best solve these planetary troubles? The people who deny these conditions excuse themselves as too inexperienced to help fix the situation, or seek to escape to other allurements that are beyond our immediate purview. Our primary audience are those of keen observation, who have an authentic spiritual grounding to attend to difficult situations, and who seek to take some global responsibility for Earth's troubles. The current environmental challenge is even more difficult than conceived of four decades ago, because we now see this problem as a **social addiction** (see Appendix I); this insight, in turn, colors our response that must go beyond mere rationalization. More is needed, for the addiction cannot be resolved through some sort of rational debate or discourse. Something spiritual is called for at this critical time.

For many of us, addressing this environmental problem is a spiritual call; for believers in a personal God, this is a call from the Spirit. For Christians, the Spirit is a divine person. Thus **Earth Healing** is a spiritual calling experienced by all people of good will, but involving an all encompassing mission on the part of believing Christians. Earth is our home -- **HERE**; a problem exists of which we are moved with some degree of urgency to respond -- **NOW**; "Our" makes this a joint concern of a multitude -- **WE**. The solution, as with all addictions, which have a spiritual root, must come from a "higher power." The common approach has been to appeal to creation and its spiritual ground as our guide. We are convinced, from a Christian perspective which has universal importance that the ultimate ground of our Earth and its healing is the Resurrection of Jesus, which has begun the transformation, and has the power to effect the changes we need if we cooperate with the Spirit of Jesus. We feel an urgency to highlight this neglected approach to Earth healing given the increasingly critical situation.

Any treatment that addresses the planet's troubles is directed to a healthy balance of Earth's natural systems. Each of us is in some specific place on our Earth, and the more we are rooted in a place, the more we are in tune with our environment. Our local environment includes landscape and its features, waterways, wind direction, seasonal and weather conditions, and neighbors human and otherwise. "Here-ness" includes a local community (with its flora and fauna). **HERE** gives specificity to our callings.

Due to the urgency of this situation we are impelled to act. This moment, our **NOW**, is unique in the cosmic space/time continuum, which shapes our ultimate response. If our location is deeply wounded by human misdeeds, then our response expresses that concern. Our wounded Earth strikes our sensitivities, and we soon learn that historical conditions brought about these forms of degradation. Each of us yearns for healing of our wounded Earth in the near future, though often we judge that time is running out.

Current needs in place and time makes each of us aware that we are unable to change serious global problems by acting alone. In a profound state of discomfort, each of us reaches out

and discovers others with similar goals: WE must work in solidarity. The uniqueness of concerned individuals and a growing sense of kindredship helps us to discover an underlying spiritual power that can catalyze action at broader levels. Local place gives us specificity; shortness of time gives us urgency; and limited abilities for the compassionate bring us together to work for a New Earth. We strive to balance place, time, and solidarity in a Christ-centered Resurrection approach to changing our troubled world. The Resurrection brings humanity into the eternal time of God, embracing past, present, and future in a single point. We are called now to respond to the urgent need of our Earth. In essence, over these four decades our basic principles have not changed; they simply need further application.

In the past two decades, the global **Internet** (a word not found in our original book), has become a prominent component in our problem-solving arsenal. The appropriate technology section in Chapter Five has been expanded, because we can now reach beyond mere demonstration and on-site environmental resource assessments. One of our drawbacks when first developing this book was our inability to popularize the contents. We now see in the word-searching capability of today's Internet, that this theme can be broadcast globally, especially when made available electronically via our [www.earthhealing.info](http://www.earthhealing.info) website (currently receiving over a million hits per month). Also, references to intergenerational healing can be found on [www.familytreehealing.com](http://www.familytreehealing.com). This second edition is now able to be sold via Internet book-selling venues.

Besides a clearer understanding of the addictive nature of the problem and the available tools of the Internet, a third change in the past two decades has been a clearer understanding of the causes of this ecological crisis. The profound dysfunctionality of the economic/political/social system emerges in clearer light amid current global financial difficulties, failure to come to common agreement on the cooperative approaches to climate change, and a revolutionary movement towards democracy on the part of many of the world's unemployed. A consumer-based culture acting as the engine of current globalization with no regard for the essential needs of the world's destitute is bound to continue to fail, and generate growing unrest on the part of many of the young. Ecological problems are interconnected to this dysfunctional world system where money interests are seeking to privatize our Earth's resources that are meant for all God's people (see "Reclaiming the Commons," a work in progress, on the [www.earthhealing.info](http://www.earthhealing.info) website).

From a standpoint of unfinished work, these two writers are now elders, and have the grace of an ever-growing awareness of the shortness of life. Urgency makes us doubly committed to make the points expressed two decades ago available to all people of good will. With God's help, may each of you join us in working to save our wounded Earth as a cooperative global enterprise.

Bob Sears, SJ  
Al Fritsch, SJ 2011

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Estelle Frankel, *Sacred Therapy: Jewish Spiritual Teachings on Emotional Healing and Inner Wholeness* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003). She notes that the Hebrew YHVH, which God gave to Moses, "is a composite of the three Hebrew words *hayah* (was), *hoveh* (is), and *yihiyeh* (will be). YHVH, then, represents the experience of the eternal now, wherein the linear time-space continuum is suspended." p. 108.

## INTRODUCTION: THE LATCH IS OUT

by Al Fritsch and Bob Sears

Healing our wounded Earth<sup>1</sup> is one of the greatest challenges facing us today. The two of us authors make no pretensions to be master Earth healers; we are only learning the healing art and so present this as a justification for its emerging importance. We want to initiate discussion by drawing from our personal experience and the discernment process so identified with our common membership in the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

In some ways the two of us are vastly different: one is rural in background and residence and the other urban; one a public interest activist and the other an academic teacher and research person; one is a physical scientist and other a psychologist and theologian; one is more collective and the other individual and interpersonal; one traditional and the other charismatic. We live 500 miles apart but feel compelled to collaborate on this venture because we do sense the urgent need for saying what follows.

Surprisingly we are asking the same questions and finding answers which tend to complement each other. Do we have the power to heal the wounded Earth? How do we become spiritually energized for the task? Who are to become involved as Earth healers? Are there natural differences and polarities which must be identified? Must we consider the various charisma and gifts in healing? Must our prime elements of faith become the center of the healing process? Is our healing call ever deeper and more involved? How does prayer enter into the healing process?

Even as beginning healers we need to reveal our credentials. There are no degree programs in Earth healing -- and they may not be necessary. However, it is wise to acquaint the reader with why we find this art necessary and what process may be used to acquire it. Hence, our autobiographical introduction. We admit it is a novel manner of proceeding, but there is reason in our madness. We are emphasizing how much we honor diversity and these upcoming sketches show difference as much as similarity. Further, we are convinced that healthy Earth renewable practice will not only preserve that diversity but welcome and even celebrate it. Presenting two different approaches within the same book, not melted into one or the other approach but still fruitfully interacting, is to model what we expect and propose as good Earthhealing practice. Thus we do not hide differences but recognize them as part of the current situation. The author of each chapter is indicated, and we both have contributed to our introduction and conclusion.

### **Al Fritsch: "The Latch is Out"**

"The Latch is Out" is a Kentucky expression of hospitality. It doesn't mean it is out of commission; rather that on pioneer homes the latch string would be through the hole, and available for outsiders to pull and to release the lock allowing them to enter. "The latch of my own experiences is out" for I invite you to enter and discover my journey to the moment of Earth healing.

Actually my ecological career started on our small farm near Washington, Kentucky where my folks raised virtually all the food we consumed —meat, vegetables, fruit, eggs, milk. While we still had horses we were at least fifty percent self-sustaining in fuel as well. We

caught our own water in cisterns and we used locally sawed wood from the nearby Appalachian foothills.

Self-sustainability gave us the energy to look further into our resources. What we found near us were some run-down farms where over a century of intensive agriculture and over pasturing had eroded the land to the point where it was hurt. It was a challenge to my Dad to acquire the run-down farm and nurse it back to health, healing and bandaging the major wounds, covering the hills with grass, and returning it to proper cultivation or pasture.

In practical matters we were healers and considered this a challenge. Healing arts ran in the family with eight first cousins as doctors (2) or nurses (6) and most of the other 39 (plus 5 siblings) engage in healing in a variety of ways in their extended ministries. It was second nature to constantly search for ways of applying subjects learned during a long educational process to the healing of social, economic or physical wounds rendered to Earth communities and individual inhabitants.

My formal ecological career began on a Peace march in Austin, Texas in 1969 when I was a chemistry post-doctorate research associate working with Michael Dewar at the University of Texas. While marching along the busiest street in town I became acquainted with the next marcher, Joe Tom Easley, and he mentioned he was returning the following (Thanksgiving) weekend to Washington, DC where he was working with Ralph Nader at the Center for the Study of Responsive Law. I asked whether Ralph needed a chemist. After conversations with others including superiors my public interest career began the following June as a raider.

Those first public interest days included use of applied chemistry: mercury in fish, lead in gasoline, several hazardous pesticides and asbestos. Three of us fledgling scientific public interest advocates decided that in heavily legal D.C. we'd better band together and do our own thing, and so Jim Sullivan, Mike Jacobson and I formed the Center for Science in the Public Interest in early 1971, which continues to this day as a nutrition advocacy and research group. Tony Mazocchi of the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers Union gave us work space in his office, and a grant from Jay Rockefeller, a member of the West Virginia Governor's cabinet (and later U.S. senator), launched our career.

Early on, my focus was on chemicals in the environment (especially additives in gasoline) and Appalachian strip-mining issues (1970-2), aerosol sprays (1973), energy calculations and simple living (1974), energy and resource conservation alternatives (1975-77), the first solid wastes nationwide conferences and the right-to-know policies (1977-8), ethics as applied to chemicals and energy generation/use (1977-80) and applications of self-sustaining lifestyle techniques (1977-present, in Kentucky).

Healing our Earth seemed easy in the heady early 70s with a newly formed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and comparable state agencies and academic programs springing up everywhere. Environmental solutions would surely come if we only expose improper practices to public scrutiny, and furnish the barest outlines of what to do. The next six years in DC were filled with writing, speaking, and research projects along with serving on numerous governmental committees and panels. The pace was vintage hectic DC — that could burn the most hardened out in a short while. Washington is where people tell others how to live but hardly practice what is preached. Around the core city are the

wealthiest and most powerful counties and towns in the nation — and much of that is based on big government.

During the 70s, my ole Kentucky home had edged to number one in coal production and it was being hurt by the ravages of the exploiters' bulldozer and chain saw. Kentucky was calling — and, when a member of one's family is sick, you pack up and go to the bedside. My Jesuit Provincial, Dan Flaherty, encouraged this move as well and appointed me part-time Province social ministry coordinator. Jerry McMahon and Denis Darcey, two DC-based Jesuit Volunteers who were working on strip-mining issues, helped found a tax-exempt group, Appalachia—Science in the Public Interest (ASPI), with which I was director for 25 years.

The initial insight was to heal our Earth by coupling somewhat negative advocacy work with an environmental research and demonstration center (positive environmentalism). But the positive took much time, and traditional social change Appalachian groups were suspicious of our technology - as though we were watering down the pure environmental message. Many public interest groups accepted uncritically the prevailing governmental solutions of water and waste problems through mega projects costing millions of dollars. They shared the bureaucrats' suspicion over lack of control of ecologically-compatible decentralized methods such as cisterns and compost toilets.

Surprisingly, for being a Jesuit steeped in the Spiritual Exercises, an eco-spirituality grounding a healing ministry did not come early. Theological justification was always an interest as shown in my first major non-scientific venture, *Theology of the Earth* (1972) and its sequel, *Renew the Face of the Earth* (1981). However, not until after the latter book was published did I realize that "Earth healing" with the New Age flavor was overpowering the traditional theological arena to which I belong. Christianity was being blamed through its association with Western Culture for the malady of economic exploitation, and the call for Eastern and Earth-spirit religions was being frequently heard and found in the ecological literature. We simply woke up one day and found the whole world (at least in this hemisphere) toying with the New Age tenets.

I had been a speaker at a conference with Tom Berry in 1984 and heard a talk by Matt Fox at Garrett Seminary in 1986. I knew my instinct for Earth healing was very different from either of these, even though we shared a common priesthood in the Catholic Church. My concerns are primarily with the poor - poor Earth and poor people, those desiring a new creation and a redeeming and loving hand. Furthermore I am convinced that the poor are key players (and healers) in a new social order. I work for and with and among the poor and hope I identify with poor folks. If my theology doesn't touch them, it needs revision. The poor are my judge and jury.

That is not a recent finding. This thinking is consistent with what I held in my youth. I became angry when the school bus we lily whites were riding would pass up our friends and neighbors, the Smiths, who were black. They had to go to a one room school when others went to the larger public ones. My anger was always for the poor and I pray often that it will not subside nor burn me up. So much for differences which wind their way into my preferences for a more social ecology.

My entire priestly ministry has been associated with secular organizations, not religious ones. I noted through extensive travels and workshops that various components of the Earth-

concerned movement, "The Movement," thought theirs to be the ONLY environmental approach. Lawyers regarded all environmental concerns as legal; teachers saw all issues as pedagogical; research persons, as research problems. But wasn't there more to environmental action than any one specialty? Doesn't the balance of diverging approaches make for better ecology, not one monolithic way of thinking? It was over a decade since LBJ squatted on the front porch near Inez, Kentucky and launched the War on Poverty — the precursor to the ecological battles of the next decade. That war mobilized diverse forces, and so should we.

Financial reality joined hands with reflection by the early 1980's. We saw the end of Federal public interest funding when a Reagan Transition Team operative called me up and asked from what Federal agencies our Center received grants. All such funding groups ceased in late January, 1981. I give credit to the National Science Foundation which quickly shifted our ASPI funding from its "Science for Citizens" program (a Ted Kennedy pet) — to another where we had a previous grant. It gave us three years of breathing space to switch from nearly total government funding to total private sources — and we, unlike many, were able to survive.

Part of the survival focused on running resource audits for different non-profit groups either in or beyond Appalachia. By applying tested procedures to outside groups we offered what is good in Appalachia to others. By doing the service and launching these groups on their own environmental programs we were replicating the demonstration work done here and at Long Branch Environmental Education center at Leicester, North Carolina and later Earth Connections in Cincinnati, Ohio. The program began in 1984 and later termed the "Earthhealing" programs of the Resource Auditing Service Project. Healing took on an outward dimension and involved environmental design along with ten-year programs for the participating groups whether they be retreat houses, religious motherhouses, colleges, or youth camps.

In the spring of 1987 Dan Berrigan taught at nearby Berea College and visited ASPI. I mentioned to him how powerless I had felt upon returning to Kentucky and saw social structure change hopes dashed in the Mountain entanglements that weigh down a "Third World in a First World." Dan gently reminded me that I was only discovering our fundamental powerlessness before the Almighty. For the next six years I have thought about the interaction of power and powerlessness.

That sense of ineffective action was heightened by another concurrent incident. The Catholic Committee of Appalachia, a social justice group, was developing a position paper at the instigation of community organizers to show gradations in ministry in Appalachia - and guess who came out on top -- organizing. The visiting team came to ASPI and let slip that the report was just about completed - before a sizeable portion of the data was collected. My later lengthy critique of the draft document was ignored as were protests at the subsequent autumn CCA meeting. Different types of ministry were never accepted on an equal par and so the final document was heavily weighed to the community organizers' persuasion.

Amid the disappointment, it was becoming clear that ministry does have levels or depths, but not based so much on type of work but on each type's deepening level of awareness. My basic thesis was that there were many gifts but the same Spirit, affirming our "Catholicity" through mission gifts that require the encouragement of all. Variation only adds to the luster of the Church, the Community of Believers, provided all work in harmony and all deepen their individual and collective consciousness through work with and among the poor. By 1986, my

talks shifted to the poor holding the key role in healing our Earth, an older insight reinforced by Third World visits: Mexico (1975), Peru (1983), India (1988), Haiti and Dominican Republic (1990) -- and also to Israel in 1992.

Traditional church response to ministry has offered a privileged place for stewardship, which was the translating of financial giving to caring for Creation gifts. At a rather plush conference setting in Daytona Beach, Florida in December, 1987, sponsored by the National Council of Churches Stewardship Committee, I was asked to substitute for a presenter and furnish an activist response to some theological position papers. The intensity of the meeting allowed me to verbalize my thoughts. In the spring of 1989 I was asked to give a keynote on stewardship at a gathering of directors of mainline church national hunger programs in Chicago. I developed the topic that stewardship was only one of several approaches to environmental ministry — and it along with the others has a shadow side.

At a talk in St. Louis the same year I developed an application of St. Ignatius Loyola's three degrees of humility as found in the Spiritual Exercises. This progression from one level to another is the normal manner in which one reaches deeper levels of spirituality -- and healing. And this can apply to those in environmental work as well as others all of whom need to help share the pie of activism. What was becoming painfully apparent was that so-called environmentalists with noble causes do not necessarily act differently than others in our human society. Purity of cause does not ensure purity of method.

Both models of ministry and the deepening levels of awareness were further refined in 1990 -1991 talks and eventually became the structure of my book, *Down To Earth Spirituality*. Be humble as Christian people, not triumphal; be one with the people, especially the poor, not elitist; see Earth as poor and in need of care, not a Gaia figure; come closer and closer to Earth as a means of being in tune with its Creator; know the bioregion (the HERE) and the seasons (the NOW); consider the work ahead as a participative process of a WE, not an I.

The Mountain spirit was impregnating my bones and even my way of praying. A littered landscape, which was so distracting when first returning to the Appalachian Mountains, had now become the Calvary of poor land, fractured communities and people drained of self-respect. Now litter is not mere distraction. I can pick up four or five pieces each day, and still pray while walking.

As a practical person and one with roots in the wounded Earth I saw the need for redemptive action that goes beyond Creation-centered spirituality. During 1987-89 there was a struggle over control of the North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology of which I was deeply involved as a founder. At the 1987 North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology (which I helped organize but after the event was forced to disassociate from) I was particularly attracted to Bob Sears' Resurrection approach as truly promising.

Some wise personal advice in 1990 by Wendell Berry made me realize that direct battle on this subject was distracting my regular ecological work. I persuaded fellow Jesuit Joe Bracken, a theologian who teaches at Xavier University in Cincinnati to hold an eco-spirituality conference in September, 1991 and we asked Bob Sears to help focus the discussion. In part this book is a continuation of that and the dialogs that I've had since then with Bob, who serves on my Province environmental oversight committee.

While this brief odyssey hardly does justice to the many influences on the thought presented here: scientific training, farm background, a strong work ethic, Jesuit training, the Mountain people, I realize that any Earth healing needs to be mindful of the past and hopeful of the future.<sup>2</sup>

### **Bob Sears: Expanding Healing to Include the Earth**

My way to healing our Earth has come through psychotherapy and theology. As I was beginning my study of Theology in Frankfurt/Main, I became aware of a personal depression that blocked my feelings and made me anxious about life. I began to study psychoanalysis to find the root of the depression, but the more I learned, the more depressed I became. Knowledge, I learned, did not heal. It simply made me more aware of the problem. I was not yet certain what the solution was. An article by a fellow Jesuit referred me to Isaiah 43:18ff "Remember not the events of the past..., see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers...for my chosen people to drink." It touched me very deeply and seemed to lift the roots of the depression. Our creator is now at work, in the very heart of our Earth. Healing depends not on what went before (my analysis of beginnings) but on God who makes all things new. I began to think that my inner dying was actually part of a process grounded in God, a dying that was to open to new life. I thought of this then in terms of God as creator, not in light of the Resurrection, but the impact was the same. It was not by understanding causes that I would be healed, but by surrendering my whole depression into the hands of God. God's creativity is infinite and eternal, and God creates out of nothing. I need only surrender, and God can make all things new. I still had moments of depression and fear, but somehow there was a deep peace. They were part of the process of transformation.

That insight led further. If God creates new now, then we ought to be able to verify our theology by what concrete effects it produces. In a seminar on Teilhard de Chardin, I looked into the history of theology to see if I could discover the link between science and theology. I needed a theological norm of growth and therapy, and it seemed the way to find that was to see how theology related to science. What became clear was that theology changed with the introduction of new ways of thinking. The wisdom theology of the early church was rooted in a neo-platonic world view. The theology of Charlemagne's court was rooted in the grammatical categories of Aristotle then introduced into the West. Later, the dialectical works of Aristotle changed theological interpretations, and then his philosophical works helped Thomas Aquinas articulate the faith. The shifts in recent times through the philosophy of Schelling, Hegel, Heidegger, etc. are easy enough to document. What we didn't have was a theology rooted in psychological/social categories which was the thought-frame of our day. I was led to Psychodrama as the therapy of most interest at that time in Europe. It dealt with groups and thus could connect with a theology centered in the Mystical Body. As it turned out, Moreno, the founder of Psychodrama, had himself had a God-experience and designed his methods in light of how God would create and bring healing to groups. It is by releasing human creativity through freeing our interaction with one another that we are healed. We then become like God in action. I had found a second piece to my puzzle. Now I had a way to see God's creativity in human interaction and what Moreno called "global psychotherapy."

Yet I still did not have the right theological link. The theology I knew (Rahner, Lonergan, Aquinas) was focused on consciousness. But therapy worked in the unconscious. What was needed was interpersonal interaction (as in psychodrama), but what theologian would

provide a bridge to that. I researched various bridges between theology and psychology in my doctoral studies at Fordham—the Christian Doctrine of Love, the Spanish mystics, Heidegger, Eastern religions, Paul Tillich—but could not find the key. It was only while working on the question of the charismatic community in Paul Tillich and the German Catholic theologian Heribert Mühlen that I found the link. Tillich correlated with Carl Jung, but I was dissatisfied with his non-orthodox method. Muehlen correlated with Tillich and used a very careful theological method. Muehlen had worked most of his scholarly life on the theology of the Holy Spirit as We in God—the bond of unity between the first and second persons of the Trinity. Since the Spirit works in the depths of our persons (our "a priori I" as he put it), the Spirit is the ground of our unconscious as well as our consciousness, and works interpersonally. I had found the third ingredient of my search. My dissertation was on the relation of the Holy Spirit to Psychotherapy, using Freud, Jung and Moreno as representatives of psychotherapy.

Yet this was not just a theoretical pursuit. As I was studying therapy and theology, I was doing counseling and praying for healing. I was concerned to see "what difference" God made in healing, and I found by experience that God made a great difference. One client who came to see me in those days was both schizophrenic and plagued by "legions" of demons. He had therapy and shock treatment, and even deliverance prayer separate from therapy, but found little relief. I knew nothing of this sort of person at the time, and asked Fr. Rick Thomas, a Jesuit who worked with the poor in Mexico and was experienced in the deliverance ministry, what to do. What he said freed me from any illusion that it was "my prayer" that would accomplish anything. He told me, since I was unskilled in this area, just bless holy water and give it to him to drink! They had found in Juarez, Mexico that the demons would be so disturbed that gradually they would leave! Needless to say I was nonplussed. I hadn't blessed holy water in years, and I had never heard of drinking it. But I decided since he had the experience I would do what he suggested. Each week Ed (not his real name) would bring a five gallon can of water that I would bless and he would drink. After two weeks he had a significant release and could go about his ordinary life while still having the schizophrenia to deal with. Blessing of water and objects is an extension of the Sacraments, I learned, of Baptism and Eucharist. What would happen, I think now, if the Earth were thus blessed to become a sacrament of Christ's presence? I had found that God was a powerful help when through analysis we knew what to ask for, and even sometimes when we don't.<sup>3</sup> The aspect of healing prayer had been added to my point of view.

It was while teaching theology in Chicago that a further dimension came to me, the healing of family systems. I was led to the work of Murray Bowen and family systems therapy by Dr. David Augsburger of Bethany School of Theology. During his time at Menninger's Bowen found that patients would act very differently in the presence of their parents and family from when they were alone. He initiated the then unheard of practice of inviting the whole family to Menninger's and working with the family together. He began to see the client's mental illness as an effort to assuage a dysfunctional relation between the parents. If he worked only with the parents, the client would often be cured. I was intrigued. I had found an area in therapy that could give me controlled data to correlate with my interpersonal view of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> I began to pray not only for the individual, but for his or her family—and gradually for his or her ancestors. It was the whole extended human family that needed healing, reaching all the way back to Adam.

This extended view led me to the importance of the Resurrection of Jesus, and ultimately to praying for healing our Earth. How can we pray for those who are past unless God's power to

heal reaches into the past as well as the future? In working on Mary's Assumption in light of Jesus' Resurrection, I came to see that Scripture presents the Resurrection as a new kind of "Lordship" of Jesus. He sits at the right hand of God and shares God's rule. Since God's rule transcends our notion of past and future in an eternal NOW, the Resurrection must be bringing Jesus in his humanity into the eternal NOW of God! That is why Scripture could call Jesus the "new Adam" and speak of his preaching to the souls who were dead (see 1 Pt 3:19-22; 4:6) and their being saved. He could heal even the dead by the power of God to raise Christ from the dead. I experienced families getting free as we prayed for their wounded ancestors in the power of Jesus' Resurrection.

It was this prayer for ancestors in the power of Jesus' Resurrection, finally, that brought me to praying for our Earth and to seeing the power of the Resurrection to bring healing. In the late 70s Agnes Sanford began to be moved to pray for the Earth. Agnes actually moved to California as she felt called to pray for the San Andreas fault.<sup>5</sup> Soon afterwards, another person experienced in healing prayer, Barbara Shlemon experienced the same call when she was looking for a suitable place in Clearwater, Florida for a healing center. Nothing opened up till she looked into the history of a site she was especially interested in. She found that it was the site of a massacre of Seminole Indians and their burial ground, and she felt she needed to ask forgiveness for the way the whites had usurped their land. The day after she held this ceremony, the plot was opened for sale and she purchased it. This and several other experiences indicated that the land was affected by the traumatic events that occurred on it, and was released through prayer for forgiveness and reconciliation. As Genesis says, the land is closed up because of our sin, but it can be released through the power of prayer in the Resurrection of Jesus.

It was the talk on praying for the Earth in 1987 that brought me in contact with Al. After hearing my talk, he invited me and a co-worker down to Kentucky to pray for their region. My friend experienced a great sadness on entering the area, without even knowing we were there. Al explained that this area was on the Cherokee "Trail of Tears" and was also caught in between in the Civil War. We prayed for reconciliation with the Cherokees and for reconciliation in families, and then for forgiveness in an area wasted by strip mining. Al noticed a more peaceful atmosphere, and recently experts have noticed how the strip-mined area is coming back in a remarkable way. We felt that our two approaches to the same problem, as different as they are, could illustrate how God uses our different gifts for healing. This book is an effort to clarify the implications of this amazing truth, that the Resurrection can help us heal our devastated Earth, and can help us understand our call to being true stewards of the land.

### **A Quick Overview of Several Other Approaches**

In a little book on *Eco-Spirituality* Charles Cummings points out the importance of coming back to a reverent view of creation and accepting our place in the interconnectedness of all beings. The scientific mentality has given us the impression that the world is an object for our use. We understand the world and think that we know how to use it, but we do not have to concern ourselves with how the Earth responds to our usage. Some have even made a case that this is the effect of Christianity, since it freed our view of the world from being the dwelling of gods and goddesses, in order to focus on our use of creation. This accusation is questionable since the objectifying of nature grew more from Greek Aristotelianism and Roman domination, though Christianity did little to oppose it. The inner Mystery of the Earth was overlooked in a too otherworldly spirituality. The fact that it is our "home", that as we treat the Earth, we treat ourselves was not taken into consideration.

The fascination with the "unlimited" possibilities of science and technology has gone unchallenged till recently. With the destruction of the rain forests, the change of climate, the pollution of our water and the heedless exploitation of energy resources that cannot be recovered, we are hopefully growing in awareness that what we do to the Earth we are really doing to ourselves. We are beginning to see that the Earth is not private property, but every human's concern—that how one person treats (or mistreats) the Earth will be felt by every human being. We live in a post-Chernobyl and a post-Saddham Hussein age, when nuclear accidents and oil fires have polluted the world's atmosphere, with effects that extend beyond the environment of a single country. Science itself is making us aware of this interdependence on the Earth of all people.

This awareness might be called the emerging human consciousness. In the recent past we have had to factor psychology into our theological and spiritual point of view. Then we were caught up by Marxist Communism and the need to take into account the social implications of our view of God in Liberation Theology. That made us more aware of the neglected role of women and minorities and their search for justice. We could not have an up-to-date theology that did not take these concerns into consideration. Yet those were only the beginning of the extent of our present concerns. Now we have to look at the Earth itself and its oppression. We have to be aware that if we oppress the Earth, we oppress ourselves, and that this must become the concern of everyone. If ever there was an issue that would force us to be universally aware, it is concern for the Earth itself. It forces us to a cosmic perspective, and this cosmic perspective must also affect our theology and spirituality.

Actually, these different awarenesses—of psychology, social justice, feminist concerns, economic restructuring—are not individual issues independent of each other. The awareness of each colors the others, and this is especially true of ecological concerns. Our exploitation of the Earth has very much to do with psychological and spiritual growth, social justice, concern for women and minorities and economic justice. Irresponsibility in any of those areas would set the conditions for irresponsibility with regard to the Earth. It was the seeming inequality of Kuwait's wealth and Hussein's search for power and "getting even" that led him to set fire to Kuwaiti oil. It was the exploitation of Jews in Germany and the fear of its being repeated that has led to the unending standoff between Israel and the Palestinians in our time, which in turn contributes to an instability that could lead to further devastation of the Earth. We no longer have the luxury of compartmentalizing concerns. Everything seems to affect everything else. We must have a way to incorporate concern for the Earth that will also take into consideration all these other issues.

Different points of view have been proposed. A first approach is more ethical and strategic. It is a question of justice for the human race that we care for the Earth. It can also be a question of political activism to oppose groups that misuse the Earth. This focus is more ethical than theological, and it is aimed towards immediate effectiveness.<sup>6</sup>

Then we have Thomas Berry's focus on God speaking through the billions of years of evolution. He has been influenced by Teilhard de Chardin and a reflection on the history of science and modern culture. We humans as evolution come to self-reflection, and our very projects may actually be at odds with the innate tendencies of evolution to continue to evolve. We need, in Berry's view, to look to the Gospel of creation in order to find out how best to cooperate with its dynamics. We honor God by honoring creation. This sort of approach akin to what has been termed "Deep Ecology", which sees the whole Earth as united in a Gaia principle which is God's immanent call for us. We need to listen to the Earth speaking to us and directing

us.

A second creation approach has come from Matthew Fox's revisioning of spirituality in light of seeing creation as a "blessing" rather than a temptation. His approach began with opening to sensuality and ecstatic experiences. It deepened when he began to incorporate the insights of Meister Eckhart and what Fox terms "the four-fold path" of affirmation, negation, creation and compassionate transformation. That moved Fox into the area of social justice, and most recently into the area of the "cosmic Christ." Again, Fox focuses on creation and a spirituality embracing creation, and is quite critical of what he terms "fall-redemption" spirituality, with what seems to be a God transcending creation. What critics of Fox have found most disconcerting is his tendency to force his sources into his categories with the effect of discounting the fall and the need for the cross and redemption as focus of spirituality, and also his tendency to be so open to "new age" approaches that the centrality of the person of Jesus gets slighted. However, he offers many helpful insights that need to be included in any full treatment of the problem.

A more biblical approach is presented by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, in *A Worldly Spirituality*, in which he critiques a certain fundamentalist tendency to objectify creation and treat it as entirely under our stewardship. The world is created for us to care for, he argues, but we are God's representatives in that process, not our own. Creation is to be cared for according to its needs as given by God, not according to our self-interest. We are covenanted to God, and when we are in right relation to God, creation itself is blessed and blesses us. When we break that covenant with God, creation itself turns away from us and becomes a counterforce that we then have to dominate. Relations will be righted only when we turn back to God.

Then, finally, there is a renewal of Franciscan spirituality in our time. Roger Sorell updated this approach in his *Saint Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment* (N.Y.: Oxford, 1988). Sorell sees Francis' approach as more dialogical. Creatures are brothers and sisters with our common Creator God. Creatures speak to us of God, but do not they embody God? Francis is deeply focused on the person of Jesus (his stigmata is a clear sign of this) and it was in his deepest sharing of Jesus' suffering that he felt the deepest kinship with creation (and wrote his Ode to creation). This is clearly a kind of Earth mysticism like the more creation-centered approaches, but it is centered on God and Jesus Christ, with the result that he feels a kind of family relationship with all creatures.

While this book's approach respects certain aspects of all these different views, our approach is essentially different. We are introducing and developing the healing aspect of Jesus' Resurrection. We are not simply called to care for the Earth, we also need to help heal the wounds we as a human race have inflicted by cooperating with the Resurrection Spirit of Jesus.

### **Toward a Pluralistic Unity**

A final word about our approach. It could seem that because we are taking a specifically Christian approach, we have little to say to those of other religious traditions—the Buddhists, Hindus, Native Americans, and agnostics that are very concerned about the Earth. We hope this is not the case. Our conviction is that unity is attained, not by watering down our differences, but by getting more profoundly in touch with our deepest truth. When we are most true to our individuality, we are most universal. True dialogue will actually increase the recognition of our

differences (the human verification of Teilhard's principle that "unity differentiates"). It is respect for those deep differences that gives rise to a new kind of unity—a unity in love. This moves the issue beyond explanation or world view to facts. We are convinced that our position is about real processes, and that these realities have a way of revealing themselves whether or not we have yet named them adequately. Others may not agree that the Resurrection of Jesus is a reality. They may want to step back from that conviction to see the structure of dying and rising as a universal structure. They may not agree that God has forgiven us in Jesus, and continues to do so if we turn and ask. But it is getting ever more clear (from family systems, and from seemingly unending conflicts of regions entrenched in disputes of the past like Northern Ireland and the Near East) that only forgiveness actually changes systems. If we despair of that possibility, we despair of real transformation. We are open to evidence to the contrary of what we have presented. We are also open to others grounding the same conclusions in other basic presuppositions, and letting the basic facts be revealed in their own time. What we need now is a commitment to finding the truth for ourselves and the Earth, and taking the actions that follow from it.

Something of this dynamic of pluralism is embodied in this very study. The two authors come from very different experiences. Al has been a social activist for environmental issues, Bob a professor of theology and psychotherapy. Al has an eye for action, Bob for reflective foundation as the basis for action. Yet both have a common conviction that Jesus truly is resurrected, that his Resurrection has regrounded our whole evolving universe, and that this will show itself in facts, not just theories. Both of us think empirically. We look for the practical implications of the positions we take. It is the complementarity of those implications and of our basic faith in Jesus that has enabled us to dialogue with each other's positions. How well they integrate, the reader can judge. The book could have been written by a Buddhist and Christian, but then the differing basic presuppositions would have had to be articulated, as well as the common conclusions. Enough for now to be clear about our Christian approach.

Nevertheless, our own dialogue can indicate what we believe is now needed. All humans need to reach into their deepest convictions to find a universal world view that moves them to sacrifice. Our conviction is that only God, a personal God, can motivate us to such sacrifice. Our further Christian conviction is that only God can actually do such a sacrifice and empower us to do it. We cannot save ourselves, and mere knowledge is no assurance that we will act on it. We also believe, however, that God has done it in Jesus, and does empower us with the Holy Spirit. The seed of healing the Earth is already at work whether or not we know its source or can name it. What is needed is the commitment to truly work with God in that loving, healing transformation.

The method of this book attempts to illustrate a process that is needed, not gimmicks or simple exercises for resource conservation. Our process utilizes different approaches but still follows similar or analogous patterns which are developed in each chapter. Our emphasis is that Earth healing is a holistic endeavor, incorporating the talents and gifts of a large number of people. The key is encouragement and mutual enrichment, not suppression or competition of one method over another. In fact, the authors do not fully agree with certain details of the other's analysis, but the thrusts are the same -- and that is highly significant.

Our approach has emerged only gradually, but has evidenced a great power and a great hope. In this approach everyone has a gift to contribute, so we wanted to lay bare the life experiences that led each of us to our particular concern for this issue. Besides helping to

interpret our positions, hopefully this will serve as an invitation to our readers to examine the roots of their own interest and to find their gift for healing the Earth and learn to be enriched by dialogue with others with similar concerns.

We begin our healing venture by observing the situation: attending to our call to heal the land (Chapter 1), and the healing resource of the dynamics of Resurrection in the world (Chapter 2). We then move to diagnosis and strategy: seeing the poor as the privileged entrance into Resurrection (Ch. 3) and reflecting on our need to grow into a Resurrection spirituality and become discerning (Ch. 4), and seeing our "deep power" for change more closely in light of Resurrection (Ch. 5). Finally, we look at our various gifts for action: the basic polarity and interdependence of male-female approaches for creative change (Ch. 6), the many gifts given for Earth healing and how they assist one another (Ch. 7), and the need for prayer and union with God's creativity to ground all action for healing the Earth (Ch. 8).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this book we consider Earth a proper name, much as our other planets like Pluto, Mercury, etc., and hence we will capitalize it. Only in cases where earth refers to the common soil or dirt will we not capitalize it. To give Earth a proper name is to befriend it, to make it a dialogue partner and learn to consider things from Earth's point of view. We hope our usage will encourage such partnership.

<sup>2</sup> Since the narration of two decades ago, my ideas have been refined (though not that dramatically). Instead of conferencing and travel, my half-time occupation of pastoral ministry beginning in 2002 has kept me close to my two parishes, and my talks are mostly homilies. However, the poor of the two counties in my charge (Estill and Powell) have made a great impact, most reflected in my work in progress, *Reclaiming the Commons*. Further note that Powell County is the eco-tourist center of Kentucky (Red River Gorge and Natural Bridge) and this has focused attention on poor people/poor Earth and the complementarity of social justice and eco-justice.

<sup>3</sup> A study by W.R.Parker and E. St. Johns Dare, *Prayer Can Change Your Life* (Prentice Hall Inc., 1957) confirmed my findings. They worked with three self-chosen groups for a school year (therapy alone, prayer alone, and prayer with the diagnosis of therapy) and found that prayer alone was least helpful, therapy was somewhat helpful, but prayer and therapy was significantly more helpful, even to healing a chronic depression by the end of the year. They concluded that most prayer is badly directed or ungrounded in a deep faith in God's healing power, but with the guidance of therapy it was a powerful help. My work confirms this view.

<sup>4</sup> See my article on healing and family systems: "Healing and Family Spiritual/ Emotional Systems" *Journal of Christian Healing*, 1983. I coupled the insights of healing family systems with praying for ancestors in a way similar to Dr. Kenneth Me All's *Healing the Family Tree* (London: Sheldon Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> See Agnes Sanford, *Creation Waits* (Logos: Plainfield, N.J., 1978) where she explains her call to pray for the Earth.

<sup>6</sup> See Drew Christiansen, "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies*, vol 51, no 1 (1990), 64-81.

## **CHAPTER 1: OUR EARTH CALLING**

by Al Fritsch

Resurrection, like springtime, blooms eternal on the face of this suffering Earth. As Christian Resurrection people we express our belief by working with God to renew the Earth, and by doing so in quite unique ways. The immediate response of the Good Samaritan in St. Luke's Gospel is very appealing; upon seeing a victim, the traveler does not walk past nor hold a seminar, but drops all and initiates the process of healing. This true neighbor is a non-professional, is willing to enlist the assistance of others, and takes enough responsibility to follow-through in the healing process. Alertness to emergency is combined with a willingness to complete the task.

Our Earth calls each of us to such urgent action, not by its beauty, rich resources, or whimsical nature, but because it is a victim of the hurt done by us and our fellow human beings. As Shakespeare said "Pardon me thou bleeding piece of Earth, that I am meek and gentle with these butchers."<sup>1</sup> Earth calls through its suffering — as responsible and compassionate listeners we are moved to do something.

Our Earth is in trouble now. We each are well aware of this and could narrate a thousand sorry stories of silted-in creeks in which we used to swim, pristine landscape now trashed, fresh air now polluted, wild flowers now no longer found, idyllic woodland now in development projects, and fresh water springs now too polluted to drink. I know of individual cases related to each of these conditions. You most likely do also. Need we say more?

The suffering and wounded Earth is an environmental fact that has been noticed and noted at the turn of this century by conservationists such as John Muir and Aldo Leopold with reference to local, regional, or national resources. A jump to vast global dimensions occurred in the 1960s after Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and culminated in the first Earth Day in the Spring of 1970 and the United Nations Conference on the Environment in 1972. Suddenly a host of local, national and international organizations arose and took up different portions of the crusade to save Mother Earth. That early euphoria withered away with an awareness that answers to the suffering were more complex than earlier imagined. In due time, outright opposition to environmental activities for so-called economic and political reasons began to develop. Indeed, by the second Earth Day in 1990, the climate had changed. Some polluters gave lip service but were beginning to also manipulate the terms of any meaningful action. This became all the more evident in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit when international cooperative efforts were blocked by powerful interests, especially led by the United States Government.

At this point we could narrate a host of ills from deteriorating oceans, air quality, cumulating solid and hazardous wastes, and depletion of natural resources. For brevity's sake such a discussion, even though hair-raising, will be omitted and we refer instead to the host of ample literature now available on the subject, including some by this author. Most of the readership has access to such information. Within the last quarter century we have had two shocks: the rapid deterioration of our Earth's ecosystem, and the difficulty and lack of will to initiate actions to profoundly improve the environment. In part this is due to a failure to understand the nature of our human mission and to perceive the Earth's call as ongoing and open to deeper stages of development.<sup>2</sup>

Suffering Earth reveals that not only is it hurt, but that the healers need to be strengthened and more experienced in order to bring about meaningful action. Knee-jerk responses can only increase the pain and delay solutions. Activists have a delicate balancing act; we must take time to reflect and yet act with some haste; we need to improve healing methods while healing ourselves in the process. The irony is that those with first-hand knowledge of suffering Earth are those living in communities devastated by improper resource extraction practices, fouled air, unhealthy water, and congestion. Their support communities have been harmed because human and ecological communities suffer together.

### **Our Wounded Earth**

By the time of the second major Earth Day celebration in 1990 those concerned about the environment were becoming increasingly aware that something was awry. Superficial consciousness-raising devices and techniques were and are not sufficient. Earth healers were now hearing something more — doctor heal thyself. The nobility of the call does not mean that we can act properly. So often we still retain many of the imperfections that led to the Earth's suffering in the first place. Allowing these to continue can only exacerbate the problem.

A major premise of this book is that the call to heal is a universal one coming to all human beings of good will. However, our manner of responding may differ and we may be tempted to do one of three things: to deny that the harm actually exists and close our eyes and ears to the destructive practices that we and our fellow human beings are doing; to excuse ourselves as being too busy, sick, ignorant, old, young, or inexperienced; and to escape from this very direct call through drugs, television, alcohol, or the allurements of the consumer culture and lifestyle.

Those who deny the damage prefer to balance jobs with environment and say that some perceived damage is the price of economic progress. The domestic comforts of air conditioning and space heating may exact a toll on resources, but why not as long as we benefit? The current environmental picture is depressing and those who deny would ask whether the feeling of such desolation is really healthy. Why bring it up? A perversity prevails that condemns the bearers of bad news, whether correct or not. It even belittles those who attempt to balance negative environmental messages with positive alternative practices, saying that such alternatives are not economically sound or significant, or take too much effort to implement. The Sage Brush Revolutionists in the Rocky Mountain regions, who want to de-emphasize big government, and the ultra-conservative Wise Use folks, who contest any governmental regulation on industry, participate in this sort of denial.

Excusers manifest a false humility, saying that others can do a better job. This is the silent majority who comprise a sizeable portion of the 70% of the population favorably disposed to environmental concerns and the movement. They may find it too embarrassing to garden, too expensive to install solar energy, too formidable to remodel or build their own home, and too time-consuming to change wasteful community practices. They are the overly institutionalized who are paralyzed to openly act for fear of criticism, self-revelation or failure in the eyes of peers. It is this category of people who hope that professional Earth healers come on the scene and do their duty, and regard sideline cheering and Monday morning quarterbacking a fulfilling pastime.

Escapees may be aware of environmental concerns but do not have the heart, backbone or tough skin to enter the fray either. They know they could make a difference but prefer to dodge issues through temporary distractions which may turn into long-term mind-numbing habits, e.g., drugs, mall-shopping, television, alcohol, excessive travel to overcome boredom by seeing distant and exotic places. They may delve into eco-spiritualities which give good feelings without directly encountering the suffering of the Earth as such. Together with the excusers they may engage in recycling — an activity now accepted as part of peer pressure and local regulation. But the deeper issues are frightening, depressing, overpowering. For them - and in some cases it may be healthy - an escape is the better approach.

For the most part we will ignore the first category because the denying type will have to overcome their mental block before they will read this or similar literature. The second and third groups are more receptive and offer greater hope. Excusers beg for encouragement. The good news is that they are capable of becoming good Earth healers, provided they accept encouragement, are comfortable in being themselves, and are willing to complement the talents of others. We need to realize the uniqueness of our own niche. Escapees are a more difficult type because if they have reached addictive levels of escape agents, mere reasoning and rational forms of persuasion will not suffice.

Most of us are afflicted by these various obstacles to involvement to some degree. These are the static which hinder the voice of the Earth, the unnecessary distractions, the detours and false allurements, the busyness and clutter that fill our days and drain our energy. Are we being drawn to green marketing as an excuse to continue in our consumer habits -and addictions? Isn't it perversely pleasing to hear how some rather domineering advocate for the Earth has been shaved down to size? Don't we make our recycling record into an excuse for not doing more or confronting our wasteful consumer habits? We are tempted to gloss over a profound social, political and economic malaise that paralyzes us. It is painful to admit the Earth call is often drowned out, and that the 1990 Earth Day-20 celebration was co-opted by consumer products manufacturers fearful of market position loss. We are tempted to become cynical and burnt out.

A new perception is emerging: Earth healing and individual and community healing go hand-in-hand, but which comes first. Expecting Earth healing to come after individual healing resembles mechanistic physics. Healing ourselves first in time while the Earth is devastated ignores the social responsibility that is part of our own healing process, though it is quite alluring for we are never perfectly healed, and we all too easily ignore the disasters all around. What is needed is to work on both fronts (self and Earth) at the same time. Modern scientific thought speaks of complementarity of wave and particle, such that both characteristics can exist simultaneously. Similarly, the call of God at particular times (events of quanta) is always interacting with the constant ongoing call (waves as it were). An emerging spirituality that accepts the Earth call is also confronted with this apparent constant co-existence of two elements. We need to heal self and Earth; we are healed in healing Earth, and Earth is healed in healing self. In reality Earth heals us when we turn and touch it with a merciful hand. We need to have faith that we will be healed and worthy of the calling to which we as human beings have been commissioned. Far from the misunderstood Biblical cosmology of the conquest of Earth, what is needed is the far more profound Scriptural calling to be humble enough to accept our noble calling to care for the Earth.<sup>3</sup>