

The Sacred Edge: Women, Sea and Spirit

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The shore is an ancient world, for as long as there has been an earth and sea there has been this place of the meeting of land and water. Yet it is a world that keeps alive the sense of continuing creation and of the relentless drive of life (Carson 1998a:2).

The Spirit of Life

To speak of God as Spirit, particularly God as Holy Spirit, means we can reclaim the affirmation of the Constantinopolitan Creed, the Spirit is the “life-giver”. As the psalmist sings, “O Lord... the earth is full of your creature... When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground” (Ps 104:1,30). Recent pneumatological works draw on this connection of Spirit and life by extending the metaphorical “household” of God (2 Tim 2:20-21) beyond the churches to include the whole creation (Baker-Fletcher 1998, Chung 1991, Moltmann 1992, 1997, Prichard 1999, Müller-Fahrenheit 1995, Stendahl 1990). Thus, from an ecotheological perspective, Mark I. Wallace proposes the image of the Spirit as “the Green Face of God” (1996:225). The greening of the Spirit provides creative opportunities for gathering together the Spirit-associations of breath, wind, viridity, embodiment and sensuality toward a holistic theology of life.

But in the heart of Christian traditions lies the additional association of water and Spirit. In Genesis 1:1, the *ruach* (breath, wind) of God broods over the deep waters with anticipative desire. In New Testament traditions, the rebirth of creation is manifest by the water of baptism and the Spirit. Life and all its abundance are claimed as God’s good

gifts through the language of water and Spirit. Yet in the field of ecotheology, land as desert, mountain, garden and forest provide the dominant senses of place. What if contemporary ecotheology attends to those places where green meets blue—the sea—with its salty water, deep chasms and coastal shores? Since the sea covers just over 70% of the surface of the globe, what if we bring “planet ocean” to the centre of our reflection on Spirit and life (*The Vision Splendid* 1998:1)?

The following study presents explorations toward a theology of Spirit set within an Australian contextual coastal spirituality. The goal is to add an alternative journey to the existing conversations on spirituality and theology, not an inward desert-movement, but a journey outward into the depths of an(other) landscape—*seascape*. Is this only a woman’s journey? Not exclusively, but as women have begun to articulate voices of difference within the “dualistic structure of western thought”, so are these oceanic journeys a strategy of dangerous remembrance (Plumwood 1993: 41-68). A spirituality of seascape opens up the closed edges of patriarchal society toward new depths of ecological relations within what Rachel Carson understood as “the house of life” (Brooks 1972: xi).

Sea Love

Rachel Carson is usually noted for her classic work on ecology and pesticides, *Silent Spring*, which many people acclaim as the definitive text of the contemporary environmental movement (1963). But Carson’s formative ecological vision had been expressed earlier (1941, 1950, 1955) in three books on the sea (1991, 1989, 1998b).

Through her spiritual sensitivity to the uniqueness, vulnerability and interdependence of all living beings, Carson introduced a generation, and now another generation to the *living* sea. For Carson, the myriad of sea creatures, the deep currents of oceanic space, and the aeons of ecological evolution naturally evoke wonder in persons who take the time to enter the low-tide world. In her essay, “The Sense of Wonder”, Carson begins with a story that expresses her relation to the sea:

One stormy autumn night when my nephew Roger was about twenty months old, I wrapped him in a blanket and carried him down to the beach in the rainy darkness. Out there, just at the edge of where-we-couldn’t-see, big waves were thundering in, dimly seen white shapes that boomed and shouted and threw great handfuls of froth at us. Together we laughed for pure joy—he a baby meeting for the first time the wild tumult of Oceanus, I with the salt of half a lifetime of sea love in me. But I think we felt the same spine-tingling response to the vast, roaring ocean and the wild night around us (1998b:15).

In her story, Carson describes her relation to the wild waves and wet darkness as *sea love*. All her scientific knowledge and environmental activism was first and foremost based on this sense of wonder and love for seascape.

Deep-sea diver and former chief scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (USA), Sylvia Earle describes her “urge to submerge” as based on a love-relation with the sea that began for her in her childhood:

When I was three, the ocean along the New Jersey shore first got my attention much as it happened in the dream: A great wave knocked me off my feet, I fell in love, and ever after have been irresistibly drawn, first, to the cool, green Atlantic Ocean; later, to the Gulf of Mexico, warm and blue, serving as my backyard and playground through years of discovery; and thereafter to other oceans, to reefs, raging surf, calm embayments, steep dropoffs, and the farthest reaches of the deep sea beyond (1995: 14-15).

Carrying forward the legacy of Carson, Earle trained as a marine biologist and from an epistemology of sea love has called attention to the increasingly precarious viability of the earth's seas.

Judith Wright recalls that, in 1949, while spending a few weeks on Lady Elliot Island, one of the Great Barrier Reef's coral isles, she too fell in love:

The island was already spoiled; its guano had been stripped and shipped away, and little was left of the vegetation except a few pisonia trees nibbled by the herd of wild goats left there for the lighthouse meat supply long years before. But the offshore reef was still beautiful, and I wandered over it amazed at the colours of the corals, the shellfish and the tiny darting fish and crimson and blue slugs and stars and clams in its pool-gardens, and stared down from a small boat at its shelves and coral crags. I fell in love with the Reef then, through that small and southmost part of it (1977:1).

For Judith Wright, the sea, like the land, represented “an abiding power in the natural world” that existed “against the destructiveness and vulgarity of consumer society” (Brady 1998:189). Love of the sea inspired Wright to help form the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland in 1963, which fought for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

The stories of Carson, Earle, and Wright inspire connections with my own experiences of sea love. As a child in the U.S., I grew up spending summers at the New Jersey shore. I remember my father waking me up early in the morning to walk the beach, where we explored the starfish, jellies and shells of all shapes and sizes that had been brought in with the tides. Now in Western Australia, beaches are no longer for holidays, but regular pilgrimages. Recently while snorkelling in Yallingup, I swam out to the edge of the reef, full of confidence and delight in the close encounter with fish and corals. But when I

peered over the edge, swimming hard against the current, I was not prepared for the view—the reef sloped off suddenly like an inverted cathedral of undulating green grasses into the depths of bluish-purple darkness. With both fear and awe, I experienced the *mysterium tremendum* of the sea, only the transcendence was not of heights, but depths (Otto 1975: 12). Out of the “whirlpool” I heard a voice say, “Have you entered the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep (Job 38:16)?” I swam back to shore aware that the cathedral sea was not my place, but an *other* place I respect, value and love.

Stories of sea love challenge both theology and ecology to bring into focus an overlooked subject, the sea and its many habitats for life. In order to think holistically about the relation of human beings, other species and our shared world, not only do we need to “think like a mountain,” we need to think like the sea (Leopold 1968: 129). In doing so, we can affirm the values of joy, wonder, awe and mystery that make love the epistemological prerequisite for knowledge. Knowing the sea and its creatures as subjects with whom we share the gift of life implies neither romantic fusion nor masterful control, but embracing what Sallie McFague terms “the loving eye”:

This is the eye trained in detachment in order that its attachment will be objective, based on the reality of the other and not on our own wishes or fantasies. This is the eye bound to the other as is an apprentice to a skilled worker, listening to the other as does a foreigner in a new country. This is the eye that pays attention to the other so that the connections between the knower and the known, like the bond of friendship, will be based on the real subject in its real world (1997:116).

Sea love enables us to befriend the sea with intimacy and respect for difference. Rachel Carson, Sylvia Earle and Judith Wright speak from a deep sense of seascape shaped by

loving attentiveness to the many beings inhabiting its niches. From the shore-line to the cathedral deep, sea love helps re-orient our human place within the house of life.

Land's edge

For many Australians, sea love is a way of life. Robert Drewe claims that at least three generations Australians have been conducting “a lifelong love affair with the beach” (1993: 6). Passing through stages of life, Australians as children, lovers, honeymooners, parents, and finally retirees return to the beach, ceremoniously, for its pleasure and balm. Regarding his own sense of national identity, Drewe claims he feels most Australian...

when I see a patch of ocean framed in the branches of a gum-tree...or catch my first glimpse of Little Parakeet Bay on Rottnest Island, off the Western Australian coast, on an early morning bike ride. To me the *real Australia* will always be that mysterious, sensuous zone where the bush meets the sea. The *real Australia* has no other season but summer. The *real Australia*, of course, is myth as much as it is reality. What is it about Australians and the beach (1998: 4)?

What is it about Australians and the beach? Drewe argues that conversations regarding Australian identity must recognize the vitality and sensuality of coastal living.

Like Drewe, Tim Winton places seascape at the heart of Australian identity. Sketching an Australian spiritual map in *The Land's Edge*, Winton writes:

Australians are surrounded by ocean and ambushed from behind by desert—a war of mystery on two fronts... Of the two mysteries, the sea is more forthcoming; its miracles and wonders are occasionally more palpable, however inexplicable they be. There is more bounty, more possibility for us in a vista that moves, rolls, surges, twists, rears up and changes from minute to minute... The sea is the supreme metaphor for change (1993:36, 85).

In Winton's experience of coastal living, the sea is a liminal place of open mystery; it is ever-changing, ever-new in contrast to all our human attempts to control outcomes, fix

meaning or finalise stories. Characters in Winton's novels experience seascape as the place where they encounter the mysterious limitations and possibilities of life. Thus for Winton, like Drewe, coastal living represents an Australian identity at least as valid as that of the outback. In this light Drewe speculates on our future, "Indeed, as we reach the millennium it could be said that for many the Australian spirit is really the search for that physical and spiritual liberation which seems only attainable with a glimpse of the ocean in the mind's eye" (1998: 5).

But Winton and Drewe aren't the only Australians smitten by maritime mystery. In 1998, when Peter Bentley and Philip J. Hughes of the Christian Research Association surveyed Australians about where they most often experience a sense of peace and well-being, 71% of the respondents replied, "by the sea" (1998:108). Other answers included "in the bush" (66%), "with family" (64%), "with friends" (59%), "in a garden" (56%), "praying" (29%) and "at church services" (28%). Upon closer examination, for some persons the bush, sea and gardens take the place of churches. But for others, the spiritual resources of the natural environment exist alongside traditional religious resources. In fact, the people who attend church regularly were just as strong in affirming the sea or bush as those who did not attend church. Bentley and Hughes wonder why the sea is so popular:

Is there something in the nature of the sea itself which attracts Australians, with the extent of its horizons, or the regularity of the tides, or the sound of the waves? Is it the "beach culture" which has developed Australia, which commentators have sometimes described as the place where social barriers are not apparent? Does it reflect the happiness that most children experience when they play in the sand on the beach, the one place they play for hours without expensive toys? Or is there something more, the almost mystical experiences that some surfers report, as they ride the ultimate wave (1998:109)?

In the survey, the questions remain unanswered. But the themes point to the importance of coastal experiences in articulating Australian spiritualities and constructing Australian theologies. In particular, for Australian ecotheology, if “the local matters”, then just as the land becomes “a vehicle for the quest for national identity; its cultural history and topography become part of the given of the local theological geography,” so should the sea make its own particular contributions (Pearson 1998:26). According to Bentley’s and Hughes’ research, seascape, or a coastal “sense of place” must be recognized as equally vital to discussions of Australian spirituality and theology as landscape (Lilburne, 1989: 30).

Curiously, in the survey, *women* much preferred the sea to the bush, while *men* preferred the bush to the sea. What is it about Australian women and the sea? If, as Elaine Lindsay suggests, “personal experience” functions “as a determinant of religious expression,” then women’s experiences offer alternative spiritualities and theologies in contrast to the formative experiences of bush or desert spirituality based on male cultural icons, literary texts and histories (1995:71). Lindsay explores the literary work of Thea Astley, Elizabeth Jolley and Barbara Hanrahan to centre women’s spiritualities (or marginalize desert spirituality). She observes that the hermeneutical shift from margin to centre (or centre to margin) involves a comparable shift in landscape:

While male theologians are tracking around the desert in ever-decreasing circles women are making sacred the coastal cities, the cultivated areas, the places where most of us live and where the fruitfulness of nature runs rampant (1995:75).

For the three writers, the cultivated and fruitful places of flower gardens, domestic life and pine trees give rise to spiritualities inspired by an immanent God of loving kindness,

far different from the transcendent and sacrificial deity attested to in desert spirituality. Ordinary life is hallowed amongst friends and family; dancing and planting; bees, roses and oleander.

Lindsay's shift to the spiritual margins presents a strategic move in remembering alternative Australian senses of place. But what if we spiral out further than sacred suburban places to the margins of seascape? What if we strategically centre experiences of seascape and move beyond roses and oleander to the places of tides, corals and sea grasses? Rachel Carson describes the edge of the sea as "the marginal world," the place where life began and the place to which all beings remain absolutely dependent (1998a:1). Following Lindsay's strategy, what if we bring to the centre our most *marginal margin*, the shorelines of our "coastal cities and cultivated areas"? What if, for future research, we gather up the stories—particularly women's stories—of the marginal world, the land's edge?

Sea Change

The previous discussion calls for a sea change in mapping Australian spirituality in which we de-centre a desert orientation and articulate the rich depths and fluidity of diverse coastal experiences. Attentiveness to the local, in this case seascape, enables the contextualisation of spiritualities and theologies recognized in the multi-faceted experiences of peace and well-being of women and men. In the process, coastal contextualisation need not overlook or subordinate experiences of tragedy, loss and limitation involved with relating to the sea. Perhaps it is this close association of vulnerability and empowerment, transcendence and immanence, aloneness and

connection that draws many of us daily to gain “a glimpse of the ocean in the mind’s eye” (Drewe 1998:5).

But what happens when we connect the local with the global? In mapping a coastal spirituality, we realise that through this great “circulatory system of Earth”, our shores touch other shores *via* currents of connection (Suzuki 1997:57). What happens when we “put out into the deep water” (Luke 5:4) and bring planet ocean into focus? We may love our sunny beaches and powerful waves, but do we know what is happening to the global sea? Do we know what we need for sustaining a “right-relationship” with our seascapes (Heyward 1989:193)? McFague suggests that to see the world through loving eyes, we attend to the sea as an apprentice to a skilled worker or listen to the sea as if in a foreign land so that we don’t naively project our own wishes. We can follow Abel Jackson’s mother, Dora, in Winton’s fable *Blueback*, who learned “the language of the sea” by “staying put, by watching and listening. Feeling things...She’s a part of the bay” (1997:129-130). Yet Dora’s fluency led her into deep water (into trouble with developers and illegal abalone divers too) where she connected the local with the global by saving Longboat Bay as a protected marine park. When we go into deeper waters, what do we find? Does a sea change in spiritual map lead to a further sea change in social praxis?

While the last 20 years have seen the establishment of protected marine sites and changes in marine management, the state of the sea’s health is increasingly precarious. Great environmental concern has been generated toward “saving” the rain forests as irreplaceable habitats that sustain species diversity and planetary atmosphere, but as Earle

states, “Even greater, more far-reaching anthropogenic changes are sweeping Earth’s *aquatic* atmosphere, chemically, physically, and biologically” (1995: 322). Submerging into deep water with loving eyes, we gain a new perspective:

80% of the commercially valuable fish, whose status is known, have been overfished or fished to their full potential (Earle 1995:186).

In 1989, less than 10% of the wastes generated by the Caribbean Basin received any form of treatment before being dumped into coastal waters. Nearly all of Haiti’s mangroves have been felled by poor peasants and sold for timber, fuelwood or charcoal (Hinrichsen 1990:52, 55).

Of 632 reefs surveyed in the Philippines, only 10% were found to be completely undamaged (Hinrichsen 1990: 10).

3000 factories dump nearly 13 billion cubic feet of contaminated waste and other effluents into the Volga River each year. St. Petersburg harbor shows 1000 times the normal levels of lead and cadmium (Earle 1995:237).

In 1992, 4.6 million items of trash, half of them plastic were recovered during beach cleanup of 4,445 miles of U.S. coastline (Earle 1995:256, 258).

These figures express a common situation: human beings are exploiting the sea directly, but we are also realising the history of effects—that what happens on land eventually effects the sea. Due to increasing population needs and unsustainable development practices, coastal habitats remain at risk, particularly in the Two-Third’s world where conflicts between social and ecological justice are immediate for people barely living day to day.

The connection between land and sea becomes clear through the relation of technically emitted carbon dioxide and global warming, which in turn leads to rising sea-levels threatening entire islands and coastal areas to the point that they have become “endangered countries” (Hinrichsen 1990:20). Within the sea, whole populations of

species have been depleted by miles of drift nets, longlines and bottom trawls. Reef mining, fishing with explosives and finning (where the fins and tails of sharks are sliced off and the still-living bodies are dumped overboard) represent practices without regard for long-term consequences. With the oceans, coastal waters and estuaries supporting a wealth of biodiversity—at least 400,000 known organisms—it is time to re-evaluate the practices of human beings in relation to the sea (Murray 1999:292). Just as we have become aware of the irreplaceable integrity and ecological value of the rainforests, we need a comparable sea change in orientation with the oceans.

But in order to make a sea change we need to become aware of various assumptions we may hold in relation to the sea. First, just as the earliest Europeans viewed Australia as *terra nullius*, we think of the sea as a nautical *nullius*—an infinite surface space stretching out against the horizon leaving us totally unaware of the mountains, canyons, caves and trenches below. The sea is imaged as a great muddy void, empty of life—at least useful life—and with “only 95% of the sea left to explore”, we remain primarily unaware of the sounds, colours, lights, and diversity of life even in the darkest, deepest trenches (Earle 1995:205). Since 97% of the planet’s water is constituted as salty sea, we may think, “Who needs the sea; isn’t it a great diluting, filtering system anyway?” (Suzuki 1997:205)? So we dump toxins and dispose of refuse with little thought to the life there or how sea ecology (rain, currents, atmosphere) ultimately connects with land ecology. If the sea is an infinite void, it can take all we give it. As Earle summarizes, “The sea has been used as a convenient place to dump trash throughout our history. Debris from human activity litters the coastal areas of the world, but most of what goes

into the sea remains unseen by those who put it there” (1995:142). If it remains unseen, then who can be held accountable?

In contrast to the idea of infinite void stands the assumption of the sea as an infinite resource. Sometimes the sea is imaged in maternal ways, as an ever-replenishing, limitless body of excess. For example, in his essay on water and the “material imagination”, Gaston Bachelard makes the connection between images of infinity and maternal love (1983:116). The sea with its curving capes and foaming waves presents a reverie of nourishment, tenderness and richness:

The sea is maternal; water is a prodigious milk. The earth prepares in its womb a warm and rich food; on its banks swell the breasts that will give all creatures particles of fat (1983:119).

But as we have learned, the sea does not bear infinite resources. While species such as the Atlantic blue fin tuna, certain kinds of salmon and codfish lie very close to extinction, many other species of fish, molluscs, crustaceans and sea mammals live endangered lives. To think of the sea in idyllic maternal ways maintains an illusion of fecundity without responsibility.

Issues of accountability and responsibility raise questions about the way the sea is viewed as belonging to everyone, accessible to all. This third assumption draws on the legacy of the sea as a global commons. Thus, the fruit of the sea may be harvested freely—first come, first serve—without the necessary planting, feeding or tending. While this legacy may have served a smaller earth population well in previous centuries, it currently holds great problems for the 8-10 billion people forecasted in the 21st century. International

agencies help promote awareness and lobby for international cooperation, but unless structures and attitudes of oceanic accountability are forged, short-term destructive practices will continue threatening sea life. As Earle suggests, “Traditionally the sea has been regarded as the common heritage for all mankind; now its care must be acknowledged as a common responsibility” (1995: 327). If the global commons is to continue sustaining life, then a sea change in social practice is needed.

The fourth assumption characterizes the sea in evil, chaotic or deathly ways, antagonistic to human life. (Yet, if the sea becomes poisonous and limited in its ability to sustain life due to human irresponsibility, then the sea will in fact become threatening to land life as well.) Through his exploration of the work of Edgar Allen Poe, Bachelard suggests that deep and dark waters represent heavy water and ultimately, deathly water to the human imagination. He explains, “Water is an invitation to die; it is an invitation to a special death that allows us to return to one of the elementary material refuges” (1983: 55).

Women writers have also made the ambiguous association of sea and death, as in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, but this overlooks the reality that for creatures of the sea, and for land species in ecological relation to the sea, the sea is a source of life. Certainly the pressure of water in the depths of the sea make unassisted human life impossible (divers have descended to 400 feet without suits and tanks), but this need not translate into an anthropocentric valuation of the sea as malevolent. A sea change in attitude enables us to claim that even though the sea is not our immediate habitat, it is the habitat of many species that are born and die within the sea.

In the past, humans have characterized the sea as an infinite void, maternal plenitude, limitless commons, and malevolent antagonist to human life. But as we enter deeper waters, a sea change in spirituality prompts opportunities for a sea change in values. When the sea becomes more valuable to us as a source of life, not death (or for “resources” that are valuable only in their death), then we can think beyond a “shallow” (short-term) orientation to the sea toward a “deep” (long-term) orientation (Naess 1989: 12-13, 27-29). Thus not only will we think in terms of personal and national responsibility, we can live with loving eyes that understand the subjectivity of the sea. Concerning the need for a sea change in attitude and practice, Earle concludes:

If I had to name the single most frightening and dangerous threat to the health of the oceans, the one that stands alone yet is at the base of all the others is ignorance: lack of understanding, a failure to relate our destiny to that of the sea, or to make the connection between the health of coral reefs and our own health, between the fate of the great whales and the future of humankind (1995: 236).

“And the sea was no more...”?

Mapping spiritual and social practice along the margins of seascape presents a challenge for the way language of the sea has been interpreted in biblical texts. From the contextual perspective of sea love, questions must be asked concerning the construction of Christian meaning. Curiously, the book of Revelation—the closing book of the Christian canon—closes with the apocalyptic vision of John of Patmos of the disappearing sea. Following the spiralling step-by-step implosion of creation, culminating in the aviary feast of evil flesh (Rev. 19:17-21) and the fleeing of heaven and earth so there is “no place left” (20:11), John announces, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more” (21:1). From God’s own

time and space comes the New Jerusalem, the divine architectural accomplishment without need of sun or sea (21:2).

We can acknowledge that John's apocalyptic imaginary was fuelled by a willingness to concede all time and space in order to end the pain and suffering he and his people were enduring. The sea, the great symbol of chaos and evil, the churning matrix of the imperial dragon and beast, could have no place in God's divine vindication. At first, John imagines the chaotic sea turning into smooth glass before the throne of God (4:6). But then the tamed and crystallised sea passes out of existence for the waters of life will come from the throne of the One (22:1). The Bride is revealed—the martyrs have not been forsaken—and the feast is set. Though they have been destroyed earlier, the nations and kings return bringing glory and honour as wedding gifts, for there is healing from the leaves of the tree of life (22:2). Is John's eschatology a beautiful, even "universal" vision through "paradoxical language" (Boring 1989: 226-231)? But John still knows who is in and who is out, who will enter and who will be left outside the city. He knows who is clean and who is filthy, who is true and who is false. The letter *closes* by *closing* the vision; the book of life contains its names and to question the letter is to risk one's own place in the holy city. Come Lord Jesus!

Catherine Keller claims that while John of Patmos and his apocalyptic communities remain trapped within rigid moral dualisms, phallogentric symbols and monarchical triumphalism, they "could perhaps sense in symbolic contour some sort of spiralling global threat to the entire interdependent fabric of life, if the powers that be, powers

clearly identified as those of empire and market, could not be checked” (1999: 51). Thus, an evocative correlation of symbols and events can be observed. John’s second angel pours his bowl into the sea and “every living thing died that was in the sea” (16:3). The fourth angel pours his bowl on the sun and “it was allowed to scorch men with fire” (16:8). By the end of the outpouring, islands flee and exist no more (16:20). Keller wonders whether John’s “discourse of emergency” helps call attention to our own environmental dangers—loss of species, global warming, and rise in the sea-level (1999: 49). She is not saying that environmental destruction is the will of God, but reading Revelation from a liberation hermeneutic unveils the divine indictment of the structural powers of human oppression. No wonder John’s marginal communities hope for “the destruction of the destroyers of earth” (11:18). Regarding the ambiguity of Revelation, Keller observes, “One tastes in the text of uncreation after all some love of the first creation” (1996: 62).

Keller’s eschatological exploration seeks neither to leave Revelation to the ecologically-negligent, “retroapocalyptic” fundamentalists (including military and economic zealots), nor to write Revelation off as “anti-apocalyptic” liberal theologians tend to do (1996: 7, 15). But she is also concerned about the apocalyptic discourses of environmentalists, including ecotheologians (1999: 55). For both religious and environmental “neoapocalypics”, discourses of crisis presume the reality of an end and close off the possibilities of a way beyond good and evil dualities (1996: 17). Keller strategises for a “counter/apocalypse” that dis/closes the end by opening possibilities, seeking relationship and affirming complexity (1996: 19). Apocalyptic eschatologies foreclose the end (and

thus become self-fulfilling prophecies?) by not recognizing relatedness, severing connections, demonising others and disposing of them in a cataclysmic event unavailable to human participation (except to bring it about). In the end, the household of life is levelled and redeveloped under the “economy” of the patriarchal One (Victorin-Vangerud 2000: 133). Thus, despite the liberatory nuances, Keller counters Revelation’s apocalyptic pattern in regard to the sea:

That the sea is eliminated from the new creation is no accident: the first creation of Genesis inherits the old Babylonian identification of the sea with the primordial: with the female, chaos, the Tehom. The oceanic womb of life, construed in various Hebrew scriptures as a monster to be contained, is now eternally vanquished, replaced by the purely paternal creation (Keller 1990: 256).

While John begins his vision from the margins, he ends up eliminating the centre through his drive for “transcendental unity” (1990: 257). His solution to evil simplifies his world, for while the martyrs do not escape death and suffering, they are ultimately the only recipients of grace. Is there a correlation between the absence of the sea and the dominion of the One? With the sea’s vacuation, John closes off the mystery of human beings’ relatedness to each other and to the creation, thus eliminating the future. Keller concludes, “Apocalypticism portrays the death of everything as the way to the eternal life of the privileged few” (1990: 260).

Keller’s counter/apocalypsis leads to questions about why this text has become so privileged in our Christian eschatological imagination. What about Job’s imagination in which the sea presents a place of wonder, depth and mystery beyond human desires for control, domestication and order (Job 38-42)? “Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb? —when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its

swaddling band... (Job 38:8-9)? In the creation account from the midst of the whirlwind, God values the chaos and creativity of other beings, other “wild” places and creatures (Wallace 1996:158). The chaos-creature Leviathan even emerges as the consummate of creatures:

On earth it has no equal, a creature without fear.
It surveys everything that is lofty;
it is king over all that are proud (Job 41:31-34).

For a Christian ecotheology, must Spirit’s sanctification of the cosmos be imagined (as in Revelation) as the elimination of what is *other* to righteous human beings? What if by (sea)water and the Spirit, we imagine a future of creaturely complexity, in which human beings are part of the Many in praise of God?

In considering sea love as a strategy of counter/apocalypse, we can learn from Keller’s wisdom: “to relate is to complicate” (1990: 257). The discourse of emergency employed previously in deepening our understanding of the sea’s precarious vitality seeks not to fall into the trap of simple dualisms or assumptions of an inevitable end to sea-life. A sea change in spirituality and practice doesn’t eliminate other senses of place, but calls for the complication of relatedness—to other species, other shores, and to one another. As wise woman Dora Jackson whispers to Abel before she dies, “We come from water... We belong to it, Abel” (Winton 1997: 145). Going out into deeper waters dis/closes the “separative self” and reclaims connectedness within the house of life (Keller 1986: 8-28). A spirituality and practice of sea love opens out time and creates a future hope for this heaven and earth by complicating our relations with others.

The book of Revelation ends with the cry, “Come Lord Jesus!” (22:20). But which Lord Jesus—the wounded Lamb (5:6) or the Faithful Word who rules with a rod of iron (19:15)? The ambiguity of Revelation’s Christology leads to questioning the privileged narrative of an apocalyptic eschatology. The strategy of counter/apocalypse remembers Jesus’ “prophetic” or “sapiential eschatology” in which human participation for the just and abundant life of this creation remains vital (Keller 1996: 51; Crossan, 1994: 56-7). In Revelation, the Lord Jesus meets his faithful elect in the new creation without the sea, yet from a sapiential perspective, Jesus meets even his enemies on the margins of the land. The Spirit of God leads Jesus not only into the desert wilderness but to the sea, where he teaches, heals and ministers “on the edge” (Mark 1:16, 2:13, 3:7, 4:1, 6:30-34). According to Keller, countering apocalypse leads from eschatology to pneumatology, a pneumatology of the “creative edge” that continues dis/closing and complicating relations toward sustainable communities (1996: 287). For an Australian coastal context, we can draw from Keller’s lead, but here the existential creative edge becomes located in a particular place. An Australian sea change in spirituality and practice leads to a pneumatology of the Sacred Edge.

The Sacred Edge

Tim Winton has it right—Australians live between two great mysteries, the desert and the sea. This paper’s exploration invites a remapping of Australian spirituality and practice based on our sense of place as seascape. I suggest that in contrast to the desert, seascape offers an alternative spiritual geography. Thus, rather than thinking we huddle and cling (negatively) to the coast, what if we consider instead living on a Sacred Edge?

Previously, Lindsay pointed out that the desert as landscape has historically provided a challenging resource for spiritual orientation. Following a desert map, Veronica Brady claims we have an opportunity today to receive anew the land with Aboriginal Australians as a sacred gift for wholeness (1990: 82). Brady's map contrasts with the haunting fascination of early colonialists in their attempts to conquer, tame and fill *terra nullius* by imposing order on the perceived chaos of the land. Yet for contemporary desert spirituality, the desert is not a place of God's absence, but God's living presence. The desert provides a sense of place for Brady's spiritual journey of travail, enlightenment, purification, prayer, baptism, transformation, and resurrection.

Another desert sojourner, Tony Kelly believes Australia is poised to make a distinctive contribution to the multi-cultural, global conversation concerning spirituality. Kelly writes of a unique Australian "spiritual imagination" that for years has been an inarticulate, even embarrassed longing for what Les Murray calls "wholespeak" (Kelly 1990: 22). Kelly believes that in our relation to the land, we meet a human limit where we move more deeply into the silences of the soul. Thus, by journeying to the interior—geographically, politically, psychologically and spiritually—we can attend to the mysterious centre, "away from the noise and business of the periphery, to the silence and dispossession of the desert." (1990: 31). Kelly joins Brady in mapping the spiritual terrain as a movement away from the busy seaboard toward the centre where we "expose ourselves to the vastness, the silence, even the menace of the land" (1990: 31).

Theologians Brady and Kelly are joined by Jungian analyst David Tacey, whose book *The Edge of the Sacred* charts the spiritual journey from the secular edge to the sacred centre (1998). Following Tacey's map, Australians descend from the surface (the urban edge) into the interior depths of red earth (the desert), which instigates a corresponding descent from the rigid, closed and rationalistic ego into the unconscious depths of the soul. When desert pilgrims make this sacrificial journey, they give up their secular psychological armour for an emergent identity more holistically characterised as intuitive, mythopoetic, and sacred. Tacey's map re-enchants the human relation to landscape by acknowledging that the autonomous ego is a myth too, one constructed by modernity and Western colonialism to protect the ego from the *other*, not only the others of the land and Aboriginal culture, but the Holy Other as well. Discovering personal depths of soul, Australians are invited to embrace their own red earth as the heart or ground of their being.

Through this short survey of desert seekers, we see that the spiritual map toward a healing archetype or divine transformation is imagined as a journey inward. Desert, land, and red earth comprise images feeding an Australian material imagination. But what if the desert is not the only mystery? What if seascape offers another sense of place for spiritual reconciliation, following Brady's map? Doesn't the sea also meet human beings as a limit-encounter, according to Kelly's map? Surely the sea offers a place of descent beyond the autonomous ego, drawing upon Tacey's map? How would we re-map the movement of the Spirit if we take seriously our love affair with the sea?

But the pathways are beginning to show. Male writers like Drewe and Winton share their own coastal insights. Female writers like Dorothy Hewitt also articulate the spiritual mysteries of seascape. But as a re-orienting map, seascape needs more expansive exploration and expression. Curiously enough, Kelly draws on maritime metaphors to speak his new imaginary. He refers to “the living, shimmering reef of our consciousness” and the “the hidden reef of spirit” for inviting spiritual seekers into the “characteristic silence in which something more deeply human is hiding” (1990: 12-13). Kelly even closes his eloquent book with a vision of another cultural crossing, a coastal re-crossing where non-indigenous Australians run from their suburban homes and workplaces, plunge into the silent ocean and begin their history all over again:

Then cleansed and refreshed, we are caught up in a huge dumper to be thumped unceremoniously onto the warm sand. And so dazed, yet with the triumph of escape, we get slowly to our feet, turn about us, and laughingly help drag the rest out of the pounding waves. And as our eyes turn to the shore, we make great gestures of greeting to those who are there long before us, those who have been quietly watching, astonished by the whole performance. Then, not without a sense of survival, not without a sense of the wonder at this place and at this grace of meeting in this moment of history, we begin slowly learning the new language of Australia’s future (1990: 133).

Kelly’s image of baptismal transformation plays with the experiences of coastal living and connects to the argument advanced earlier, that in articulating the new language of Australia’s identity, we also need to learn the language of sea. A sea change in spirituality will lead as well to a sea change in social practice—a hopeful new beginning.

But it’s not just Kelly. In the midst of his red-earth journey, Tacey slips into a seascape imaginary. He describes Australian struggles for identity as encountering “the tidal wave of the other” and being “awash in a sea of otherness” (1998: 114). Descent into the

depths of consciousness necessitates a fluid and changing self, the dissolving of solidity and form into new energies for life, and openness to mystery both within the self and beyond. For Tacey, being awash in a sea of otherness is scary, confusing, and chaotic, but joy is found in the midst. The key is in the balance of openness and closure, change and stability, security and revolution. Drawing on his oceanic metaphors, perhaps we can say that only with a face turned toward the sea can we embrace both the openness and security of the self.

Thus, while elaborating on a descent into the desert, Kelly and Tacey both draw on coastal experience to articulate their spiritual visions. In considering seascape as an alternative map of Australian spirituality, it is evocative to recall that in the early days of colonisation, people were haunted by a dream of abundance found deep in the interior heartland (Brady 1990:82). They imagined some great inland sea in the centre of the continent into which the great rivers ran. Does this mean that in terms of mapping Australian spirituality, we might imagine the edge as the centre and the centre as the edge? In the end, is the inner the outer and the outer the inner? What does our map look like now? Exploring desert spirituality and its sub-texts of maritime mystery leads us out of the dualism of edge/centre and secular/sacred. Seascape offers an alternative sense of spiritual place which challenges us to redraw our spiritual maps in ways inclusive of both the Sacred Edge and the Sacred Centre.

Conclusion

What is it about the sea? Remembering women's experiences of sea-love challenges ecotheology beyond its land-based sense of place into the depths of planet ocean. In

Australia, research has discovered that coastal living provides women and men with significant experiences of peace and well-being. Thus, a contextual focus on seascape offers alternative maps of spiritual orientation that holistically integrate red earth and blue sea, margins and centres, and the journey inward and the journey outward. The exploration suggests that a sea-change in spiritual orientation further leads to a sea-change in social practice as people gain awareness of interdependent, ecological relations with other species and their interests. Rather than living in ways that maintain egocentric and anthropocentric privilege, a spirituality of the Sacred Edge values dis/closure, openness, fluidity, and relational complexity, which offers hopeful possibility, not despairing isolation. While much more work needs to be done in gathering Australian women's experiences of sea-love, we can conclude from this exploration that in the great house of life, the movement of God's Spirit not only calls us to the land, but the sea as well.

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