

## RESURRECTION SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING THE EARTH

by Robert T. Sears, S.J.  
Loyola University in Chicago

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Those involved in ecology and those involved in a healing ministry are for the most part on two different tracks. The one is focused on a scientific study of evolution and the interdependence of creation, the other on individual hurts with little attention to environment. My own healing ministry, on the other hand, has led me little by little to concern for the environment. I began with attention on the individual, then was led to see family relationships into past generations as grounding present destructive patterns. And only recently have I become aware that the environment itself is affected by these destructive patterns and can receive healing. Several experiences have brought me to this conclusion.

In the first place, there is evidence that places are affected by what occurs on them. Barbara Shlemon, noted for her healing ministry, has observed the on-going destructive influence violence can have on certain places. She felt called to build a healing center in Clearwater, Fla. but over a years time could not find a place. With two others she prayed for guidance and one member thought of Indians. They looked into the history of that region and found that it was the location of a war with the Seminole Indians where it is estimated that some 10,000 to 15,000 Indians died as we took their land. They had a service of reconciliation, asking forgiveness of the Indians for what our ancestors did then. The very next day an ideal piece of land opened up for them! It was as though God would not give the land till reparation was made for that violence. I will speak later of an instance in my experience comes from Chicago. The civil war camp Douglas, lay between 31st and 33rd streets and Cottage Grove. Some 6000 Confederate soldiers died there in inhuman conditions, and when we went there to pray for healing, we found that prime property still overgrown and in ruins.

Secondly, we have some experimental evidence that at least plants remember. Cleave Backster, an expert on the psychogalvanic skin response that is basic to the lie detector, decided one day to attach the electrodes to a tropical plant in his office.<sup>1</sup> He wondered if the plant would respond to cutting it. It did, but not as much as he expected. He then thought he would burn its leaves, and even at the thought the graph showed a violent response. The plant seemed to be able to anticipate his intended violence. He then set up a situation where plants could "witness" a destructive action. Six people were selected and given numbers. Each but one was instructed on their paper to go into the room, look at the plants and leave. One was instructed to tear some leaves off one of the plants (there were 3 I believe) and then leave. Electrodes were attached to the two "witness" plants, and each person again went into the room. No one knew who the destructive person was except the plants! There was no response for the 9 innocent persons, but when the 10th went into the room the plants responded vigorously, as if in fear. They remembered.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Dr. Kenneth McAll an English psychiatrist noted for his healing ministry with family systems (see his *Healing the Family Tree*, London: Sheldon Press, 1982, pp. 59ff) was travelling by banana boat over the Bermuda Triangle (a place formed by an imaginary line between Miami, Puerto Rico and Bermuda where for hundreds of years ships and aircraft had gone down without a trace) when the boat was caught in a terrible storm.<sup>3</sup> In escaping south one of the ships boilers broke leaving them adrift. In his quiet leisure, he heard a droning outside. It wasn't the crew. Researching, he found that this was the place unfit slaves were thrown overboard so their owners could collect insurance money. As Gen 4 said of Cain's killing Abel "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil", these souls were crying out from the sea. On returning to England, Dr.

McAll got Anglican bishops in various places to celebrate Eucharist for those who lost their lives in an untimely way in that place, and later the Bermuda Anglican bishop did the same. For five years between that celebration (in 1977) and his book (1982) there had been no reported accident in that region.

We are dealing with incidents that are hard to repeat scientifically, but such evidence supports a view of the world as living and responsive to what occurs on it. Much as the humans, God's most developed creatures, the earth retains the marks of past experience. Can it be healed? What implications might result for the earth if humans understood how to assist in this healing? It is my conviction that a deeper understanding of the resurrection of Jesus would help us bring healing not only to humans but also to the earth. I will begin by relating creation-centered spirituality to a focus on resurrection.

### **Resurrection-Centered Spirituality**

A recent focus on the importance of celebrating creation and joining its creative impulse is the work of Matthew Fox: *Creation-centered spirituality* (see his *Original Blessing: a Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Bear & Co. Inc., 1983). Fox sees traditional spirituality (which he terms Fall/Redemption spirituality as instanced in Augustine, Thomas a Kempis up to Tanqueray) as dualistic, focused on the danger of sensuality and earthiness and on the need for ascetical restraint. He argues for another tradition which he finds in the Yahwist, wisdom writers, Irenaeus, Eckhart up to Teilhard de Chardin which is basically positive toward creation. In his view Fall/Redemption spirituality sees little value in science, focuses on original sin and its effects, encourages detachment from the world and moral self-control and awaits the end of the world rather than its transformation. Creation spirituality, on the other hand, welcomes the discoveries of science as revealing the creator, focuses on the blessing of creation and our god-given commission to care for it, moves beyond moralistic negation of human action to a sense of communion with nature and believes in the ultimate goodness and creativity of the cosmos. He wants to move beyond a focus on guilt to a focus on spiritual growth. He presents 4 stages from the work of Eckhart: Befriending creation, befriending darkness, befriending creativity or our inner divinity, and befriending new creation and universal compassion. I found myself in tune with those goals, but not with Fox's negation of the Fall/redemption tradition. It gradually dawned on me that those very goals are restored to us through the resurrection of Jesus. Let me explain.

It was Teilhard that turned our attention first to many of these themes. When he was in the novitiate he told his director about his desire for both spirituality and science, and his wise novice director encouraged him to pursue both believing that God would somehow bring them into unity. His focus on evolution did make theologians suspicious that he was neglecting original sin. In response he wrote an appendix to *The Phenomenon of Man* explaining that evil was discoverable at every level of evolution, even though he chose not to speak of it for the sake of clarity. There is the evil of failure and disorder in adjusting and emerging, the evil of decomposition of the present to make room for the new, the evil of solitude and anxiety (especially for humans) in striving for consciousness in a dark universe, and the evil of growth itself--the constant struggle to make progress against the inertia and resistance of the present state. Whether further there is an excess of evil, stemming from an historic tragedy, he declines in that study to say. What he does persuasively illustrate is that humans emerge as a higher consciousness within an evolving universe filled with seeds of new creation. We must choose, and in choosing we bring creation with us for better or worse. By our choices we develop a human "layer" of evolution, a *noosphere*, that affects

everything. We create culture and "history," and we in turn are influenced by that history. We need only look at our technological world which drives our days with given hours and our attention with narrowly determined tasks to see how we are formed and informed by our creations. Yes we are faced with new possibilities and creative challenges, but new creation is conditioned by the patterns we have grown accustomed to, our compulsion to consume, to live by an ever increasing standard of consumption. What will empower us to change?

It is this awareness of historical conditioning that makes me take more seriously than Fox seems to the doctrine of original sin. Granted the doctrine as developed by Augustine needs reconsideration, but its roots are the biblical insight that our evil choices have a history. It is not enough to change our present attitudes because the present is conditioned by the choices made in our past. Our ancestors need healing and the earth affected by our ancestors needs healing. Joy in creation cannot accomplish the earth's healing alone. We need redemption, yet a redemption that does not separate us from the earth but empowers us to purify the earth and bring it into wholeness. Redemption must be more than personal. It must extend to the whole of creation. The resurrection of Jesus changed his sinful, unreliable disciples into a powerful community of compassion. Can we expand our view of the resurrection to include its power to restore the earth. Let us see.

### **Stages of Salvation History**

Both Freud and Jung worked on the assumption that the growth of the individual in a speeded up way goes through the stages of evolution--from emergence out of water to the unfolding of human physical and psychological life. This evolutionary view need not be seen as contrary to creation, since God's creation if ever present. It simply describes *how* God creates. What I have found is that human spiritual growth also recapitulates the stages of salvation history, and it is only in light of salvation history that the resurrection as its culmination can be fully understood. I have found five such stages culminating in the death/resurrection of Jesus as the goal of the process: (Initial faith (Yahwist), Familial Faith (Elohism/Deuteronomist), Individuating faith (Exilic prophets and Job), Communitarian faith (foreseen in Is 53, first lived in Jesus) and Mission faith (revealed in Pentecost).<sup>4</sup>

I will briefly explain these stages beginning from individuating faith. Ez 18 begins with the affirmation "You have heard it said that the Fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. That will *no longer* be said in Israel, for the children are mine as well as the fathers." In other words we see here a definite break in the "conditional covenant" made to Israel's ancestors: "if you keep my law, then you will be my people." That covenant, Yahweh affirms, they have broken (see also Jer 31:32), and were punished by the Exile. Yet in this breakdown there is a breakthrough of a promised "new covenant" when Yahweh will "put my Spirit within you and make you live by my statutes" (Ez 36:27). Individuating faith, then, is a breakdown of human effort and a turning of each individual to God's initiative. I experience this in a personal depression I went through while studying theology in Germany. I studied Freud to get some understanding, but was still depressed. Then one author led me to Is 43:18 (written during the Exile): "remember not the events of the past...See I am doing something *new*." In other words, healing would come from God's present creativity, not from a repairing of the past.

From that central breakthrough (Israel's and my own), I saw that mere keeping the law (Familial faith) was no longer enough. In that stage "The sins of the fathers [mothers] are handed down to four generations [and more in my experience], the blessings to a thousand" (see Dt 5:9f, Ex 20:5-6 etc.). In other words the patterns of history are handed down for better or worse till

there is a collapse of human efforts and an in breaking of God's new creation. Even before that concentration on human cooperation through law, there is (in the Yahwist, Gen 2-3, 12:1-5 etc. who wrote in the time of David) a focus on trusting Yahweh in order to find life. That universal trust, however, gave rise to intermarriage and distortion of faith in Yahweh (as it can do whenever we lose the specificity of our faith) and so encountered the prophetic challenge of the Elohist and Deuteronomist. We see the result of even this human effort in their Exile.

Once we turn to Yahweh's spirit ourselves, we need to find the spirit in others. This we do by the forgiveness of enemies which I find first only in Jesus (though foreseen and forgotten in Is 53--the suffering servant.) This stage of unconditional forgiveness allows us to remain faithful even to unfaithful partners (as Jesus did with Israel) and so to die that others might live. It is community build on joint suffering.

And finally, the actual gift of life in union with God releases a new communal reality through the Pentecostal power of the Spirit. Through the Spirit Jesus' death/resurrection builds a living, self-giving community that is open to all and all creation. I contend that it is through this transformation of humanity that ultimately the earth itself will be transformed.

The ground and goal of this development is God who raised Christ from the dead. The norm of who God is is not creation alone, but the life/death and resurrection of Jesus. "Who sees me sees the Father" (Jn 14:9). God's suffering love surrendered his Son for us, and through Jesus' response of self-surrender the Spirit of self-giving love is sent and revealed. God is revealed *as a community of self-giving love in this world-forming event*.

The pattern of stages is fully revealed in Jesus, but is loved out cyclically. Individually or communally we can have a breakthrough to a new stage but then regress to previous a previous stage. This, I believe, is what happened in the church. With the failure to convert Israel the message of Christ went to the gentiles who were not prepared with a solidarity of a thousand year history. The gifts of the Spirit led to factions as we see from the Corinthian community and the Didache. The central gift of the Spirit of forgiving love that builds the self-giving community was superseded by the need for institution and discipline (my "familial stage"). Structure and control replaced healing as focus of attention. As in Jesus' time, I believe we are again emerging from the familial stage of development to recognize again our need for forgiveness and healing.

### **Healing the Human Family**

In order to understand the healing brought by the resurrection, we need to look at sin in history. The Yahwist, who first wrote of the sin of our original ancestors, did so by first looking at the sin of his day (the time of David). It was a time of domination, of loss of faith in Yahweh by the multiple marriages of the kings like Solomon, of alienation of families torn by strife. If Yahweh was all good, how could this happen? The Yahwist concluded (see Gn 2-3) that it was due to a freely chosen loss of faith in Yahweh. Humans were the culmination of Yahweh's creation, formed from the earth, given the power to name (and so direct) creation and the commission to subdue the earth and bring it to order. All creation served humans, as humans served God. But they chose their own way and not only did they hide from Yahweh, but they also blamed and were alienated from one another. God gave as punishment that Adam would dominate his wife and the woman cling to her man, and the earth would be hard to till and not graciously yield crops. The Yahwist was symbolically telling the story of sin. Humans were given care for the earth, but when they turned from God, the source of creativity, they could only use power, dominance and force.

Further, this beginning continued in history. Cain also had doubt about his acceptability,

envied and then killed Abel. Domination and enmity, social and sexual sin were handed down generation to generation to the Yahwist's own day. His solution was a return to trust in Yahweh as Abraham did (Gn 12:1-5). But as we have seen Israel proved incapable of such trust. God's Spirit was promised "to make them keep God's Law," but centuries passed. A similar envy and hatred of one gifted by God led to Jesus' death. The heritage of sin exploded around him. The earth quaked and shook the foundations, as though being exorcized from an ancient wound. What began its healing was not a simple trust in God's goodness. It was Jesus' willingness to forgive and trust God while suffering the effects of human sin. Such generational patterns, we find, change only when they are understood and forgiven. This is how we can view Jesus' resurrection. As human he inherited his nation's sinful temptations (see his baptism "to fulfill all justice" (Mt 3:14-15) and his temptations which were like those of Israel). Yet he responded with a surrendered trust in God. Under God he showed he had "authority" over the storm and sea, and over the fig tree. Yet he freely bore the hatred of the Jewish leaders and Romans. His death culminated a life of trust in God, and through his resurrection he "sent" the Spirit to continue this new life with his disciples. What Adam was called to and lost by distrust Christ restored not on the basis of the old creation, but by the "new creation" through his resurrection. The world is restored to God's favor not by a return to the past (creation), but by a reconciling call from the future--the resurrection. It is important to understand the resurrection as such a restoration *in* this world.

## The Resurrection

Firstly, the resurrection is an event *in* this world. It is not uncommon to imagine the resurrection as Jesus' reward apart from this world. Scripture presents a very different view. Peter's sermon in Acts points to the gift of the Holy Spirit as the sign that Jesus has been made "Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36). The resurrection meant that Jesus was made Lord over the whole earth. As Paul put it: "God . . . put all enemies under his feet" so that he in turn can subject all to God "that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). This is expressed in the earliest Creed: "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:11). Far from separating Jesus from the world, the resurrection unites him to the world in a new sovereign way to bring everything to its intended goal of the Kingdom of God.

Secondly, the resurrection is a *now* event. A second misconception is that the resurrection is a past event in the life of Jesus. In the resurrection Jesus returns to God and brings human creation into union with God. Since God's Time is an eternal *now*, the resurrection is also an eternal now. That means it touches all time and all space. It affects the heart of every creature with a deepened and more absolute hope. It is not a particular event that we can locate in a particular space and time. It is an event that transcends our concept of space and time, and is universally available if we but call upon the Lord.

Thirdly, it is not merely spiritual but also bodily. All the apparitions point to bodily aspects: eating fish, touching his side or clinging to him, seeing him though some doubted. The resurrection is, as Teilhard might say, a new phylum in our world, the basis for building all believers into a new *Body*, a new family that is based not on blood ties or cultural ties, but on faith in Jesus as Lord and on the power of God's Spirit. Since it is a bodily event, it also penetrates the depths of bodiliness and so of the earth. As Colossians says, "It has pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him, and by means of him to reconcile everything in his person, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross."(1:19-20).

Fourthly, therefore, in Jesus' resurrection the whole of creation has a new beginning, a new

creation. This is the ultimate ground of spiritual healing. Spiritual healing is not simply a repairing of wounds, like re-parenting because of wounds from one's parents. It is actually creating anew. As Isaiah 43 taught me: "Do not look at what is behind, behold I make all things new." I realized that healing came from looking at God's ever present creativity, not at one's problems. God's love heals our basic distrust. God's love gives us power to forgive rather than rebel against our heritage in the familial faith stage. I have come to see that Jesus' resurrection restores our link to the creativity of God. He is the "new Adam" (1 Cor 15:22), the ground of our new family in God. He is also the one who fulfills God's command to Adam--increase and multiply, subdue the earth and bring it into order. As Lord, Jesus has this power to create anew in right order.

It was Teilhard who called our attention to three basic principles of ongoing creation or evolution: differentiation, increasing interiority and deepened community. Every new stage of evolution -- molecules to life to sensation to thought -- shows increased complexity or differentiation, increased self-activity or freedom and all this in a total unity. If resurrection is the final point of creation, a new creation from God, does it show these principles to the highest degree? It does. The Spirit from God gives each a "different" gift "for the building of the body." Differentiation and community are both increased as we see in the free sharing with the community that occurred in response to the Spirit in Acts. And the Spirit frees us to our deepest truth. The resurrection is a life at work in our deepest depths calling us through intimacy with Jesus, the Spirit and our loving Creator.

Finally, it is through sharing in the resurrected life of Jesus that we share Jesus' Lordship and power to heal. The miracles of Jesus (showing his power over materiality) are expressions of the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. We are to do "even greater works" (Jn 14:12). Jesus' power over the storm at sea (Mt 14:22-33) and over the fig tree (Mt 21:18-22) are not presented as unique to him. Jesus complains about their "little faith" and says if they had faith as a mustard seed they could say to the mountain "go into the sea," and it would obey. "If we die with Christ", Paul says in 2 Tim 2:11-12, "we shall also live with him; if we hold out to the end we shall also *reign* with him." And again in Romans 5:17: "If death began its reign through one man because of his offense, much more shall those who receive the overflowing grace and gift of justice [grace from Jesus' resurrection] *reign* through the one man, Jesus Christ." The disciples are to share Jesus rule which extends not only to believers but to the whole world (the whole universe). We share this rule not by our own power but as channels of the Spirit--the resurrected power of Jesus, "for without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

Thus, in the Scriptural view, the gifts that were meant for humans from the beginning of creation--union with God, rule over the earth that would respond fruitfully, partnership between men and women and the power to bless their offspring--were lost through Adam and Eve's sin but restored through the death/resurrection of Jesus. We are to live now in the power of the resurrection or new creation, not just by union with world creativity. Resurrection differs from creation in that it is centered in a personal relation to Jesus (whether explicitly confessed or implicitly lived through love) and has at least the following characteristics: a commitment beyond feeling (as revealed in Jesus' death in fidelity to God), creative community beyond failure (as seen in disciples' renewed community), wholeness beyond perceived disintegration (as seen in their power to heal), and the ability to face death through trust in God's indestructible life. All these are qualities of Jesus' resurrection Spirit as seen in Scripture. But the central difference, in my view, is that creation focuses on the beginning unaffected by historical choices (an "original blessing"), whereas resurrection restores a new beginning by forgiving and healing actual historical choices and their effects. The stages that Matthew Fox finds in spiritual growth (befriending creation,

befriending darkness, accepting inner divinity, co-creativity) almost parallel the historical stages I discovered (trust and familial being creation, individuating faith opening to darkness, communitarian releasing creativity in relationships, and mission caring for all and the earth). Only he omits the historical grounding. What Jesus' resurrection does is make historically real those goals. Jesus took our death- bringing choices on himself and in God empowered a new beginning for those who believe and receive forgiveness. All creation "waits" for that freedom of the children of God, Paul says in Rom 8:20. It is consigned to futility (or emptiness) for the sake of that hope. This resurrection power is already at work in us (Col 3:1). How can we become instruments of healing the earth?

### **Healing the Earth**

If we are meant to live by the power of the resurrection to reconcile, order and heal we need to know the principles of such a life.

*Firstly*, we need to be oriented to Jesus' victory. The resurrection brings creation into union with God. Jesus became human and since all humans are united with all creation, his death/resurrection brings creation into union with God's own life. This cannot be lost. The universe *is* fundamentally saved though we cannot be sure how this transformation will actually work itself out. Healing prayer is grounded in this truth, and seeks Jesus guidance for how to cooperate with the saving of the earth.

*Secondly*, our power to envision and imagine needs to be transformed by this vision of God's kingdom. What we believe is what comes to be. Belief is not a surface act of mind alone, but also includes feeling, will and imagination. Jesus' initial proclamation was "Repent and believe the good news." Repent meant "change your mind, believe the good news." Healing prayer is often unsuccessful because we do not expect and envision the hoped for change. For example, we might pray for a friend to be healed of an illness, yet go on complaining about how he or she suffers. We are attending to the sickness, not envisioning her getting well and thanking God for it. The conversion we most basically need is to trust God's love totally. We are channels of God's creative light, but if our minds are filled with worries and fears, what we are actually believing is that the worst will happen. It is a spiritual law: what we believe is what we cause. We need God to change our faith, to believe that God wants and can bring good to the earth, and that we are given the power to pray for this.

An example may help. How many times have we not prayed for good weather with little effect? Perhaps we did not have sufficient faith for such a large project. We may have to start smaller--say with our garden--in order to be convinced about the power of such prayer. Or perhaps we don't really believe we have such power with the weather. "That's God's domain," we may have been told and believed. Jesus' disciples were shocked when Jesus commanded the storm to be still, but he corrected them for their little faith (Mk 4:40). A number of cases show that we do have marvelous power under God. In a talk on healing the earth (given at the annual conference of the Association of Christian Therapists, San Diego, 1982) Barbara Shlemon told of a prayer for just that purpose. She and several others were giving a healing retreat for several hundred Indians in Montana when a tornado was spotted heading directly toward their camp. Not wanting the Indians hurt they thought of disbanding, but decided first to pray for guidance. What they got was to ask the Bishop to say a prayer for God to turn aside the tornado and let only a slight rain come to water the ground. Although he was not used to this kind of prayer, the Bishop complied, and then went on with the healing Mass. That is exactly what happened. Only a slight rain fell. The incident may not have received notice if a journalist had not been present, with the result that the next

mornings headlines read: "Tornado divides and misses a healing service and then comes together again." Needless to say, the Bishop was quite impressed (he had said after the Mass "One does need common sense.") Many other examples could be given.<sup>5</sup>

*Thirdly*, what heals is God's Love. The more we are filled with God's love and forgiveness, the better channels we will be for all sorts of healing, including that of the earth. If we harbor resentment or judgments against others, we block the power of God's healing. Many instances could be given, but the one that comes to mind was given by Fr. Jim Burke, OP in a retreat. He was in a retreat where people shared conversion experiences and one sister spoke of getting to like Detroit after harboring a dislike for many years. Fr. Jim felt her words like a knife. Whenever he thought of bad examples of cities, Detroit came first to mind. In the repentance service he asked forgiveness for his condemning attitude toward Detroit and asked for God's view. The result was that in the next few years he had fifty invitations for missions or retreats in Detroit whereas before he had almost none. Forgiving Love opened the way for God's love to work. As we pray for the earth, we need to ask for God's forgiveness of those who exploit the earth, and for ourselves who in many ways have hurt the earth unawares. It is not resentment and bitterness that heals, nor discouragement, but forgiving love and faith.

*Fourthly*, we have found that blocks may often be from the past both in individual healing and in healing the earth. As I mentioned earlier, places seem to remember what has happened on them and similar evil seems to continue. A group of us were led to have a Mass said for the civil war dead from Camp Douglas in Chicago, and to pray for the camp grounds. We found through history that some 6,000 Confederate soldiers died there in inhuman conditions, and the place of the actual camp (between 31st and 33rd and Cottage Grove in Chicago, a very suitable piece of land for building) was still a waste land after more than 100 years! We felt many of the dead did find release. We wondered what affect it might have on the land, and now three years later we passed by and saw a new housing complex being built there. I mentioned Dr. McAll's prayer for the Bermuda Triangle, and the 5 year freedom from incidents. He has many similar examples. We have been led to pray for such events as the Alamo (and the enmity between Spanish and Whites affected by that battle), the different sides in the Northern Ireland dispute, several areas in Chicago with Mafia and Satanic connections, divisions in Livingston, Kentucky, and similar areas. It may well be that the root of a present misuse or exploitation stretches back to an original hurt (like the killing of the Seminole Indians), or to injustice perpetrated by the Church (like the witch trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).

In sum, we have found that the same principles that apply to healing of persons apply also to healing the earth. Ps 115:16 says: "Heaven is the heaven of the Lord, but the earth he has given to the children of men." Nature is also given into our care as well as other persons. The earth is given to us to learn to love. As children teach us our sin by how they are affected by it, so God seems to let the earth be devastated so we will see our own inner devastation that causes it. But Jesus has come to restore to us power through his resurrection and Lordship to pray for its healing. Whether we will choose to restore the earth or exploit it has been given to us to decide.

### **Implications for Us**

What are some implications for our own care for the earth? Firstly, true prayer is helped by being informed.<sup>6</sup> Agnes Sanford found out about the San Andreas fault in order to pray for it, how the earth must swell to create new land, how a division of the earth falls along that fault. She prayed not to stop movement (that would have caused problems elsewhere), but that the tremors would be many and slight so that no destruction would occur. If we want God to heal the earth, it



helps to know what to pray for. Should we pray for the leaders of nations to realize the importance of their land? For the leaders of firms and their relation to the health of the environment? Ask God for guidance.

Secondly, we need to grow in awareness of the power of healing prayer. Each of us will be led differently to experience God's love and forgiveness, and begin to pray for small things. Rest in God's love; envision that love and light radiating out into your selected place (a flower, garden, bird, etc.). Envision with love and gratitude the healed condition you anticipate (a healthy flower, garden, etc.), and finally thank God. If nothing happens you can check a number of things: your faith (are you convinced God wants this? that God wants to respond to your prayer?), your attunement to God's plan for this area, its appropriateness with regard to other things (for example, not to pray for a good day for a picnic when the earth needs rain). God is infinite creative love and Jesus has been given "all power" to bring the earth to order. We are Jesus' instruments, so prayer will be effective if we have learned to become channels.

Thirdly, you may expand your concern to some place like a city or church. Agnes Sanford was led by one lady to pray for cities. You may pick out city hall (quite a challenge in Chicago, but we have been trying). Visualize God's love bringing peace to that place, reconciling differences. We can waste our energy complaining because what we attend to is what we cause. We need to develop a constructive attitude of trust in God's Spirit and prayer with a vision of peace being given.

There may be some particular issue that you are led to pray for. One of our group worked at Edison, and found his particular office rife with competition and discord. He didn't even want to go to work. As we prayed we were led to pray for Thomas Edison himself who had no religious faith and was disillusioned and angered by conflicts and competition around the use of electricity. We prayed for him to be healed and opened to trust in God, to forgive and be forgiven and for the corporation he began to be freed from that attitude. There has been relief in my friend's office, but long term change can require ongoing prayer.

Or we may be concerned about the loss of small farms and the exploitative policies of insurance companies that have received the land. We may not know how to pray for such complicated issues and can best leave them in God's hands, always ready to do what we are led to do. We can pray God's light into these lands, and God's protection. I was asked by some members of the Association of Christian Therapists to go out to their land and bless it, and pray for any traumatic events (Native American or otherwise) that occurred on it. I was more than happy to do that knowing the many instances where such prayer has helped, though in most cases we don't see the results for some time.

## **Conclusion**

As Psalm 115 says: "Heaven belongs to the Lord alone, but he gave to earth to humans." We have misused it, appropriated it for ourselves, as the parable of the vineyard says, and even killed God's Son, but we have not been left without resources for healing. Through the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' resurrection we can cooperate in God's ongoing creative work. We pray daily: "Your kingdom come, your will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven." In heaven, God rules. On earth we pray that God may also bring life, peace, order and justice, but it cannot be done except through many who make themselves channels of God's love. Agnes Sanford likes to use the example of the light bulb. God is the power source, Jesus the transformer, but there will be no light unless we light bulbs are wired to Jesus and ultimately to our triune God. Further, one light can

light a room, but if we want to light a house or a city we need many bulbs. God has entrusted the earth to us and given us the energy. We still have to understand how creation works and how it is healed, and we need to become ever more fully united with God's creative power.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird, *The Secret Life of Plants* (N.Y.: Avon Books, 1973), chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25. Backster admitted the plant could have picked up guilt feelings in the culprit, but since it was for science he likely had none.

<sup>3</sup> See his *Healing the Family Tree* (London: Sheldon Press, 1984), pp. 59-61.

<sup>4</sup> See my "Trinitarian Love as Ground of the Church," *Theological Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4, Dec. 1976, pp. 649-679 where I develop this argument. Also see my "Healing and Family Spiritual/Emotional Systems," *Journal of Christian Healing*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1983), pp. 10-23, where I apply the five stages to healing family systems.

<sup>5</sup> See Agnes Sanford, *Creation Waits* (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1978) for several of her examples.

<sup>6</sup> See W. R. Parker and E. St. Johns Dare, *Prayer Can Change Your Life* (Prentice-Hall Inc., 1957) where they give results from three self-chosen control groups -- prayer only, therapy only, and prayer and therapy. They found that the prayer and therapy group improved by far the most, and prayer alone the least! They concluded that psychology (understanding) was needed to guide the prayer.