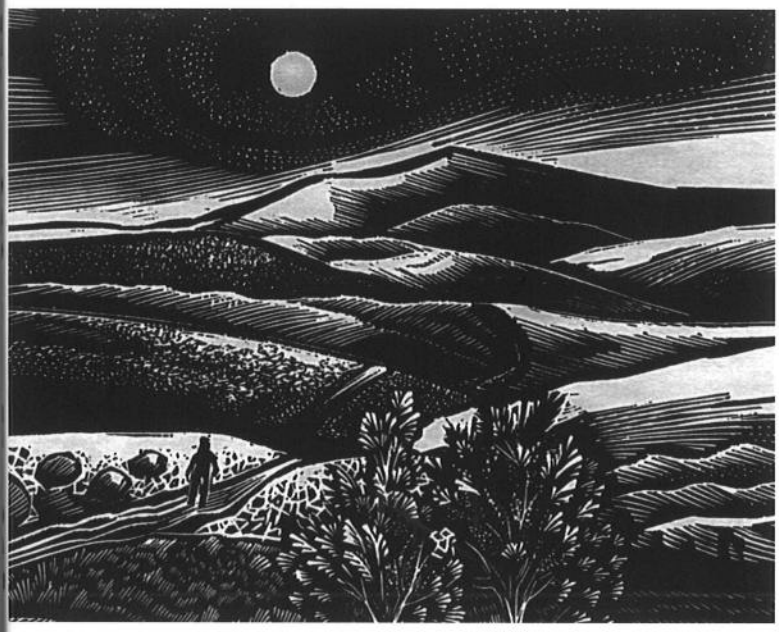
Fugitive Faith



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Ecology & Justice

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In a series of candid interviews with some of the world's most insightful thinkers *Fugitive Faith* provides insights on the ecological, spiritual, and social challenges we face today. Political and spiritual leaders, naturalists and scientists, writers and poets: all convey their passionate conviction about the decisive interface between nature and human spirituality, and the practical relationship of spiritual, environmental and community renewal.

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Benjamin Webb is an Episcopal priest serving St. Luke's Church and a college chaplain at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. His undergraduate studies in forestry, ecology and agriculture at universities in Montana and Iowa were followed by M.A. and M.Div. degrees at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. He is the former executive director of a midwest foundation and co-founder of the Regeneration Project (affiliated with the Tides Foundation) which builds partnerships between communities of faith and the environmental movement.

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Benjamin Webb

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Published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, U.S.A.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

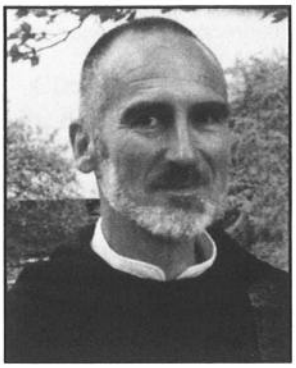
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fugitive faith : conversations on spiritual, environmental, and community renewal / Benjamin Webb, [interviewer].
p. cm. — (Ecology and justice series)
ISBN 1-57075-170-6 (alk. paper)
1. Environmental sciences—Philosophy. 2. Environmental sciences—Religious aspects. 3. Environmental responsibility. Environmentalists—Interviews. 5. Social scientists—Interviews. I. Webb, Benjamin, 1954- II. Series: Ecology and justice.
GE40.F84 1998
179'.1—dc21 97-45882
CIP

Contents

Belonging to Community: Earth Household and God Household

DAVID STEINDL-RAST



Brother David Steindl-Rast has been a Benedictine monk for forty years, twelve of those at New Comaldoli in Big Sur, California. A native of Austria, Brother David said, "I grew up at a time when we still had sacred springs and sacred trees and every day of the year was a feast of some kind, and we were just living in this religious atmosphere." From that blessed experience he went on to study philosophy and theology, and ultimately acquired a doctorate in child psychology from the University of Vienna. Over the years, his devotion to prayer and to dialogue between religion and science and between Buddhism and Christianity has made him a respected bridge builder, spiritual leader, and teacher around the world. Brother David has published many articles and is the author of The Listening Heart *(1982),* Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer *(1984), the co-author of* Belonging to the Universe *(1992) with physicist Fritjof Capra, and most recently,* The Ground We Share *(1994), with Robert Aitken Roshi. What is religion? "Religion . . . always has to do with belonging, with community, and that is the decisive interface between ecology and religion. Ecology seems to be our contemporary form of expressing this belonging, this belonging to the whole universe, this being at home in the world, in the earth household, in the God household." And what do we have to offer each other? "I think people who are open to nature and ecology are long on religious experience and short on religious vocabulary. The ones in church may be long on religious vocabulary and short on religious experience." In this life, it is always good to laugh. Brother David was interviewed at Esalen Institute along the Big Sur coastline on a glorious day in which the grey whales could be seen migrating north in the waters of the Pacific.*

BW: You have spent many years in dialogue between Buddhist and Christian religious traditions and between religion and science. What is there about the edge of things that you find fruitful?

Community:
ıd God Household

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DSR: Well, I've been studying chaos theory lately, and its application to biology, and I am interested in the fact that life occurs at the edge, between chaos and order. If it's only order, it's not alive; it's dead. If it's only chaos, it's not alive; it's dead. So the interesting things are happening on the interface areas, and I've experienced it that way. I'm also interested in pulling things together, because when you connect two points or two realms, you do so only by going deeper or higher—whichever metaphor you want to use—to a deeper level on which the two are already one. Then whatever you find there you can connect with something else on that level by again going deeper and finding some entity that connects these two, because on the deepest level everything is connected to everything. So one of the aspects that I like about the edge and the bridge building and the connecting is that it forces you to go deeper and deeper.

BW: To constantly reexamine things. And there's fruit in that?

DSR: Yes. Questioning is very important to me. When I teach I always want people to ask questions. I learn that way. There are teachers who feel that questions are disrespectful. I feel I learn from questions.

BW: In thinking about the interface between ecology and religion, are there some parallels?

DSR: Well, this question is a bit ambiguous because of what we may mean by the word "religion." Religion is not a clear term. It means, on the one hand, our religiousness or our spirituality. On the other hand, it means sociological and historical religions which are separate entities. If you take it as religiousness, I find it difficult to even conceive of an edge between religiousness and ecology because our embeddedness in the world, our feeling at home in nature, is an integral part of our religiousness. Think of the "Kingdom of God," this all-inclusive term which Jesus speaks about that is so central to his teaching. Nowadays we wouldn't call it "Kingdom," because the king doesn't mean much to us. But a fairly good translation for the Kingdom of God in our contemporary language is "earth household," or "God household." Gary Snyder's term, earth household, could be widened to God household. That means not only humans, certainly not any one group of humans, but all humans—along with all animals, plants, and the whole household, even its furniture understood as the lifeless forms in the universe. In other words, this God household is the whole universe.

And from that perspective of religiousness, we cannot speak of an edge between ecology and religion. If you speak of religion as the various churches or religious groups, then I guess you could speak of an interface between ecology groups or people whose religiosity or spirituality finds expression through ecology or nature. There are many people for whom this is the main area of their being religious. And there are those whose religiosity finds expression in a church or synagogue or some religious group. It seems very important to me to

help the ones who are in church understand that for the others, nature and their concern for nature is their church, and they should not be looked upon as some sort of heathens, as though we are the only ones who are religious. On the other hand, I would encourage people who are ecologically alert and so forth to realize that there is this similarity, that in both cases we are dealing with deep religious impulses, and to make every effort to help all those whose religiosity is expressed in church to see that their own concept of belonging and community must, nowadays, include the animals and the plants and the whole cosmos, because otherwise it is very impoverished. Religion in any sense, and in both senses that I have used the word, always has to do with belonging, with community, and that is the decisive interface between ecology and religion. Ecology seems to be our contemporary form of expressing this belonging, this belonging to the whole universe, this being at home in the world, in the earth household, in the God household.

BW: So when we speak of religion as religiousness, we cannot speak of an edge with ecology because it is—or rather we are—embedded in the world, in the earth community.

DSR: Of course under the aspect of religiousness, or of being religious, it is an aliveness not only to the world of animals and plants and the cosmos, but also to the horizon of the cosmos, and that is the divine horizon. So when we speak of religion, it is not just an inner-worldly affair, it is a transcendent affair. From a real openness to nature, one is also led to transcendence. I cannot very well imagine any human standing under the starry sky and not being religiously moved, not being open to something that transcends this universe. On the other hand, I know of people who are open to this religiosity but have no vocabulary for it, have no map for it. That is what the traditional religions provide: a map and a vocabulary to speak about this experience. I think people who are open to nature and ecology are long on religious experience and short on religious vocabulary. The ones in church may be long on religious vocabulary and short on religious experience.

BW: So do they have something to offer each other?

DSR: Absolutely. Just that. The cosmic Christ, for instance, is a very traditional concept in the Christian tradition and, whenever I speak about this to any groups that are unchurched but open to nature and ecology, they are fascinated. So there are valuable and beautiful concepts in the various traditions that could help people who are completely impoverished when it comes to religious language and images.

BW: Why is such language and imagery important for those who are having direct kinds of spiritual experience through nature?

DSR: Because our experience is enriched by being able to speak about it,

and our lives gain meaning only when we tell our story. What the various religious traditions have done over the millennia is to tell the universe story. And one of the reasons why the Christian tradition has been in turmoil the last two or three centuries is that the cosmology that it carried with it was no longer applicable in the particular form in which it was expressed and told. As a kind of defensive posture, Christians closed themselves off to a new cosmology, and every religion without a cosmology is dead. It just doesn't work. And now, through the efforts of people like Matthew Fox, Tom Berry, Brian Swimme, and others, we have a new cosmology coming out of a Christian understanding of the universe that can also enrich other people. It enriches our experience if we can tell the story, for which you need to have the vocabulary and the framework, because the scientific cosmology is not enough for human beings. We need meaning, and science, by its own definition, doesn't give us meaning. It just provides us with facts.

BW: But does it have meaning and value in its ability to amplify the story? For instance, the Genesis story is but a few lines long. Unless we read these passages of scripture poetically, looking for meaning in the largest sense, we may not be able to reconcile what we read there with what we know of the universe today. So perhaps science amplifies our reading of scriptures, especially when we read them poetically, and in that way it gives meaning.

DSR: That is right. The biblical cosmology is an old cosmology, even though intelligent and alert people who were Christians have, over the millennia, been able to stretch and adapt it to their particular time and worldview. But as such, the biblical cosmology is a three-story universe with heaven above, the earth in the middle, and hell below, and the pillars of earth can be shaken. It's just a stone age or, at best, an iron age cosmology. And that's perfectly all right because we read myths from other traditions and we can look through them, seeing they are mythic expressions, and we can appreciate the poetry even though we would not express ourselves in that way. But when it comes to our own tradition, we often take it literally, or it has been hammered into us literally. This literalism is our problem. So we have to break out of that and look first at the scientific facts of our world and how we can, in the context of our religious beliefs, express this in a new way. So today, to speak of the divine force that drives everything, the creative force, is quite compatible with the biblical tradition. The Spirit of the Lord fills the whole universe, holds everything together and knows every language. It is the life-giving spirit. It's all there. Only when we have made the connection between our scientific picture of the universe and this traditional religious view, is the religious view viable today and the scientific view meaningful.

BW: What has your role been in this conversation, in this convergence of religion or religiousness and ecology, this movement that some people call the earth and spirit movement?

DSR: I just happen to be a monk who by now has been in this monking business for more than forty years, and I feel perfectly at home in it. And I've had the opportunity of exposure to many different things, many different experiences that most monks normally don't have in their lifetimes. Yet I didn't look for it; I didn't even want it. It was sort of my fate, for better or worse.

BW: So it found you.

DSR: It found me. I just respond to the given situation. And I'm always amazed why this should be so relevant to people, but apparently what is happening is that people who are rooted in the tradition in which I feel firmly rooted, or in any spiritual tradition, often stay within their own walls and speak only to one another but not to those outside, and so an exchange never takes place. I happen to be one that was in some way thrown into that opportunity to dialogue. That is all. By nature I am just not defensive, because I feel so completely secure. I have nothing to fear. I want the truth, so I don't mind if I have to change. I've changed my opinions many times. That will not shake me to my roots. I grew up in Austria at a time when we still had sacred springs and sacred trees and every day of the year was a feast of some kind, and we were just living in this religious atmosphere. This is so life-giving. It is not in your head. It's not just something you learn in religion class. It is your life. And I'm not afraid of losing that. But precisely because I have a firm stand I can enjoy going way out. When you have a firm stand you can enjoy swaying, but if you cannot stand firmly, you start swaying and fall over. So I enjoy stretching and discussing these things with people, enjoy changing and also learning. I also like language, a good expression, and a good story that really comes across to people. For that reason I try not to use any religious jargon words that just alienate other people. I try to say it in my own words that other people can understand. That's how you dialogue.

BW: I am reminded of something Wallace Stevens once said, "We don't live in a place but a description of it."

DSR: Yes, that's very good. It's the same thing about stories. We don't live events; we live a story.

BW: And we live out of those stories, and it makes a difference.

DSR: You can revise your story. That's another thing. Over the course of your life, you can revise your story. That does not change the events, but it may make them clearer, more meaningful. That is also true of a religious tradition. You have to retell and revise your story. And you are not changing it or falsifying it. You're making it clearer.

BW: Is there, in your estimation, some healthy revision occurring in the religious story or stories that is being influenced by the environmental movement with all its concerns?

DSR: Absolutely! You see, up to now, I was mostly speaking about these new insights from the scientific field, cosmology and so forth. But when I answer your present question about the influence of ecology, we are really concerned with something else. We are concerned not so much with facts, for we are now talking about an attitude, our attitude toward nature, this feeling at one with nature. We've heard it so many times that we have to take it seriously, that we are a very young species. We are just coming down off the trees and out of the caves to this day. It cost us a great deal to rise to our challenge, the challenge that our particular place in nature gives us, of freedom and responsibility. We have freedom and responsibility in a way that is unprecedented, given our recent journey from the cave and our reflective thinking. It cost us much to rise to this challenge. We did it by distinguishing ourselves from the rest of nature, which was necessary. We have to distinguish ourselves because otherwise we cannot rise to our stature. We are doing what people do when they are in puberty, finding out who we really are as human beings. That means we have to distinguish ourselves from nature just like a young person has to distinguish him or herself from all others. But you can push this too far, as we have done. We have pushed it so far that we not only distinguished, but also separated, ourselves from nature. And now we are waking up and saying, "Well, we have achieved it and we have gone a little overboard." Now comes the next movement where we have to recover a new innocence, a new naiveté. First we were simply part of nature. Then we distinguished ourselves and separated ourselves. Now we have to retain the distinctiveness and recover the oneness, and that's our great task right now. What is characteristic about people who are in the ecology movement is that they have learned this, at least they seem further ahead in this particular attitude and change. The rest of us still have to learn it. This is a very important task.

BW: That sounds like an important perspective to impart to the religious community as it revises its story. But what about the environmental community. Is there also something the environmental community needs to hear or stands to gain from religious communities and traditions?

DSR: Well, if you stay with this rough sketch . . .

BW: . . . of maintaining the distinctiveness while recovering the oneness?

DSR: Yes, in terms of recovering the oneness, we could point out that there is of course a danger—and we have seen it in some people—that through their rediscovery that we are really a part of nature, they might tend to throw out the distinctiveness. For instance, I believe that deep ecology is correct, that we are not the goal of nature, nor is everything subject to us. We are members of nature and we have to respect other creatures. To believe otherwise, that they were all created for us, is a very myopic perspective. But when you discover how wrong that perspective is, you have to resist the tendency to throw it all out.

Yet I have also heard frightening statements saying essentially that we have

nothing over any other creatures, and that would be wrong because that would mean that we are not rising to our responsibility. This cosmos has given us a particular responsibility and we have abused it. But the biblical image in the second chapter of Genesis, where we humans are put into this world as in a garden to keep and tend it, that is still valid. We have abused and exploited it, but our task is to keep and tend it. The danger is that we neglect this, or forget it, or overlook it in our effort to blend with everything. And the religious traditions are the ones that uphold this distinctiveness, although they tend to push it too far, as I've said.

The process by which we humans rose to our stature was largely connected to religion. It was not primarily a philosophical or a psychological effort. Philosophy and psychology are so young in this process. For a hundred thousand years we have religiously raised ourselves to where we now are humans. Philosophy and psychology are just icing on the cake. It has been a religious effort, and that is why the religious traditions still emphasize human distinctiveness. That is true even of Taoism, and of the religious traditions that we are familiar with today in this culture, and of Native American nature religion where the distinctiveness is quite clear. This distinctiveness is quite clearly there, particularly in the Taoist tradition because it is more philosophical and more explicit that we are different, we are distinct, we have our freedom and responsibility. But at the same time, we are part of it all, not above and against it.

BW: This puts me in mind of a trip I made to Asia in 1991, and how struck I was by the extent of environmental destruction in some of those countries that are principally Buddhist in their religious and cultural orientation. And then I think about these same destructive patterns in ostensibly Christian cultures. This raises not only the question about whether all of our religions have something fundamental to teach us about our relationship to the earth and to nature, but also why they fail to impart that more effectively. Has the message become subverted? What is the problem?

DSR: It suggests we are not religious enough. We are not spiritual enough. And the deeper and more gripping spirituality and religiousness now emerging in the ecological movement is, for many people today, the real place for religion, not the churches. But on the other hand, precisely an experience like that—of Buddhists who abuse the environment despite Buddhism's respectful sense of our embeddedness in nature—helps us see that they are not exploiting the environment because they are Buddhists, but that the better Buddhists they are, the less they will harm it. Then we can turn around and say, "Ah, now we understand. The Christians who have been harming nature did so not because they were Christians, but in spite of it." But if this is easier to see in Buddhists, it is equally true in Christians. It reminds me of how we sometimes hear people say that Buddhists are such peace-loving people and are not fighting one another like those Christians. Someone once voiced this to the Dalai Lama when I was present and he replied, "Well, wait a moment, it is not that easy. Look at history

with an unbiased eye and you will see that all religions—Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and the others—teach peace. But members of all religions wage wars, not because they are Buddhists, Christians, or whatever, but because they are fallible humans."

BW: So we need to pay a little more attention to our own texts.

DSR: Yes, and more attention to our being humans. This is again what the ecological movement does. It makes us pay attention to our human experience, our human stance, our human embeddedness in nature, rather than some doctrines. There are people who put the religious or confessional aspects above their humanness. They act as if you could become a better Christian at the expense of being a human being. But Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are all given to us as the means to become better humans. The goal is the same for all of us, never in the end to become great Christians, great Buddhists, or great Moslems, but great human beings. We have gotten it wrong, because it is easy for us to see that there are Moslems who think they can become better Moslems at the expense of being good humans. We don't see that this can happen in our own Christian religion as well.

BW: You once said, in effect, that all religious traditions respond to a sense that things are out of order, that human life is grinding against the axle, that something needs to be put right, that we are in some sense lost and looking for our way home. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, for instance, there are the prophets who can frequently be heard to call the people to return and live. What might that mean for us now?

DSR: In every age there is this call to return, this notion of turning, of conversion. The key word I would use for us today is "common sense." The world we have created is not based on common sense. I give to this term deeper meaning than we usually give to it, but nothing that is not implied in the words—common sense. We have created a world that is not run by common sense, but by very destructive conventions and agreements. Conventional society doesn't run by common sense. It is run by a dog-eat-dog mentality, a legalism. Things like prestige and power are the great things to achieve. Whoever has power can lord it over others. What we need to come back to, or return to, is common sense, which is the force, if you want to use that term, or the Holy Spirit, or the life stream or bliss within us that carries us. It is what we all have in common, and the only thing that makes sense. It is the Tao, the Logos. Those were words that Lao Tzu or Heraclitus would respectively use. Tao meant "a road," so we took this word "road" and turned it into something that now the whole world uses for this specific thing. And to Heraclitus, logos meant "thought" or "word," and he used it in a very specific sense, as that principle of understanding, or understandability. Heraclitus asked himself, like Einstein, "How come I've been so amazed that everything makes sense mathematically? How come we can

understand the universe at all?" It is because we have the Logos within us, and that which is within us is the same thing that makes the outside world. It's the same thing that moves our thoughts and makes the trees grow and makes us understand that clearly.

BW: You make it sound very ordinary and accessible.

DSR: It used to be very accessible. So we have to do something similar today and use a similar word, like "common sense," and just give it a little more depth and sweet reasonableness, and say it's what we all have in common, that which makes sense, the only thing that makes sense. The word "sense" is a good word because it is connected with the senses. It is not disembodied up there in your mind. But it has a much deeper meaning, and I think we could use it as that Logos, that Tao, that force that makes all of nature move and also moves us in the right way if we attune ourselves to it. That is the one great thing that makes a difference between the world we have made, this demented society in which you have to be crazy in order to get along, and the common sense reality. The next time you go to a meeting, any meeting, try to use common sense, and you will see how you clash. In almost all circumstances, we have been trained not to use common sense because we get in trouble.

BW: This does make sense to me, and yet I sit here thinking about the structures of power, and whether common sense is compelling enough in the face of such power.

DSR: Well, it is not compelling enough to promise success on that level. The story of common sense is, of course, the story of Jesus. In the end, the authoritarian power structures, both the reigning religious and civil powers, put him away. And it is the story of Socrates, who followed common sense. The deaths of Socrates and Jesus have often been compared. If you follow common sense, you may well run into danger. But ultimately you must ask yourself, "Would you rather be on the side of those who killed Jesus and condemned Socrates, or would you rather be in their shoes." And that says, "Do I want to side with Socrates and Jesus or with those who condemned and killed them." And if you side with those who live by common sense, as did Socrates and Jesus, you will be alive in a way that cannot be destroyed, not even by death. That is what religion is about and what we all long for in our hearts.

BW: What strikes me is that death cannot keep common sense down.

DSR: You can oppress and repress and silence common sense, but you cannot refute it. And since what we call common sense here is not just intellectual argument but a whole way of living, common sense stands here also for that life which cannot be wiped out even though you are being killed. That's what stands behind this notion of the resurrection. It's not that he was killed and zap, here he is again, but, as is said so poetically in the Apocalypse, the book of Revelation,

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"The lamb that was slain, and behold, he lives." It doesn't mean that he is no longer slain. He is slain, yet he lives. In all the ancient hero stories, you have the hero who is dead, really dead, killed and dismembered, and behold, he lives. And he not only lives but is the lifeblood of the community.

BW: Well, if common sense has so much to do with how we live out our daily lives, our spirituality, our religiousness, our relationship to one another and the earth, then perhaps the environmental movement is bringing that resurrection message—that common sense message—back to the religious tradition which is searching for more effective ways to practice its faith in the world. Could this be so?

DSR: That's right. This is overgeneralized and so not entirely applicable, but one can say that religions have become very ritualistic, dogmatic, doctrinaire. When this happens, the real spirituality, the real religiousness always springs up in another form, in another way. Like common sense, it cannot be kept down. In this transition from the age of Pisces into the age of Aquarius, there are some rather earth-shaking changes taking place, and among them is this common sense attitude, this aliveness, this common sense aliveness that is springing up outside the customary religious channels and boxes. And the more you really move this aliveness into religious tradition, regardless of which one, the more you will recognize it. And the more you are not moving and growing but just clinging to the forms, the more you will be threatened by this aliveness, because what you are serving are the forms, the structures, and not the Spirit.

BW: Yes, indeed. This puts me in mind of spiritual fruits, spiritual practices, and spiritual vigor, and whether they require spiritual roots.

DSR: But how do you get spiritual roots? I think this is one of those questions, "What comes first, the chicken or the egg, the practices or the roots?" You have little roots when you are born, otherwise you wouldn't be alive, and you strengthen them by practice with the roots becoming stronger as you strengthen your practice. But it is the practice that roots you in your spiritual life. If you practice, you will be at home there.

BW: Is it important for most of us, to some extent, to develop those spiritual roots within a tradition, to go deeper within it before we spread out? Or can we pick and choose all the time?

DSR: Well, it is a great help to be able to live deeply out of one particular tradition. It is also a gift for a child to be so brought up, but, of course, with great openness for the others. Otherwise, we tend to be attracted to a tradition and follow it for awhile until we come to some aspect of it which does not appeal to us, when we may turn to another and start over again. This simply does not work. It scatters your energies. But if you persist in one and take it very seriously, study it and live it, you will ultimately reach that center where all

religious traditions are connected with one another. There is no competition there. Of course, there is competition between the institutions because an institution is something that is in competition with others. This does not apply to religious institutions only. Personally, I have great respect for the people who carry the institution. Life always creates structures, and these people are needed to support and refine the structures. However, while life creates structures, structures don't create life. So we have to keep the spirit going, the life strong, and then we will create the structures we need at a given time.

BW: So the structures are important but they always need to be open to the life-giving sources that renew and revive them. What, then, is your counsel to the religious structures today, Christian or otherwise, in terms of what the environmental movement can bring to them in the way of new life?

DSR: Well, it's easy for me to sit here and give advice, but my counsel to any sort of religious structure would be, "Don't focus so much on the institution. The institutional structure serves life; it is not life that serves the structure. So look at the life." If that life happens to occur somewhere else, not inside the structure but outside the structure, then be open to it. And if that life is so strong and so new that it bursts the existing structure, allow that to happen. The structure will renew itself. Life does that all the time. Every Spring, all the protective structures that are around the little leaves burst and fall off. If we pay attention, we will see these little brown things lying under the tree, and the little leaves overhead. And in the middle of the new leaves, the structure which will protect next year's growth is already forming. So let it happen.

BW: You mean, trust the resurrection potential?

DSR: Yes. And don't take yourself so seriously. Take seriously that for which you are created as a structure, and that is the life. That is very difficult advice to take because institutions have a built-in tendency to perpetuate themselves. We know that.

BW: Even in the interest of perpetuating themselves, and recognizing that some of the mainline churches are declining in membership, you would think they would want to be open to this new life. Well, what counsel would you have to offer the environmental movement, for the people who may be frustrated by the resistance to this new life which they perceive within the structures of religion, and who may therefore feel like rebelling or turning away from those structures?

DSR: From a strictly political point of view, I would say, "Realize that these structures are potentially dangerous enemies if you alienate them, and potentially helpful allies if you get them on your side." This should not be difficult today because ecological consciousness has become a big issue in the public mind and in the media, and is now penetrating organizations previously indif-

ferent to these concerns. On a somewhat deeper level I would say, "Realize that in the different religious groups and traditions, there are many genuinely religious people." We may be disappointed that there are not more, but there are still many in there and they are potentially very strong allies. They are the people who are best prepared for an awakening to environmental issues. You have a whole reservoir of people who are potentially ready, but may be somewhat shielded by their institutions.

BW: You're saying they need each other.

DSR: Yes, they absolutely need each other. We all need each other. Nobody can be left out. This is an absolute emergency situation, and we cannot afford to leave anybody out. We are in this little boat that is going over the waterfall and we need to do anything we can. It is very serious.

Let me say this, because people are always asking me, "What can I do?" Every one of us can start where we are. Each of us has to realize that this is my world, not somebody else's. I live here. I'm at home here. And if I'm at home, I do what I would for my home. When I go on my morning walk, I take along a bag and pick up the garbage, just as I would in my living room, for this world is my living room. I'm at home here. You see, it is not "they," but "us," all of us. And every day it gets a little better. The first day you might bring home five pounds, the next day two pounds, and after awhile you'll notice a difference. Robert Miller did that in New York City. He walked a mile to his office in the United Nations building and every day picked up the garbage along the way. He said that after a while, the old garbage was gone and there wasn't that much new garbage. Also, when it's cleaner, people are a little more reluctant to discard things so irresponsibly. If everybody did that, can you imagine what it would look like? Just this one little gesture.

BW: This puts me in mind of environmentalist friends of mine who have been working in this movement a long time, some of them committing much of their lives to the cause these last twenty years. They're now at mid-life and discouraged with how little progress they see, and some of them are succumbing to cynicism and despair. Is this one of the antidotes, to simply continue doing the right thing that is within your power to do, even though you don't necessarily expect the outcome you're hoping for?

DSR: I think so. Any activity is good. It's like talking to somebody who is inclined to get depressed, and this is a form of depression. When you're depressed, you can't think anymore, you can't talk anymore, you can't do anything anymore. What shall you do? Well, brush your hair. It helps. You do something for yourself. Well, I belong to this world. The world is the border of your body, so do something. Brush it. Clean it up.

BW: What do you do on those days?

DSR: Take a walk. I should say I give myself to a walk. Movement is very helpful. It is also very helpful to remember that we have come some way. As Robert Miller says, "When you are pushing a car uphill, it may be very, very hard, but don't always look ahead at how much further you have to push. Put a rock under the wheel and look back at how far you have come." So remember that we have come some ways. There are incomparably more people nowadays who are aware. Don't look ahead and say, "Yes, but it's too late." It may be too late or not too late. That doesn't make any difference. I still want to go in this direction even if it is too late because, in the last moment, at least I will know that I have put my weight where I wanted to put it and am not totally part of the problem.

BW: Keeping a sense of perspective is important, isn't it?

DSR: Yes. And to remember the other people who have done so much. We don't want to let them down. A person who was a model for common sense, for instance, was Diane Fossey who studied and lived with the gorillas and was shot for trying to save their habitat. I remind myself when I just want to give up, "Look, you don't want to let Diane Fossey down," or somebody of that sort. These people are really our saints. And it's not only that you want to honor them, but they are here. They are very powerful and they are right here. They haven't dissolved into thin air; they are here at our side.

BW: So our memory of their common sense, their spiritual power, is available to us. That makes me wonder. If there is a practical link between spiritual and ecological renewal, what would the local church or any local faith community look like if it began to make those connections?

DSR: What would it look like? I know, for instance, a Benedictine community in Minnesota where they are collecting and recycling cans, and that is really part of their spirituality as a religious community. How could we possibly not do it? And so I could imagine that to a really healthy and alive parish, this sort of activity would be part of it. Just as it is quite common that we gather money and food for redistribution to the poor, by integrating that into the service at the offertory, along with the bread and wine we bring. By extending our concern for the Earth and its creatures, we could also integrate recycling into the service of the church. That is profoundly religious. If you're approaching the Kingdom of God, the God household, then keep it clean, keep it going. It's so obvious. This is not just a practice we bring into liturgy! It *is* liturgy! Because liturgy literally means the service of the people, the work of the people. The original notion of liturgy was that somebody, a wealthy citizen, would build a water fountain as a legacy for the community. That was liturgy. It was doing something for the community. One of the most important aspects of religious services is to open our eyes to the world community, not just this little community, but the world community. Not only in space with all that live today but in

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time with all who went before and all who will come after. Think ahead, plan not only for our children but for seven generations ahead, as Native Americans say. Turn the service, the so-called religious service, into real service. If it's only in service to "God up there," you can kid yourself by making your God anything that you like, and then your idea of service will follow from that. But if you take seriously these words, "Whatever you have done to the least of my brothers, you have done to me," or their parallel in other traditions, then your service to God becomes a service to everyone, to every creature.

BW: So my hour-long experience of Sunday worship is inseparable from the daily liturgy that is life, and the real work of the people is to serve life.

DSR: Liturgy is a Christian word with Greek origins, one that probably has its parallels in other traditions. But in the Christian context it is truly the worship of God as father or mother, as head of this earth household, as parent figure that is head of the household. Since that is so, the best worship, the best service to the deity is to show love and respect and care for all the other members of the household whenever it is needed. You see, it is all one piece. I can't even take it apart. I wouldn't know how to express it any other way.

BW: But don't you think there is this tendency, for many, to walk into a worship service and experience it as though this was all there was to sacred time and space and actions, and so fail to see the wider sacredness of life because we fail to connect liturgy to life?

DSR: Yes. Well, there was a very good little film put out by Franciscan Communications where you see someone walking down a street in the city, and this person sees a homeless person. To avoid contact, he steps to the other side of the sidewalk where he sees someone of another race, so he slinks by—just a few little things that we do in daily life. Then this person walks up some steps and opens the door to a church. At that point the image freezes and a voice says, "If you didn't find God outside, you won't find God inside."

BW: What could help us notice this wider presence of the sacred in life?

DSR: Well, I think poetry helps. Poetry is another link between the religious tradition and the ecological movement. Religious language is poetic language, and people who really live in their religious tradition continue to feed that poetic element in their lives. There is also a poetic quality in nature, in environmental concerns, that links it to the religious. But you can see, in both cases, a danger that this can all become too abstract and ideological. This is always the danger, but it can be avoided when what remains between them—between religious language and the language of nature—is a deep poetic sense that really serves as a bridge. It is just something that the two areas have in common. And that is why a poet like Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose poetry is deeply religious, wrote "Binsey Poplars," a poem about a row of poplars that

was cut down. It was one of the really early ecological or environmental poems, written around 1879. It's a powerful requiem for this sweet, special, rural place whose loss he bemoans.

BW: I think of other contemporary figures in these terms too, such as Wendell Berry, whose poetry for me and I think for many others is just imbued with religious significance and meaning, rich with what you earlier called "religiousness."

DSR: Yes! Absolutely! Hopkins' poetry is more explicitly religious, but clearly environmental in many cases. Wendell Berry's is more environmental, but clearly religious in many respects.

BW: So poetry and a poetic approach to one's reading is a way to see more deeply into the truth of things and, perhaps, offers us a more common language with which to converse with others?

DSR: Exactly. And that brings us back to our being human. You see, if we are just human, that is all we need to be. Don't ask about being an environmentalist or being a Christian or a Buddhist or whatever. Just be a human. And then all these other things help you be more human. According to the image in the Hebrew scriptures, you have Adam in the garden—he's a gardener and thus an environmentalist—and he gives names to all the animals, which makes him a poet. Adam is the human. As we become more human, we become gardeners and poets.

BW: In keeping with that, what kinds of virtues are appropriate for us now? There are people who bemoan the fact that we don't have the sort of strong moral voice that we once had, say, in Martin Luther King, Jr., which some believe is needed again today. Yet others say that we don't need heroic virtues so much as we need humble virtues and qualities that allow us to make small changes in our everyday lives.

DSR: The two are not opposed to one another. I very strongly believe that we need patience and humility, which means down-to-earthness. But I think the most important virtue would be obedience.

BW: Obedience?

DSR: Usually, when we say obedience, we mean the thing that dogs learn in obedience school. But literally, obedience means to listen thoroughly, to listen with the heart. And if we listen moment to moment, we will know whether this is the time to be patient or impatient. There are moments when it is right and good to speak up, to say "This is enough." We will know this from heartfelt listening, from this openness of the heart, from listening with the ears of our heart. That's what we need most, to listen—to one another, to the institutions, to

nature, to what the whales and the waves have to say, to what the peregrine falcons have to say, to the rainforests. Just listen, and you will know when it is time to stand up and protest. It is easy to say that this is not the time for it. But listen to see whether it's the time for it. Maybe it is not yet time, but maybe it is.

BW: If we are listening carefully enough, we may find that this capacity to stand up and express resistance or moral outrage may be in all of us?

DSR: Well, it has been hammered out of many of us through fear. That is why courage is one of the real virtues that we need, because fear demoralizes us, while authoritarian power deliberately instills fear in us so that we won't speak up. So we need to listen for courage.

BW: What is your hope for our culture?

DSR: Survival. Creative survival.

BW: Through common sense?

DSR: Yes, through that endangered common sense.