Religion and Environmental Education: Building on Common Ground

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Abstract

Environmental educators are beginning to consider how to incorporate religious resources into their curricula. Common concerns about religion pose a challenge for integration, but these concerns are manageable. Reflection on the precursors of environmental citizenship behaviour provides a framework for considering some of the ways that religious elements can enhance environmental education. Furthermore, faith-based environmental education programs have existed for decades, and their practices can suggest some starting points. Abundant ecotheology resources also exist, including environmental policy statements within most denominations. These resources can provide a common ground between religion and environmental education.

Résumé

Les éducateurs de l'environnement commencent à examiner l'inclusion de ressources religieuses dans leurs programmes d'étude. Des préoccupations communes sur la religion posent un défi en ce qui concerne l'intégration de ces ressources, mais ces inquiétudes ne présentent pas de problème insoluble. La réflexion sur les précurseurs du comportement de la citoyenneté face à l'environnement fournit un cadre permettant de considérer certaines façons dont des éléments religieux de mettre en valeur l'éducation écologique. De plus, les programmes d'éducation écologique basés sur la foi existent depuis des décennies et leurs pratiques peuvent laisser entrevoir quelques points de départ. D'abondantes ressources écothéologiques existent aussi, notamment des formulations de politiques en environnement, dans la plupart des dénominations religieuses. Ces ressources peuvent fournir une base commune entre la religion et l'éducation écologique.

Keywords: ecotheology; educational theory; environmental citizenship; environmental education; religion

Introduction

Religious perspectives have long been relevant to environmental values, and references to Native American and Eastern religious and cultural perspectives have often been included in environmental education programs. Recent developments in Christian and Jewish ecotheology have led environmental thinkers also to increasingly appreciate the potential of

mainstream Western religion and theology to contribute to environmental education and citizenship. For example, environmental historian Roderick Nash (1989) documents the greening of American religion and the development of ecotheology (see also Fowler, 1995; Gottlieb, 2006). A recent Worldwatch Paper describes religion and spirituality as potentially powerful and natural allies for the sustainability community (Gardner, 2002). Environmental philosopher Max Oelschlaeger (1994) claims that "religion is a necessary condition for the resolution of ecocrisis," and particularly commends the Judaeo-Christian metaphor of caring for creation as a "last, best chance" for environmental citizenship in North America (pp. 22, 236).

Given the predominance of religious traditions and their enduring influence in the world, these recommendations signal a new hope for environmental sustainability. Aldo Leopold remarked more than 50 years ago in "The Land Ethic" that any significant change in ethics would require an internal change of affections, loyalties, and convictions; the proof for Leopold that conservation had not reached "these foundations of conduct" was that "philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it" (1949, p. 209). In fact, outside of the field of ecology, especially prior to the publication of Rachel Carson's (1962) *Silent Spring*, very little of the world had awakened to the modern environmental concerns that Leopold portended. In the North American Judaeo-Christian religious context to which Leopold referred (and which is the main frame of reference for this article), significant work in environmental theology did not emerge until the 1950s and 1960s, grew along with all genres of environmental literature after Earth Day 1970, and only became a topic of widespread theological attention at the end of the 1980s (Siemer & Hitzhusen, in press). But the clear evidence by now that "religion" has not only heard of, but is championing conservation, is good news indeed, and these developments invite environmental educators to take advantage of the possibilities that religious resources provide.

Many studies have begun the work of considering how spirituality and religion might enhance outdoor, experiential, and adventure education (e.g., Stringer, 2000), and a few studies (Baer, Tantillo, Hitzhusen, Johnson, & Skillen, 2004; Hitzhusen, 2005) have examined how specific religious themes have been incorporated into environmental education. A full understanding of how different religious insights might complement environmental education, however, is still forming. Furthermore, common worries about religion may infringe on educators' confidence. Educators may be wary of the place of religious thought in their curricula for several reasons, including constitutional and political questions about religion in schools, as well as the potential for controversy, subjectivity, and dogmatism. These are serious challenges, but I will argue not only that they are not lethal, but that re-conceiving the role of subjectivity and dogma may reinforce the potential value of religion for environmental education. To be sure, the role of religion in environmental education needs to be pursued thoughtfully. But the common

ground between religious environmental teachings and traditional environmental education elements, which I'll discuss in terms of a familiar theoretical framework (Hungerford & Volk, 1990), indicates several ways that religious elements can be incorporated into environmental education.

Addressing Concerns About Religion

The first problem most educators face when incorporating religious teachings in environmental education is the question of how to appropriately bring those insights into public education. Valid separationist concerns exist, and many educators do not have the religious or theological credentials to present representative, balanced, or adequate coverage of religious and theological ideas. But these concerns provide opportunities for educators. Concerns about treading on inappropriate religious ground can be addressed by general guidelines available from sources such as the American Civil Liberties Union's "Joint Statement of Current Law on Religion in the Public Schools" (American Civil Liberties Union, 1995). The concern about credentialing is serious and has not yet been widely addressed at schools of education. But extensive materials are available for educators to draw upon (consider, for instance, Wildman's (2006) online bibliography of more than 2,000 ecotheology works). The larger challenge may be how to select appropriate items from available materials, but ample resources exist (including some mentioned in this article) to assist educators in this task.[1]

A second challenge is to avoid unnecessary controversy in the process of including religious sources in environmental education. For instance, debates about religious myths of origin and evolutionary theory can generate tension, especially in the U.S. And there may be other, largely unrelated religious teachings that concern some educators. The Biodiversity Project (Lowery & Swartz, 2001) has developed a helpful and sensitive set of suggestions for reducing potential conflicts when linking environmental and religious efforts in the realm of advocacy, and such advice may also provide helpful guidance for educators. For instance, potential tensions can be soothed by demonstrating respect for religious views, monitoring the tone of discussion about religion, and avoiding debate about controversial values unrelated to conservation. Potentially controversial religious issues need not overshadow what religion has to offer environmental education, particularly if educators focus on established religious *environmental* teachings, which tend not to be theologically controversial (skepticism about the environmental friendliness of certain religious views will be addressed below), and which often parallel pre-existing elements of environmental education curricula.

Another challenge involves the perception that religious thought is uniquely subjective, and thus stands in sharp contrast to more objective or scientific contributions to environmental education. This concern may be fading in light

of postmodern sensibilities; scholars have extensively addressed epistemo-logical issues of this sort (Barbour, 1974; Miller, 1998; Peters, 1966), and indeed, environmental education scholars have commonly defended the complex and interdisciplinary nature of environmental education (Sauvé, 2005). But a few brief comments to reinforce the point seem in order here. In the first place, the privileging of "objective" sciences over more "subjective" disciplines (e.g., philosophy, theology, history, literary criticism) is clearly problematic. As philosopher Mary Midgley (1992) suggests, spiritual, moral, metaphysical, or psychological concepts that fall outside of today's narrow notion of science "do not cease to be thought about just because they lie outside the borders of science. They [simply] have to be thought about in other ways" (p. 56). This comes as no surprise to educators who already employ poetic, artistic, spiritual, or religious themes to address environmental issues.

Religions, like art and poetry, can address environmental issues in ways that science cannot. Nevertheless, educators may worry that the means by which religious traditions promote morality (environmental and otherwise) are too dogmatic for public educational settings. Clarifying the semantics of "dogma" and remembering the neutral ideal of the educational context can help make this worry more manageable. Dogmatism is commonly defined in two distinct ways. Dogma as *inadequately grounded but authoritatively or arrogantly asserted teaching* should obviously have no place in education, public or private. But dogma as *authoritative teaching asserted without scientific proof* is another matter. It should be remembered that inadequately grounded teachings are not welcomed in religion, either, and religious communities have legitimate means of validating knowledge via processes not too dissimilar from those engaged in science (Barbour, 1974). As E.F. Schumacher (1977) observed, "After many centuries of theological imperialism, we have now had three centuries of an ever more aggressive 'scientific imperialism'" (p.6). Science, religion, philosophy, ethics, and indeed all human thought enterprises are vulnerable to dogmatism in the negative sense. But established religious dogma, as well as other types of authoritative teaching, need not be advanced arrogantly. Teaching about religion should not be confused with the dogmatic promotion of religion, or with religion itself: educators can describe without advancing particular religious or ethical teachings.[2]

In fact, the formal, authorized environmental dogma of religious communities—represented by hundreds of denominational environmental policy statements—is one of the more important resources religions can contribute to environmental education.[3] Many environmentalists have the mistaken idea that Christianity has promoted a theologically-based disregard for nature (e.g., Moyers, 2005; Orr, 2005). But these critics have yet to provide a single substantive example of an established anti-environmental *religious* teaching.[4] Some conservative political and religious perspectives differ from common liberal environmentalist views and policies (Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship, n.d.; Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt, & Green, 1995;

Locke, 2001), but increasingly these differences presuppose a common context of environmental concern of the sort exemplified by recent statements of evangelical Christian environmental priorities (Haag, 2006; Stafford, 2005). Oelschlaeger's (1994) lament that "many environmentalists, in spite of evidence to the contrary, continue to think of religion as the enemy" (p. 22) unfortunately still holds. The fact remains that religion and science both seek to address environmental issues, and it is precisely the potential complementarity of religion and science that makes religion helpful to environmental education. The sort of scientism or political partisanship that ignores this complementarity and highlights only alleged conflicts between religion and science is probably itself a dogma of the inadequately grounded sort.

Indeed, the inclusion of religious views can help reduce a form of dogmatism that occasionally has been present in environmental education. At times, and against the neutrality recommended by some environmental education theorists (Ramsey, Hugerford, & Volk, 1992), some environmental educators have narrowly promoted a conversion to a new way of viewing the world, most often in an anti-anthropocentric way.[5] The assertion of anti-anthropocentrism can influence openness to helpful religious environmental views. For example, in the early 1990s, I was a member of an informal committee formed within the environmental education division of a large, environmental non-governmental organization to investigate how religion might complement environmental education and advocacy. The concept of stewardship of creation, which has become a major theme of religious environmental thinking (Kearns, 1996), was proposed as one promising point of connection. However, the suggestion was strongly opposed by some committee members because "stewardship" was deemed to be "too anthropocentric" a notion to be of any use to environmentalists. The committee disbanded amid the contentious disagreement over this point. Hopefully the likelihood of this sort of episode is diminishing, but environmental educators can avoid perpetuating such dogmatism by being careful not to promote a particular or popular belief system (e.g., biocentrism, ecocentrism, anthropocentrism, etc.) as the only reasonable basis for environmental thinking. Educators can examine religious views on their own merits, as important catalysts for environmental values.

As Hotchkiss says in George Bernard Shaw's (1911) play *Getting Married*: "Religion is a great force: the only real motive force in the world; but what you fellows don't understand is that you must get at a man through his own religion and not through yours" (p. 290). Adding religious teachings to the environmental education mix greatly broadens the base of values available to support environmental citizenship—not by attempting to convert students to a new environmental belief system, but by empowering students to develop their environmental values within whatever pre-existing value system they already occupy.

There are surely other concerns to address, and educators should not

shrink from the challenge of addressing them. Admittedly, the above recommendations will not apply to every environmental education or religious context, and are not intended nor adequate to settle debate once and for all. An ongoing conversation among practitioners will be critical, especially in light of the persistence of concerns (founded and unfounded) regarding religion. Environmental educators will be wise to proceed with care in engaging religion, but most of the concerns that affect how educators might incorporate religious material into their curricula are manageable. A great body of religious environmental resources can directly complement environmental education, and represents a promising source of new material for environmental educators. There is much common ground on which to begin and build further if success merits.

Starting Points

The reciprocal benefits to connecting environmental education and religion have already been seen where popular environmental education activities translate well into religious settings. For instance, some of Joseph Cornell's nature appreciation exercises have been adapted to engage a range of Jewish spiritual themes (Biers-Ariel, Newbrun, & Smart, 2000). Several religious environmental education programs studied by Hitzhusen (2005) also drew from secular environmental education materials, such as Cornell's, or Steve VanMatre's acclimatization activities. At the same time, experiential programs like the National Outdoor Leadership School and Outward Bound have occasionally incorporated traditionally religious disciplines like meditation, yoga, or inspirational reading to enhance experiential learning (Gookin, 2002). These examples demonstrate the complementarity of religious and environmental program elements, and begin to suggest some ways that religious teachings and traditions can theoretically translate into environmental education. Of course, more specific recommendations must be examined, and reviewing some of the factors that influence environmental education can provide a framework for the discussion.

Reflecting on Environmental Education Theory

Many models have been proposed to inform environmental education by describing the factors involved in environmental citizenship. One of the most useful and best-known schemes is the classic citizenship behaviour flow chart of Hungerford and Volk (1990). Based on available research, Hungerford and Volk proposed major and minor factors that influence environmental citizenship behaviour (see Figure 1). Although the interaction of the factors they described is only partly understood, it is widely assumed that these factors play an important role in fostering environmental behaviour, and many environmental education curricula have been based upon this model.

Entry-level Variables	Ownership Variables	Empowerment Variables	
Sensitivity	**In-depth knowledge about issues**	**Knowledge/skill in environmental action strategies**	
	Personal investment in issues and the environment	**Locus of control (expectancy of reinforcement)** →	Environmental Citizenship Behaviour
Knowledge of ecology	Knowledge of the consequences of behaviour—both positive and negative	**Intention to act**	
Androgyny		In-depth knowledge about issues	
Attitudes toward pollution, technology, and economics	A personal commitment to issue resolution		

Major variables; Minor variables

Figure 1. Environmental behaviour model: Major and minor variables involved in environmentally responsible behaviour (adapted from Hungerford & Volk, 1990).

The elements in Hungerford and Volk's model have been exhaustively discussed and need not be fully reviewed here. But several characteristic religious elements could contribute to and complement the influence and interaction of these factors. For instance, Hitzhusen (2005) identified specific concepts, teachings, and activities that have proven effective in long-standing Christian and Jewish environmental education programs in the U.S. and Canada, and some of these might help educators extrapolate appropriate religious material for inclusion. These examples are drawn from Judaeo-Christian traditions, but functionally similar themes are present in all major faith traditions. Relevant themes of practice include:

- Cultivating awe and wonder.
- Learning from nature, especially by examining ecological and communal relationships.
- Connecting understanding of ecological and communal relationships with spiritual, ethical, and scriptural teachings and metaphors.[6]
- Encouraging spiritual growth, especially as it follows from reflecting on the preceding point. Religious environmental education programs encourage spiritual growth in ways that resonate with their own traditions and scriptures. Obviously, this could be potentially inappropriate or difficult for much environmental education, but the *fact* that spiritual growth is considered an important part of reaching ethical maturity is of objective interest.

- Celebrating growth and learning through worship and prayer. This theme would not seem appropriate for most environmental education programs, but elements of celebration, thanksgiving, reverence, song, and ritual (e.g., Adams, 1987) can enhance environmental education by contributing to spiritual and ethical development.
- Applying specific ethical and moral teachings regarding the connection between humans, God, and creation. Common ecotheological concepts, such as stewardship, eco-justice, *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), and cosmic redemption can all impart a sense of moral imperative regarding the environment.
- Seeing life as a gift, and environmental citizenship as partly an outflow from appreciation of that gift.
- Perseverance and enduring hope, drawn from religious narrative traditions.

Some of these themes are similar (the first two may be identical) to those that appear in secular environmental education programs, and yet the fact that religious programs also employ them does not make them unfit for public education. Rather, the simple fact that religious perspectives align with some common environmental education traditions may help students value the lesson for additional reasons. These and other religious elements can be further discussed in terms of Hungerford and Volk's model.

Entry-level variables. These are variables that seem to be important precursors to environmental behaviour, and that enhance a person's decision-making once an action is undertaken. *Environmental sensitivity*, or an empathetic perspective toward the environment, is the major factor identified in this category. Clearly, some of the above religious and theological themes might enhance a student's environmental sensitivity. For instance, cultivating awe and wonder can heighten environmental sensitivity, and religious perspectives can deepen the effect. A vast majority of Americans believe in God (recent General Social Survey (SDA Archive, n.d.) figures indicate 81 %, with another 8 % believing in an impersonal higher power), and connecting reverence for nature with reverence for its creator can link environmental sensitivity with the expression of a theist's ultimate devotion. Some of the doxology Psalms (e.g., Psalm 65:8-13; 96; 98; 104; 148) express an appreciation of nature in such terms. If appreciating ecological diversity can be an act of praising God, then religious perspectives can augment the development of empathy and kinship with creation.

Furthermore, the problem of justifying the intrinsic value of nature that has troubled environmental philosophy (Sober, 1986) is directly addressed by various religions. For example, in Judaeo-Christian traditions, the Genesis creation stories record that as God created all things, he declared them "good." And when all things had been created, God saw that it was "very good." Thus these scriptures assign divinely proclaimed intrinsic value to creation, and highest value to the fullness of creation. As these examples suggest, a range

of religious themes of value, respect, and reverence can inspire a more imaginative appreciation of nature and biodiversity.

Although its impact is not well understood, the minor variable of *attitudes toward pollution, technology, and economics* could also be influenced in a variety of ways by religious insights. For example, the environmental justice and simplicity movements within religious communities may reinforce any number of positive environmental attitudes (e.g., Schut, 1999). A sense of the sacred can also heighten environmental sensitivity and contribute to environmental behaviours and attitudes (Tarakeshwar, Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2001), as can a host of other religious variables (Hitzhusen, 2006).

Beyond these examples, some evidence suggests that environmental values provide a forum where appreciation of religious values can be shared. In a study of environmental values in America, Kempton, Boster, and Hartley (1995, p. 91) were some of the first to offer survey respondents a religiously-motivated option to explain their environmental concern. Their results were telling. More than any other question assessing environmental concern, respondents across categories agreed strongly that: "Because God created the natural world, it is wrong to abuse it." Even 68 % of the non-religious respondents agreed with this statement, and surprisingly, 47 % of atheists (and those who did not believe there is a spiritual force in the universe) agreed with the statement. The authors concluded that even for those who do not believe, reference to divine creation is an important language Americans have to express their deepest value for the natural world. Taken as a simple matter of fact, many Americans resonate with valuing nature because God created it, as described by the book of Genesis and reinforced by other tenets of Judaeo-Christian ecotheology. People of different religious persuasions can appreciate the beliefs of others and make meaningful use of language and values that are culturally important.
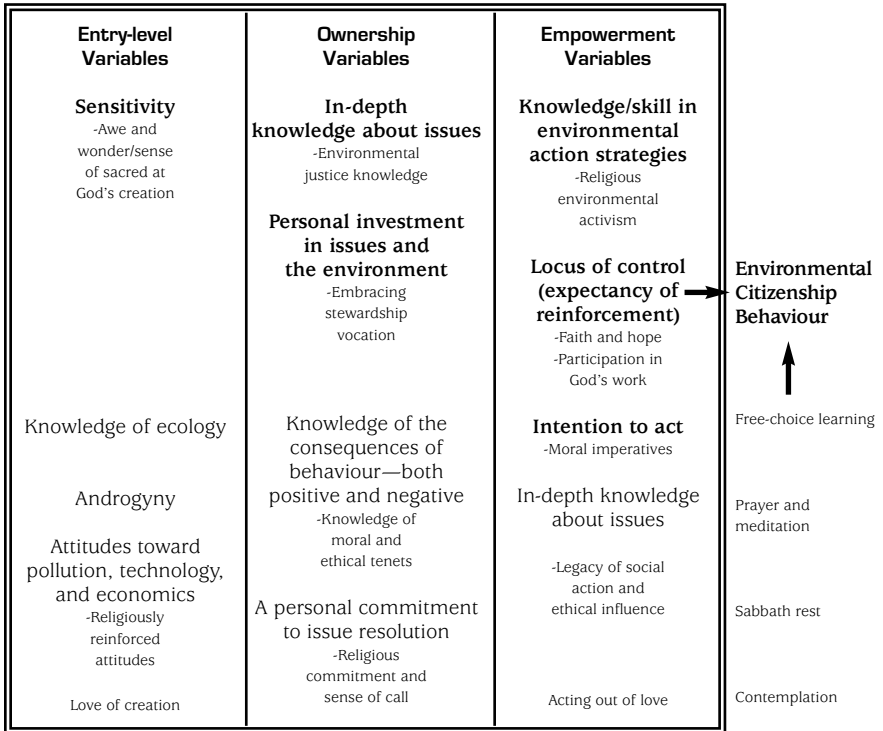
Ownership variables. These are factors that make environmental issues personal. At a very simple level, ownership of environmental issues by religious adherents may be increased when they learn that their faith tradition promotes environmental action and concern. *Personal investment in environmental issues* can therefore be enhanced. For instance, a central tenet of Christian stewardship theology is that the Earth is the Lord's (Psalm 24:1), but it is entrusted to human care—God calls humans to serve and protect creation (Genesis 2:15). With this view in mind, contemporary ecological concerns challenge humans to take greater ownership of their vocation as stewards. In fact, many religious environmental leaders credit a sense of religious calling to explain their investment in environmental issues or express their *personal commitment to environmental issue resolution* as a part of a larger commitment to peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. Moreover, religious teachings have long been at the forefront of environmental justice work (Bakken, Engel, & Engel, 1995), and thus can contribute to *in-depth knowledge about environmental issues* where justice is concerned. These religious points of res-

onance can complement ownership elements of environmental education.

Empowerment variables. These are crucial and give individuals a sense that they can help resolve environmental issues. Motivation and empowerment are strong features of religion, and all of Hungerford and Volk's (1990) major empowerment variables can be enhanced by religion. For example, the involvement of faith communities in recent environmental advocacy makes clear that religious life is a source of empowerment. Many religious adherents are gaining *knowledge and skill in environmental action* as exemplified by a host of success stories.[7] Religious motivation and empowerment can also enhance one's *intention to act*. Prophetic charges can increase motivation (e.g., Jeremiah 9:12-14; Hosea 4:1-3), as can a healthy fear of the consequences of environmental neglect (cf. the warning to those who "destroy the earth" in Revelation 11:18).

A sense of participation in God's work of cosmic redemption (cf. Colossians 1:15ff.)—believing that one is part of God's larger work to redeem and heal all of creation—is also empowering. Such empowerment may relate to a person's *locus of control*, or the expectation of reinforcement or success in one's actions. Feeling a part of a divine initiative can help people or individuals feel their actions will make a difference (by God's grace), thus promoting an *internal* locus of control.[8] Religious activism can similarly offer a hopeful antidote to pessimism in the face of complex environmental issues. Faith, after all, is the assurance of what cannot be seen. Faith gives the capacity to act even if there is no assurance of reward or immediate success. For instance, this sort of hope and empowerment borne of religious faith has sustained social activists in other cases, such as the abolition of slavery or the continuing work for civil rights. Not all environmental issues (if any) can be resolved quickly and easily. Some may take generations to solve, and in the face of these potentially daunting realities, religious faith can supply hope and resolve. The formative Exodus stories of Israel, for instance, tell that the generation that was freed from slavery did not enter the Promised Land, but their children did. Such a vision may provide a source of enduring hope for those facing the environmental challenges of the present—this generation may not see all its hopes come to pass, but present efforts can still help the next generation inherit a better world.

The points of resonance noted above illustrate some pathways by which religious insights and influences can complement environmental education, and others could also be examined. Religious environmental influences can be highly complementary to the goals of environmental education, especially in the context of what writers have recently referred to as free-choice learning (Free-choice Learning and the Environment, 2005)—that is, learning conducive to environmental citizenship that comes in freely chosen venues outside of institutional educational settings. For instance, many churches and synagogues across North America have sponsored Bible studies regarding the environment. Another example is the vision of empowered

Entry-level Variables	Ownership Variables	Empowerment Variables	
Sensitivity -Awe and wonder/sense of sacred at God's creation	**In-depth knowledge about issues** -Environmental justice knowledge	**Knowledge/skill in environmental action strategies** -Religious environmental activism	
	Personal investment in issues and the environment -Embracing stewardship vocation	**Locus of control (expectancy of reinforcement)** -Faith and hope -Participation in God's work	**Environmental Citizenship Behaviour**
Knowledge of ecology	Knowledge of the consequences of behaviour—both positive and negative -Knowledge of moral and ethical tenets	**Intention to act** -Moral imperatives	Free-choice learning
Androgyny		In-depth knowledge about issues	Prayer and meditation
Attitudes toward pollution, technology, and economics -Religiously reinforced attitudes	A personal commitment to issue resolution -Religious commitment and sense of call	-Legacy of social action and ethical influence	Sabbath rest
Love of creation		Acting out of love	Contemplation

Major variables; Minor variables; religious variables

Figure 2. Religious variables added to Hungerford & Volk model.

environmental action that H. Paul Santmire (2000, p. 119) suggests might "overflow abundantly" from the grace of God implanted in human hearts. Santmire says a sort of existential freedom is conferred by the positive sense of wholeness and love gained in worship, praise, and thanksgiving, and such a spiritual state empowers humans to extend love to all creation. Other common religious practices and spiritual disciplines, including contemplation, Sabbath rest, prayer, and meditation, can give practitioners better perspectives, allay consumptive habits, and offer clarity of mind amid complex challenges and issues. And finally, love—a centrepiece of much religious life—can be a pivotal virtue for the environmental citizen. The classic environmental education proverb of Baba Dioum (1968) underscores the point: "we will conserve only what we love." Love encourages care and willingness to act, and insofar as religious life fosters love, it can reinforce the efforts of environmental education (Bratton, 1992; Nash, 1991). Figure 2 incorporates many of these elements into the Hungerford and Volk model.

More recent theoretical environmental behaviour schemes might also be examined, such as those that explicitly attend to social and psychological

barriers to environmental behaviour (Kollmuss & Ageyman, 2002). The environmental citizenship model of Hawthorne and Alabaster (1999) already includes the element of religious affiliation, and thus it might also provide further suggestions for how religion contributes to environmental citizenship. By understanding how religious influences complement a whole range of standard environmental education elements, educators can employ religious resources in a variety of ways amid traditional environmental education curricula to broaden the impact and interactive potential of those elements.

Basic Ecotheology Resources

One way to begin to incorporate religious resources is to explore basic ecotheology perspectives. There are many resources that can convey environmental values from different religious perspectives to educate and instruct students (and educators) about different moral bases for environmental values. The Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), in connection with its series on world religions and ecology, provides scholarly documentation of the moral imperatives and other valuable environmental teachings of many world religious traditions (Tucker & Grim, 1997-2004). Other notable and perhaps more accessible examples from Western religious traditions include:

- The Columbia River Pastoral Letter, created by the Catholic bishops of Oregon, Washington, Montana, Idaho, and British Columbia, that describes a Roman Catholic approach to valuing an entire bioregion.
- "God's Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Church and Society in the United States," issued by theologians on behalf of the National Council of Churches (NCC). This statement is a recent expression of Protestant and Orthodox Christian voices addressing the ethical and moral underpinnings of concern about global climate change.
- "Evangelical Declaration on Creation Care," created by a group of evangelical Christian leaders, describes a biblical basis for creation care.
- "What's Jewish About Protecting the Environment," a commentary on Jewish environmental ethics developed by the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.[9]

Similar resources exist in nearly every denomination and religious community, and can serve as case studies of religious environmental views. For example, students might research and report on the official environmental positions of religious denominations or traditions of interest to them. Works that describe a broad range of religious perspectives on the environment can also be helpful for such comparative studies (e.g., Gottlieb, 2004; Oelschlaeger, 1994).

Various web pages also provide a wealth of resources. The National Religious Partnership for the Environment web site (www.nrpe.org) has

links to the resources and initiatives of the NCC's Eco-justice Working Group, the Evangelical Environmental Network, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, and the United States Catholic Conference Eco-Justice Program. Harvard University hosts FORE's web site (http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/main.html), and another helpful religion-environment site is maintained by several collaborating universities in Chicago (www.webofcreation.org). All are excellent sources of information, and include links to dozens of major denominational environmental policy statements, other religious environmental organizations, religious environmental curriculums, and additional resources. Many of these materials can be beneficially plugged into existing environmental education curriculums that examine environmental values.

Conclusion

The integration of religious and spiritual themes into environmental thinking is still evolving, and thus educators should not be dogmatic about how to proceed. New approaches are yet to emerge, and different contexts will invite different applications. But ecotheology and religious environmental materials have been available since the 1950s and have grown in abundance and accessibility ever since. Thus educators are really only limited by their own creativity and training in integrating complementary religious elements into their practice of environmental education.

Beyond the various religious themes that environmental educators may begin to explore, perhaps much of the success environmental education can have with religion will not come mainly from importing religious elements into environmental education, but rather from partnership. Environmental educators do not stand alone in educating students for environmental citizenship. Free-choice learning venues, such as religious and other cultural institutions, must all play their part. Environmental education can provide vital reinforcement to these partners by promoting understanding and appreciation of them, and by helping students explore these additional sources of environmental citizenship.

Some religious ingredients may indeed go beyond the traditional diet of environmental education. But thoughtful inclusion of religious teachings can offer students a richer range of perspectives from which to examine environmental values. Discussing religious beliefs and values pertinent to environmental education does not demand religious commitment of students, and need not be avoided in public education settings. If religious contributions deserve the recommendations they have recently received, in time they will bear fruit. If not, religious elements will fade from fashion. In the meantime, the range of religious influences that can enhance and complement environmental education make religion a promising partner.

Notes

1   At the university level, the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences has archived dozens of syllabi of award-winning science and religion courses (http://www.ctns.org/teaching_syllabi.html), and the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology has made additional sample syllabi available (http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/education/classre-sources/syllabi/index.html). Other instructional resources are offered by groups like the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Programs (http://www.nccecojustice.org/resource.htm) and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (http://www.coejl.org/resources/index.php).

2   Of course, educators in public settings may not be able to draw as deeply or personally from religious traditions as religious leaders do within their own communities.

3   Technically speaking, Christian dogma mostly consists in basic faith statements like the Nicene Creed and other pronouncements developed and refined over the course of years by ecumenical councils. Thus many environmental teachings of Christian denominations, such as official environmental policy statements, are not properly "dogma" but carry the weight of authorized social teachings. Notably, no denomination has ever ratified a social teaching that discourages environmental responsibility. Krueger (2005) documents Roman Catholic pronouncements, and other denominational statements can be found at: http://www.webofcreation.org/DenominationalStatements/index.htm and http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/publications/statements/index.html.

4   See Hitzhusen (2006) for a critical review of sociological, cross-cultural, and historical evidence regarding the influence of religious beliefs on environmental views.

5   The New Environmental Paradigm (Dunlap & VanLiere, 1978) is one example of an anti-anthropocentric environmental philosophy that has often set an agenda for environmental education.

6   Ursula Goodenough (1998) has done something similar in connecting reflections on the puzzles of molecular biology to spiritual exercises practiced in various faith traditions. Regarding the use of the term "spiritual" as distinct from the term "religious," see Hitzhusen (2005).

7   Success stories from various faith communities can be browsed at: http://www.nrpe.org/statements/index.html.

8   This connection is subtle. The logic of grace is not properly a matter of control, and the graceful internal reinforcement I am suggesting here may be akin to paradoxes like "strength in weakness" or "fullness in self-emptying." At the same time, scriptures speak of the need to guard against the opposite effect of *social pessimism*, or the belief that human actions are unnecessary because "God will save" (cf. I John 3:17-18).

9   These resources can be found at the following sites respectively: www.columbiariver.org, http://www.nccecojustice.org/theolstate.pdf, http://www.creationcare.org/resources/declaration.php, http://www.coejl.org/about/TenYearReport.pdf. Other sources of interest include The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) (http://www.ifees.org), and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) (http://www.arcworld.org/).

Notes on Contributor

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