



## **UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST MINISTRY FOR EARTH**

### **ENVIRONMENT & JUSTICE GREEN PAPER 1**

#### **UNDERSTANDING OUR ROOTS**

Unitarian Universalists have long stood on the side of love with people who have been silenced. Now, at a time when many religious organizations are becoming more deeply involved in environmental work, we have a special calling to join people of all races, classes, cultures, sexual orientations, and faiths to engage in the work of healing both the Earth and her people. By putting our Unitarian Universalist principles into action, we can celebrate our global interdependence and acknowledge our shared responsibility for the creation of a just and sustainable Earth.

The scope of changes in environmental policy that are required to respond to the unprecedented global environmental threats we face will require us to think in new ways and build new bridges between justice work and environmental work. The global challenges before us require major changes in the ways we live and interact with other people and other living beings. Environmental policy must now be shaped by our understanding of our interdependence with one another and with the plants, animals, air, water and soil of our Earth home.

In this first in a series of Green Papers published by Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth, we examine the work of some of those who have built the foundations for connecting environmental concerns and justice. The past fifty years have seen the evolution of at least five parallel movements:

- predominately grassroots, people-of-color environmental justice movement;
- the ecumenical/ethical eco-justice movement,
- the academic discourse on environmental ethics
- the ecofeminist movement
- and the secular, global movement around just sustainable development and sustainable futures represented by UN-sponsored Earth Summits and the Earth Charter.

Each of these have helped shape the political, intellectual, and spiritual contexts in which we today ponder our relationships with one another and with Earth.

#### **THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT IN AMERICA**

Some groups have been disinherited, marginalized, and abused for centuries. In the Americas, it can be argued that the environmental justice movement began on the day that Christopher Columbus arrived in the Bahamas. In the Caribbean, in Latin America, and in North America, conflicts continue. For over five hundred years, European invaders have tried to seize and control tribal lands and indigenous peoples. To make mines and plantations profitable in the Americas, slaves were imported from Africa. In the Americas, the roots of the environmental justice movement go far back into history, and, often, the roots connect to ongoing liberation movements and to contemporary struggles for cultural and economic survival.

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<sup>1</sup> [Photo: Withrow](#)

To understand the roots of the environmental justice movement in the United States, we can turn to Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King died more than a decade before this movement came into being, but his work and his example were direct influences on people like the residents of Warren County, North Carolina who conducted the first protests of toxic dumping, or notable leaders like Cesar Chavez, Benjamin Chavis, and environmental justice pioneer Professor Robert Bullard. In his 1963 letter from the Birmingham City Jail, Martin Luther King anticipated the environmental justice movement when he wrote, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny" and "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere".

Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement of the 1960s provided a series of powerful, evocative experiences for thousands of Unitarian Universalists. His vision moved dozens of Unitarian Universalist congregations into moral action. Men and women went to Mississippi and Georgia to speak truth to power. In 1965, Dana McClean Greeley led the Association's board of trustees out of Boston and into Selma, Alabama, to march for racial justice with King. The following year, King delivered the 1966 Ware Lecture, the major address which is presented each year to the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly.



### Excerpts from King's 1966 Ware Lecture

*...we are challenged to instill within the people of our congregations a world perspective. The world in which we live is geographically one. Now, more and more, we are challenged to make it one in terms of brotherhood. Modern man, through his scientific genius, has been able to dwarf distance and place time in chains...*

*...through our scientific genius we have made of this world a neighborhood, and now through our moral and ethical commitment we must make it a brotherhood. We must live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools. This is a fact of life. No individual can live alone, no nation can live alone...*

*...For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."*

By the time he addressed the UUA General Assembly, King was shifting his focus to ending poverty and opposing the Vietnam War. He believed that it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to rebuild American cities and to secure economic justice while billions of dollars were being spent in support of the Vietnam War. In April of 1968, King went to Memphis, Tennessee to campaign in support of striking city garbage collectors as part of the Poor People's Campaign which he had organized with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to address the issues of economic justice and housing for the poor. While there on April 4, Martin Luther King was assassinated.

The Memphis sanitation workers' strike proved a roadmap for a new advocacy movement - what came to be called "environmental justice." The focus on specific, localized environmental factors evolved from this point forward into an expanded concern for environmental remediation. Initially, existing environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and Environmental Defense Fund were little concerned with the effects of waste and polluting industries on workers in those industries or the fenceline communities which were predominately communities of color. Rather many environmentalists

focused first on "conservation" - preservation of wild lands and wild life - and later on waste and toxics and development from the point of view of harming ecosystems rather than on the effects of that waste on the environment.

***"So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound ... Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent and often even vocal sanction of things as they are...Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world?"***

Rev. Martin Luther King,  
Letter from a Birmingham Jail

In contrast, however, churches took up the call, perhaps chastened by the words Dr. King wrote from his jail cell asking them for a moral response to the problems of racial and economic injustice. One response to Dr. King's call was the 1987 landmark report on toxic wastes and race from the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice. Its then executive director was Dr. Benjamin Chavis, who would go on to head the

NAACP, and another staffer was Charles Lee who would later become a senior staff member at the Environmental Protection Agency.

Walking a similar path in 1968, César Chávez was a California labor leader who was receiving national recognition for the first time. Chavez, too, anticipated the environmental justice movement. The farmworkers of Delano, like the garbage collectors of Memphis, belonged to the great class of workers that supported American prosperity by doing much of the difficult and dangerous work that makes prosperity possible. Farm workers, too, often received little compensation and little protection. Even today, in the United States, farmworkers are predominately people of color, and they are frequently exposed to a double dose of pollution in the environment, because of their working conditions and their living conditions. Concerns about cancers and chemicals were a key part of the efforts of the United Farm Worker Union founded by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta. This union was the first farm worker union, and one of the union's first efforts was to negotiate labor contracts with growers that limited the use of DDT on certain crops.



**Photo © Jocelyn Sherman**

Chávez consistently articulated both an environmental and social justice message. He recognized the connection that we have with Earth through the food that we eat, and knew from experience that those who work the soil, those who plant and harvest the food that sustains us, are among the most unappreciated and exploited.

Building on the work of Dr. King and César Chávez, the environmental justice movement found definition and national recognition during the 1970s and 1980s. Like many populist movements, the movement developed spontaneously out of many neighborhood struggles and local confrontations. By the end of the 1980s, a variety of community, religious, and labor organizations were in conversation with each other and building alliances for action. Many were concerned about exposures to toxic substances. In states like Massachusetts, labor and community leaders worked together to pass right-to-know legislation in an effort to keep citizens informed about occupational and environmental health hazards (as an example, see box next page).

In 1979, attorney Linda McKeever Bullard represented Margaret Bean and other African-Americans in a landmark case in Houston, Texas. The lawsuit, *Bean v. Southwestern Waste Management, Inc.*, was the first that charged environmental discrimination in waste facility siting under civil rights laws. Attorney Bullard's husband was sociologist Robert Bullard. His study "Solid Waste Studies and the Black Houston

Community" identified what is now known as "environmental racism." Robert Bullard found that all five of Houston's city-owned garbage dumps, six of the eight city-owned garbage incinerators, and three of the four privately-owned landfills were sited in African-American neighborhoods, although African-Americans comprised only twenty-five percent of Houston's population. During the 1980s, Robert Bullard expanded his study of environmental racism in the American South. His 1990 book "Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality" is considered to be a classic in the "EJ" movement.

During the 80's Indigenous communities, organizations, traditional societies and tribal nations also began to gather themselves around environmental issues. In 1989 they begin meeting together on environmental and natural resource extraction issues, and national meetings in 1990 on the Dine' (Navajo) territory and in 1991, near the sacred Bear Butte in South Dakota ultimately formed the [Indigenous Environmental Network](#), as a grassroots-lead indigenous voice in regional, national and international forums on environmental and economic justice issues.

### **Churches and Communities Allied for Justice**

*During the 1970s, residents of Woburn, Massachusetts, became concerned about a high incidence of child leukemia in some neighborhoods. Woburn is a mixed-income, predominately white city, with a long history of industrial activity and toxic dumping. Some residents suspected a link between local health problems and the contamination of local drinking water supplies.*

*The Reverend Bruce Young, the pastor of Trinity Episcopal Church in Woburn, was approached by parishioners who requested church assistance. The congregation became an active partner in community organizing. Young was one of the first religious leaders to crusade for a national cancer registry in the United States.*

Joining hands with activists of color, indigenous community leaders brought attention to environmental and economic justice issues in two letters written in 1990 to the "Group of Ten" national environmental organizations. The letters called for dialogue with activists of color and indigenous leaders on the environmental crisis impacting their communities and for environmental organizations to seriously address environmental racism and improve racial diversity within their staffs and boards of directors. The "Group of Ten" organizations included Defenders of Wildlife, Environmental Defense Fund, Greenpeace, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, Wilderness Society, and the World Wildlife Fund.

The environmental justice movement became unstoppable after the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, held in 1991 in Washington, DC. This summit was probably the single most important event in the environmental justice movement's short history. The First Summit galvanized people of color around environmental and economic justice and health issues as basic civil and human rights. Delegates drafted and adopted seventeen Principles of Environmental Justice. These Principles remain relevant and powerful today as the foundation of our understanding of environmental justice:

### **Principles of Environmental Justice**

*WE THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to insure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has*

*been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:*

1. Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. Environmental justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
3. Environmental justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. Environmental justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, and, water, and food.
5. Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. Environmental justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
8. Environmental justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
9. Environmental justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
10. Environmental justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
11. Environmental justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
12. Environmental justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.
13. Environmental justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
14. Environmental justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
15. Environmental justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
16. Environmental justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
17. Environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

While rather lengthy as a definition of environmental justice, these Principles present an understanding of environmental justice that reflects the concerns and interests of the diverse groups who attended that first Summit. Even while centered on human well-being, it incorporates the Native American understanding



of human relationship with and dependence upon Earth and portends the present day when matters of justice and environment can no longer be separate.

Even though the Principles of Environmental Justice imply multiple dimensions in the consideration of justice, in the early years of the movement environmental justice was generally understood as the assertion that the impacts of environmental degradation (such as pollution) should not fall unfairly on any human group, usually identified in terms of race or class. Much of the work on environmental justice in the last fifty years has with good reason been focused on this assumption.

The Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice, and the 1991 Summit led directly to the Clinton administration's watershed [Executive Order No. 12898](#) *Federal actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations* signed by President Clinton in 1994. Applicable to all programs in all federal agencies, the Executive Order spelled out agency responsibilities for monitoring and enforcing environmental justice mandates. The mostly commonly used definition of environmental justice to grow out of these mandates is the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) definition of environmental justice:

*Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, culture, education, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair Treatment means that no group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal environmental programs and policies. Meaningful Involvement means that: (1) potentially affected community residents have an appropriate opportunity to participate in decisions about a proposed activity that will affect their environment and/or health; (2) the public's contribution can influence the regulatory agency's decision; (3) the concerns of all participants involved will be considered in the decision-making process; and (4) the decision-makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.<sup>2</sup>*

A Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit or Summit II was held in Washington, DC in October, 2002 and expanded and extended the environmental and economic justice paradigm to address globalization and international issues and laid the groundwork for the “green economy” movement being promoted by Van Jones and others.

To summarize, the environmental justice movement grew out of the concerns of low-income and medium-income people-of-color and focused much of its attention on health and safety issues. Its grassroots



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<sup>2</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/faqs/ej/index.html#faq1>

organizing techniques, its principles and values, language and symbols, and its styles of leadership brought community and labor organizing to new heights.

The founders of the uniquely American environmental justice movement laid the groundwork for today's ongoing global discourse on the relationship between environment, economics, justice, and sustainability. In addition, as they looked to local religious leaders for support, they were also awakening faith communities to a new dimension of traditional church social work.

## THE ECUMENICAL ECO-JUSTICE MOVEMENT

A parallel movement was stirring among ecumenically-engaged Christian ethicists who, inspired by the first Earth Day in 1970, suggested that, "*choosing [to work for] ecology instead of [against] poverty, or vice versa, is to make a bad choice; the way ahead is to choose both.*"<sup>3</sup> These compassionate thinkers saw that the emerging environmental movement often lacked adequate passion for the principles of social justice, and, at the same time, the social and peace activists sometimes saw anything having to do with the environment as a distraction and a lack of compassion for people's struggles. Instead, these religious visionaries recognized that environmental justice was an important facet of, but not synonymous with, what they were to term *eco-justice* - a convergence of the commitment to ecology and justice.

First coined by American Baptist leaders Richard Jones and Owen Owens, there was positive response to this new term. In the same year as the first Earth Day, a strategy to advance integrative ethics of ecology and justice became the focus of a campus ministry initiative at Cornell University. Called the Eco-Justice Project and Network (EJPN), it was coordinated for the next two decades by Presbyterian social ethicist William E. Gibson, who formulated one of the first definitions of *eco-justice*, suggesting that it embodied:

*"the well-being of humankind on a thriving earth,...an earth productive of sufficient food, with water fit for all to drink, air fit to breathe, forests kept replenished, renewable resources continuously renewed, nonrenewable resources used as sparingly as possible so that they will be available [to future generations] for their most important uses...On a thriving earth, providing sustainable sufficiency for all, human well-being is nurtured not only by the provisions of these material necessities but also by a way of living within the natural order that is fitting: respectful of the integrity of natural systems and of the worth of nonhuman creatures, appreciative of the beauty and mystery of the world of nature."*<sup>4</sup>

Since the late seventies, this ecumenical movement has grown worldwide and continued to develop and foster *eco-justice* ethics. The *eco-justice* movement articulated the ideas of "limits to growth" in a Church and Society consultation held in Bucharest in 1974 and "sustainable societies" at the 1975 Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), where Australian biologist Charles Birch explained, "*A prior requirement of any global society is that it be so organized that human life and other living creatures on which human life depends can be sustained indefinitely within the limits of the Earth. A second requirement is that it be sustained at a quality that makes possible fulfillment of human life for all people. A society so organized to achieve both these ends we can call a sustainable global society...*"<sup>5</sup>

At the 1978 Harare WCC Assembly, the harmful impacts of globalization on people and the environment came to the fore. Subsequent WCC conferences and assemblies in 1979 and 1983 continued to build on

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<sup>3</sup> Faramelli, "Ecological Responsibility and Economic Justice", 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Gibson, "Eco-Justice: New Perspective for a Time of Turning," 1985, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Birch, "Creation, Technology, and Human Survival," taped recording, 1975

the concept of eco-justice and member churches began to develop earth ministries. In the US, initiatives were led by the Eco-Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches. Roman Catholics responded to the call of eco-justice during John Paul II's 1979 trip to the Americas and a decade later the Vatican issued a message on "The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility." At the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, known best as the "Earth Summit", global religious leaders held a parallel conference which birthed a religiously and racially pluralistic network of engaged people on six continents. In 2002 the WCC, in partnership with churches and civil society organizations in Southern Africa, India, Ecuador, Canada and Sweden, initiated work on ecological debt which led in summer 2009 to a [Statement on Eco-Justice and Ecological Debt](#).

Today, nearly all the world's religions are addressing the environment/justice connection and many have issued profound statements and passionate calls to action. A good source for this inspirational reading is [The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale](#). For those of us living in the U.S. and struggling to understand the interface of environment and justice in our own lives and communities, a useful definition of Eco-justice as differentiated from environmental justice comes from [Eco-Justice Ministries](#), an independent ecumenical agency, which defines eco-justice as that which:

*Holds together commitments for ecological sustainability and human justice. Eco-justice sees environmental issues and justice issues not as competing agendas, but as intertwined elements of how humans are called to relate to God's creation. It asserts that it is not possible to care for the earth without also caring for humanity, and that seeking human justice must involve care for the environment.*

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING**

Even as ecumenical Earth ethics were developing, another parallel secular movement was focusing on the notion of sustainable development or, more, generically, *sustainability*. In 1972 the Stockholm Conference on Environment and Development set the stage for two important shifts in thinking. The Stockholm Declaration emphasized two things: the holistic connections between humanity's social, ecological, and economic obligations; and collective responsibility for *future* as well as present generations. This shift is clearly visible in the Brundtland Commission Report of 1987 which defined sustainable development as that which "*meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*"

However, the emphasis still rested primarily on meeting the needs of humans rather than the totality of what we UU's refer to as the web of existence, except as other parts of the web were of use to humans. Even the [Rio Declaration](#) of the 1992 Earth Summit had a similar anthropocentric emphasis; though perhaps for the first time there were some hints of broader environmental ethics that were to be voiced powerfully and eloquently in the [Earth Charter](#) of 2002.

The Earth Charter, a declaration of fundamental principles for a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society, embraces the view that the problems of environmental degradation, ethnic and religious conflict, violence, and social economic injustice are all interdependent. J Ronald Engel, Unitarian Universalist Professor of religious ethics, theology and ministry at Meadville Lombard from 1964-2000, was a core member of the international drafting committee for the Earth Charter which in many ways parallels the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism. He writes:

*The Charter repeatedly drives home the message that...only through the elimination of poverty and other human deprivation, and the establishment of just and non-violent social and economic relationships, will the citizens of the world be in a position to protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems...The Earth Charter thus*



*embraces what has come to be called an 'eco-justice' ethic -- a comprehensive and holistic moral approach in which ecological and social (including economic and cultural) well-being are considered both dependent and independent variables. It is not possible to adequately address one without also addressing the other; yet each also needs to be addressed on its own terms.*<sup>6</sup>

## ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental ethics is a subfield within Western philosophical and religious ethics that also emerged in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the main, it is an academic field concerned with the articulation, systemization, and defense of systems of value that guide human treatment of and behavior in the natural world.

Most agree that the historical American roots of environmental ethics are in the work of Aldo Leopold whose short essay "The Land Ethic" in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) first provided an evocative articulation of ethical guidelines for human interactions with nature. In his essay, Leopold claimed that a land ethic, "simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land."

The ecologist Rachel Carson also inspired the development of environmental ethics. Beginning in the late 1950's, she used magazine articles to expose the dangers of post-war radio-active materials, pesticides, and herbicides. In her book, *Silent Spring*, she sounded the alarm that industrial society was killing or threatening the health not only of birds and other animals, but humans as well.

In the late 1960's as King was addressing poverty and Chavez was organizing farm labor, more pivotal voices from the emerging environmental ethics discipline were giving voice to other ideas that would reshape American thinking. In 1967 Lynn White blamed much of the environmental crisis on ideas that he believed had incubated for centuries within Christianity. A year later the biologist Garrett Hardin argued that there is a "tragedy of the commons" wherein, given an ecosystem open to all, individuals pursuing their own interests degrade that ecosystem's resources and their own life-prospects if there are no mutually agreed-upon constraints to limit self-interested behavior and prevent overexploitation. In the same year, Paul Erhlich published *The Population Bomb*. E.F Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*, poet Gary Snyder's Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Turtle Island* and Herman Daly's extensive work on "steady state economy", also framed this decade.



***Each living being is a swirl in the flow, a formal turbulence, a 'song'. The land, the planet itself, is also a living being - at another pace.***

***Anglos, Black people, Chicano, and the others beached up on these shores all share such views at the deepest levels of their old cultural traditions – African, Asian, or European.***

***Hark again to those roots, to see our ancient solidarity, and then to the work of being together on Turtle Island."***

Gary Snyder, from the introduction to *Turtle Island*, 1969

<sup>6</sup> Engel, "The Earth Charter as a New Covenant for Democracy," 2007.

These and many other voices created an intellectual fervor that precipitated the world's first "Earth Day" in 1970. Earth Day further focused attention on environmental values and brought forth a grassroots movement that remains vibrant today. After Earth Day, the term environmental ethics would come into common usage, and environmental ethics would emerge as a scholarly field.

The next watershed in environmental ethics occurred in 1972 when the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined and explained the term "Deep Ecology." The term quickly became a generalized catchphrase (much like the word sustainability today) for most environmental ethicists claiming nature had intrinsic value. It is likely some of the tensions between social activists and environmentalists stem from the debates that swirled around Naess's notion of deep ecology. In the deep ecologists' view the existing, more anthropocentric form of environmental ethics was concerned only with human well being and was thus unwillingly to make the changes needed to sustain ecosystems.

Another topic that remains controversial today arose around the "Rights of Non-Human Nature" conference held in California in 1974. This conference was inspired by a 1972 law review article entitled "Should Trees Have Standing?" written by University of Southern California law professor Christopher Stone, who argued that natural objects, including trees, have interests and should have standing in the courts and be represented by sympathetic humans. Among those who attended were Native American scholar Vine Deloria, who in *God is Red* accused Christianity of waging a genocidal war against Indians and nature and suggested that only indigenous wisdom could save the planet; George Sessions and Bill Devall, who were to publish the book, *Deep Ecology* in 1985; and process theologian, John Cobb, whose conference paper "Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology" (1972) was the first of many he would write on Christian environmental responsibility.

Also co-evolving in this same time period was the concept of Animal Welfare ethics (the subject of a future UUMFE "green paper"). Philosopher Tom Regan, following in the steps of Englishman Jeremy Bentham, argued that individual rights should be extended to all beings conscious of their own good, and the Australian Peter Singer contended that all sentient organisms capable of experiencing pleasure and pain deserved moral consideration. Primatologist Jane Goodall's work overturned assumptions about human uniqueness by documenting the ability of primates to use tools, suffer, and express emotions.

## ECOFEMINISM

"OUR PLANET, CLOSE  
TO WOMEN, WOULD  
BECOME VERDANT  
AGAIN FOR  
EVERYONE."

Francoise d'Eaubonne who coined  
the word *ecofeminisme* in 1974

Also in the 1970's many feminists began to see a strong similarity between the oppression of women and the abuse of nature and to argue that the roots of both are in the dualistic patriarchal worldview that has been supported by most western religions. Today ecofeminists see much of what is being discussed by environmental ethicists as a continuation of such hierarchical thinking. Their goal is to reshape the established dualities of mind/body, nature/culture, male/female, anthropocentric/eco-centric, and human/nonhuman dualisms in nonhierarchical, nonpatriarchal ways. In this way, feminists believe we can create a new way of seeing the world and living in the world as interdependent members of the ecological community.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Daly, "Eco-Feminism, Reverence for Life, and Feminist Theological Ethics", Lois K. Daly, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2317>.

In one of the first ecofeminist books written in 1975, *New Woman/New Earth*, Rosemary Ruether said: "Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society."<sup>8</sup>

Ruether and other feminists saw that classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and speciesism were all intertwined with environmental issues.

Writer Alice Walker and others more directly linked racism, gender, and environment by referring to themselves as *ecowomanists*. While the ecofeminist sees the degradation of Earth of a piece with the oppression of women; the ecowomanist expresses the burden of this as experienced by women of color.

Another offshoot of the eco-feminist movement relevant to Unitarian Universalists was those eco-feminists for whom spirituality is an important part of their justice activism. For many, this spirituality is Earth-based, including pagan, pantheist, and Wiccan spiritualities. Starkhawk is well-known to UUs as both a pagan and an activist for justice, and her ["Five-Point Agenda"](#) speaks clearly to the issues of environment and justice by linking the sacred values of peace, community and family; diversity, self-determination, environment; and human needs and social justice.

***"some of us have become used to thinking that woman is the nigger of the world, that a person of color is the nigger of the world, that a poor person is the nigger of the world. But, in truth, Earth itself has become the nigger of the world..."***

Alice Walker  
In *Living By the Word*, 1999

## SUMMARY

As this brief history shows, the intersection of environment and justice is approached by many paths. Some arrive at this junction via their work on anti-racism and anti-oppression and call this intersection "environmental justice" or "eco-feminism". Others approach the crossroads out of their love and concern for a natural world. Still others arrive wearing scholarly or religious mantles and call their work "environmental ethics" or "eco-justice". But all come with a growing awareness that in the name of justice for unborn generations there is a moral/ethical/religious imperative to save Earth.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Do any of the five movements speak to you more personally or directly than others? If so, why?

How have your ideas about justice work changed after reading this Green Paper?

Do you belong to environmental organizations? What is their record on and commitment to addressing issues of injustice as part of their environmental work?

How about social justice organizations? What is their record on addressing environmental concerns as part of their work?

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<sup>8</sup> Ruether, *New Woman/New Earth*, 1975, 204.

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This list of resources in ecological ethics and eco-theology has been compiled Charles Demm for Professor Wesley Wildman, Boston University. It is current as of October 1, 2003.

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