Implementing Green Theology in Reform Synagogues

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

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Los Angeles, California

April 8, 2015
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Abstract

This thesis explores how different non-Jewish theologies understand environmental concerns from a spiritual perspective (known as “green theologies”) and proposes a Jewish green theology based on these influences and Jewish interpretations of biblical texts. As a way of testing those ideas, it looks at how American Reform congregations currently engage in environmental issues and offers practical suggestions for congregations to increase greening efforts more successfully.

While recent scholarship offers many Jewish perspectives on the environment, few scholars focus on the theological aspect of Jewish environmentalism. Those who do write about green theology from a Jewish perspective often focus on only one key aspect or approach. This project offers a more comprehensive approach to a green Jewish theology. After establishing a Jewish green theology and the Jewish mandate to care for the environment, I investigate successes and failures of greening efforts in the field. I looked for a correlation between the success of greening efforts in congregations and the amount of learning that takes place before and during greening efforts; I offer practical advice for how American Reform congregations can engage successfully in greening efforts.

The main material used in this project are religious-environmental writing by Jewish and Christian theologians, deep ecology philosophers, and scholars of dark green religion. My research for the third chapter came from interviewing rabbis and lay-leaders from 10 American Reform congregations around the country.

Acknowledgements

I offer immense gratitude to the following people:

First, and foremost, to my advisor Dr. Leah Hochman, for your encouragement, wit, and meticulously editing. Thank you for guiding me and enthusiastically helping me turn vague ideas and my passion for the environment into a thoughtful, concrete project. Rabbi Richard Levy for guiding me spiritually and giving me a deeper love for Torah. Rabbi Dr. Rachel Adler for challenging me to take on the most difficult questions of our time. Rabbi Dr. Dvora Weisberg for always taking care of your students and opening up the world of Talmud to me. Rabbi Dr. Tamara Eskenazi for your incredible scholarship and teaching me how biblical texts can transform our world. Rabbi Dr. William Cutter for your poetry, pushing me to keep working on my Hebrew, and always reminding me that the work is never complete. All of the other professors at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion for caring deeply about your students, both as learners and individuals. Rabbi Joel Simonds for your mentorship, agreeing to disagree, debating the state of the union, and ice cream. Rabbi Morley Feinstein for your incredible support during the placement process and for continually sending Jewish environmental writing my way. Dan Feder and Peninsula Temple Sholom for welcoming me into your *sukkat shalom*.

My parents Robin and Darryll for your love, wisdom, humor, and for teaching me invaluable computer skills from a very young age. And Noah for patiently supporting me, challenging me, and being the best partner in crime. I can't wait for our next adventure.

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Introduction

Given the increasing scientific evidence of global climate change and the negative implications of human behavior on the environment, many Americans feel the need to make changes to their personal lives in an attempt to lessen damage to the environment. Changes might include switching to an electric car, lowering the thermostat by a few degrees, using reusable shopping bags, or installing landscaping that requires less water. Governing policies also affect our behavior and include national energy policies and local plastic bag bans. The term "greening efforts" encompasses a wide-range of actions that affect the environment and can be small-scale like switching to energy efficient light bulbs to bigger choices like getting rid of a car altogether and using public transportation or replacing heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. To what degree a family engages in greening can depend on money, time, and location. Installing solar panels or buying an electric car requires financial ability and realiable access to the sun. Getting rid of a car depends on having the extra time needed to use public transportation. Geography also influences one's ability to make environmental changes. For example, living too far of a distance from a grocery store, a bus stop, or work place makes it much more difficult to get rid of the car. Despite the challenges, greening is becoming more affordable and many Americans feel an increasing obligation to overcome the challenges in order to maintain a more environmentally friendly lifestyle.

Many American Reform Jews want to see those same greening efforts taking place in their religious community because doing so reflects the care of the congregation for the environment. Many Reform congregations around the country are starting green committees to adopt environmental policies and beginning community greening projects that care for the earth. My home congregation in Bellevue, Washington, Temple B'nai Torah, attempted unsuccessfully

to start greening projects from 2009 to 2010. After wondering how a congregation in an environmentally conscious city could struggle to implement greening I decided to look more closely at the approach of the committee and other factors that may have impacted their inability to succeed. When I spoke with members of the committee and former synagogue board members I learned that the initial interest came from two congregants who learned about greening practices taking place in other Seattle-area synagogues. Those two congregants approached their clergy and board of directors to ask for support and permission to create a green committee and received approval to move forward with a $2,000 budget from the board. Forming a green committee with a few other members, the congregants tried to implement a "zero waste celebration policy" and to install an electric car charging station. According to my interviews, the clergy supported the idea in theory but did not put any specific effort into spreading the message or creating learning opportunities for the congregation as a whole. The green committee led one text-based learning session on Yom Kippur in 2009, but it seems they were not able to do more learning or involve the congregation in any other ways.

This failure of the greening initiative made me think of the story in the Talmud of Rabbi Tarfon and some elders in Lod. As they reclined in an upper story in the house of Nitza the question arose about which is greater, study or action. Rabbi Tarfon answered saying, "Action is great." Rabbi Akiva answered saying, "Study is greater." The others answered saying, "Study is greater because it leads to action."[1] While the temptation to jump into action arises because it satisfies a desire to see results quickly and seems easier than the intellectual pursuit of studying, the Talmudic opinion here agrees with Rabbi Akiva. Study is greater than action because it leads to action. And while actions do hold great importance, both for the rabbis of the Talmud and for contemporary results-driven society, I agree with Rabbi Akiva; starting with learning and

[1] b. Kiddushin 40b. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

continuing to intertwine that learning with action helps people know that what they care about as a community and what they try to achieve aligns with the values and goals of their institutions. For Reform Jews, greening in a Reform congregation could involve only an individual synagogue, or it might include the Reform movement and/or Judaism at large. I began to wonder if my home congregation missed a critical step in the process of engaging the congregation in their greening initiatives by beginning their work quietly as a small group of lay leaders and jumping straight into action with a minimal amount of community-wide study.

I interviewed nine more Reform congregations around the country that engage in greening projects and found varying degrees of learning with corresponding levels of success and longevity. Many congregations focused on environmental education from an informational, economic, and scientific point of view and most had a minimal amount of learning about environmental responsibility from a Jewish perspective. Of those congregations that did incorporate Jewish learning, most taught about environmental law and application of law rather than texts on the theological basis for a Jewish environmental consciousness. For example, they taught the Jewish value of *bal tashchit*, the biblical commandment not to waste, without teaching the evolution of that value, why that mandate might be included in God's commandments, and why it matters for Jews spiritually and religiously. This thesis investigates the theological basis for Jewish environmentalism in an effort to help American Reform congregations engage in environmental projects more successfully.

In the first chapter I discuss the theoretical arguments in favor of green theology. In 1962, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, an environmental science book that exposed the harmful effects of chemical pesticides on humans, animals, and the earth and the chemical industry's complacency on the issue. This book ignited the environmental debate in America and

strengthened the environmental movement, one of the significant social revolutionary movements of the 1960s. Environmental historian Bill Kovarik wrote, "*Silent Spring* is often seen as a turning point in environmental history because it opened a larger national dialogue about the relationship between people and nature and merged public health and conservation movements. Although it was not the beginning of the 'environmental movement,' it was a major accelerator."[2] Five years later, medieval historian Lynn White, Jr. published the article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." In this article, White suggests that the spread and acceptance of Christianity and the Bible played a seminal role in creating the context for human exploitation of nature. As basis for his argument White references Genesis 1:26-28, which reads:

> And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on the earth." And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."[3]

White suggests that these verses are anthropocentric, meaning that they promote the belief that humans are the most important element of the world and that the well-being of humans should come at the expense of all other forms of life on earth. Environmental scholar Jeanne Kay names this approach of reading and accepting these verses as God giving humans dominion to serve as

[2] "Sixties: 1960-69," *Environmental History Timeline*, accessed March 9, 2015, http://66.147.244.135/~enviror4/20th-century/sixties-1960-1969/.

[3] *Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation - Second Edition* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1985). I use this translation unless otherwise noted. In his article, White references the biblical verses, but does not quote them.

master over nature without any care for the well-being of the earth the "school of despotism."[4] The school of despotism competes with proponents of the stewardship model, the approach that interprets to mean that God intends for humans to act as caretakers of the earth. White is not a biblical scholar and does not provide an exegetical analysis for these verses nor does he make an effort to understand these verses in context of the biblical canon. Yet the impact of his work on the field of religion and nature is unparalleled. I frame my discussion of green theology in chapter one around White's article because he extended the environmental debate beyond the secular realm and into the religious sector. Many religious thinkers felt compelled to respond; I analyze some of the ways Christian thinkers came to the defense of the biblical text.

Some thinkers, both religious and secular, agreed with White's criticism and felt inspired to create a different green theology that is not based in a major world religion. I focus specifically on Arne Næss, a Norwegian environmental philosopher who set the foundation for what became the deep ecology movement, and on religious studies scholar Bron Taylor, who studies dark green religions. Næss believed that God is part of all natural components of the universe. He created a movement that relied on the theological belief that God intended for the structure of the world to be one of complete equality. For Næss, all elements of earth have inherent value regardless of their utility for humans. But Næss' extreme discomfort with the anthropocentric worldview White describes results in a borderline misanthropic movement because he tries so hard to equalize humans with other creatures that he sounds as if he dislikes humanity. He understands that the complex ecosystem depends on a balance of all the natural elements, but his principles to maintain that balance make it difficult for individuals to do much of anything without damaging it. Yet deep ecology provides a theological basis for

[4] Jeanne Kay, "Concepts of Nature in the Hebrew Bible," in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics*, ed. Martin D. Yaffee (United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2001), 87.

understanding environmentalism that can help guide the development of a Jewish green theology.

Taylor studies another green theological movement outside the major Western religions that he calls “dark green religion.” Like deep ecology, dark green religions are based on the belief that nature itself is sacred apart from its value and utility for humans. Dark green religion does not worry about minimizing human impact in the world to maintain equilibrium in nature, but focuses on preserving nature in order to ensure humankind’s ability to experience God through nature. Dark green religions provide an interesting model for a Jewish green theology because the environmental consciousness comes as a natural outgrowth of fundamental beliefs about God and humanity’s place in the world. I am interested in setting a foundation for why people should care about the environment because they are Jewish. Dark green religions could provide a helpful framework for how a religion develops environmental consciousness as a key element of the religion because it came naturally out of theological beliefs and what those beliefs imply about how humans should act in the world.

After investigating Christian green theological responses to White, the philosophical foundations of deep ecology, and the theological basis of dark green religions, my investigation turns to what a Jewish green theology might look like. Chapter two looks at the Jewish responses to White, how Jewish authors examine other biblical texts and draw on the non-Jewish approaches outlined in chapter one. Constructing a theological stance that focuses on the Jewish relationship to nature elevates environmental consciousness beyond good-will actions to a spiritual practice that focuses on a Jewish responsibility to protect the earth as a religious expression in partnership with God and for the sake of future generations. I frame the construction of a Jewish green theology around Jewish responses to and the theological

implications of the two creation narratives in Genesis. More specifically I focus on two texts, Genesis 1:26-28 as quoted above and Genesis 2:15, which reads, "[Adonai] God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it."

Many Jewish scholars read these two directives in the creation narratives as representative of a balance and an attempt to understand humanity's role in the world. In the first story God blesses humans, gives them food-bearing trees for sustenance, and proclaims that humans should rule over all the animals (known as the dominion theory). In the second story God makes the first human (*adam* in Hebrew) from the soil of the earth (*adamah* in Hebrew) and sets the role of master in balance with the reminder that humans, just like animals, are part of the eco-system. In the second story, God also places the first human in the garden of Eden to "till and tend it" (the shepherd theory), showing that God expects humans to work and protect the land. Both narratives rely on the larger theological motif that since God created the universe, everything belongs to God; the way humans use and care for the earth is meant to be in partnership with God and God's vision for the world. Humans do not have the freedom to exploit the resources of the earth to the point of desperation and environmental crisis.

Since most writing about Jewish environmentalism discusses *bal tashchit*, the prohibition against waste, I also discuss the evolution of this prohibition from its origin in Deuteronomy 20:19 to its contemporary application. Ultimately, the term evolved from a specific regulation not to destroy food-bearing trees during wartime to a general prohibition against wasting or destroying the resources of the earth. The theological implication of this prohibition links to the same idea of creation that insists humans should view everything as a gift from God and take the obligation to both work and preserve the land seriously.

After proposing that Jewish theology has a green mandate and that tapping into that theology provides a bedrock foundation for Jewish actions, the third chapter shows evidence of how establishing a theoretical basis for Jewish environmentalism impacts greening projects in American Reform synagogues. I frame this chapter around a narrative description of the 10 Reform congregational leaders I interviewed who reported some form of greening process. During the interviews I sought to find out what kind of greening synagogues implemented, if the greening had a theoretical component, if the greening still happens, who initiated the greening, and if any other factors impacted greening efforts. I found a variety of greening projects that I categorized as permanent (making structural changes such as replacing the HVAC system or using recycled materials for new buildings), ongoing (such as instituting composting for luncheons or maintaining a garden), or short-term (lobbying on a specific policy or creating a "*simcha* greening guide" for families). I categorized the theoretical learning component as either substantial or minimal. I tried not to hold congregations to an impossibly high standard and, therefore, counted learning as substantial when education on greening from a Jewish perspective took place in more than one setting. Of the 10 congregations interviewed I found that the four that established a substantial theoretical basis and incorporate learning throughout the greening process have the most in-depth, successful, and long-lasting greening programs. Of the six congregations that had minimal theoretical learning, three continue greening on a less impactful level and three no longer run any greening projects. I conclude from my interviews that the establishment of a learning component corresponds directly with the degree of success in greening projects, and I then offer some best-practice suggestions for establishing and incorporating learning with action. We turn now to a discussion of religion and nature more specifically.

Chapter One: Intersections of Ecology and Religion

The Roots of Green Theology

In 1967, *Science Magazine* published "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," Lynn White, Jr.'s article that changed the way environmental advocates understand and discuss Western society's relationship to the environment and the environmental crisis. White begins by acknowledging that humans modify their contexts, as all forms of life must, as a necessity for survival[5] and explains that the way humans go about modifying their environment depends largely on the history and presuppositions that underlie any given culture.[6] White suggests that most historians point to two historical epochs - the Renaissance, which includes the scientific revolution and the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th and early 19th century - as historical turning points for the way humans relate to the environment.[7] As a medieval historian, White argues that two important events of the Middle Ages created the context for human exploitation of nature: the spread and acceptance of Christianity and the agricultural development of plowing technology. White explains the scientific and technological advances of the Middle Ages and focuses specifically on the late 7th century. Although Christianity began spreading in the 4th century with the fall of the Western Roman Empire, subsequent victories over pagan European religions between the 4th and 7th centuries allowed for even greater spread and success of Christianity. In the late 600s, northern European peasants developed a stronger, three-step plow that dug deeper into the soil and also turned it, thus eliminating the need for cross plowing. As a technique used by individuals on their small plot of land cross plowing required only two oxen. The new plowing technology required eight oxen, which led to communal pooling of resources,

[5] Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in *The Environmental Handbook*, ed. Garrett De Bell, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1970), 12.
[6] *Ibid*, 15.
[7] *Ibid*, 14.

and thus with four times the power, communities increased the amount of land they farmed. Therefore, White argues, "distribution of land was based no longer on the needs of a family but, rather, on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth. Man's relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature."[8]

White asks his readers, "Is it coincidence that modern technology, with its ruthlessness toward nature, has so largely been produced by descendants of these peasants of northern Europe?"[9] For him, the answer is obviously "no." Ever since the innovation of the plow, scientific and technological advances allow for human exploitation of the environment. Yet it was the acceptance of Christian doctrine that changed the attitudes and culture of northern Europe in a way that made it acceptable, if not expected, that humans should have dominion over the earth. Furthermore, White argues that Christian doctrine regarding the creation of the world and the role of humans in relation to the world around them continues to have a profound impact on Western notions of science and technology.

White writes, "Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."[10] In his interpretation of medieval Christian doctrine, he asserts that church leaders read the Bible in a way that claimed God placed humans on earth to have dominion over all other forms of life.[11] White does not actually quote the biblical text but paraphrases it, writing, "Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and

[8] *Ibid*, 19.
[9] *Ibid*.
[10] *Ibid*, 20.
[11] Genesis 1:26-28.

rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes."[12] In essence, White blames Christian theology for the environmental problems of the twentieth century. He recognizes that not all cultures at all times read this biblical text in the same anthropocentric way and admits that "Christianity is a complex faith, and its consequences differ in differing contexts."[13] Still he wants his readers to understand the impact that the spread of Christian doctrine had on northern Europe in the Middle Ages and how that influence carried over into the scientific and technological developments of the Western hemisphere. Religious beliefs influence how people understand themselves in relation to the world around them and, consequently, how they act in and towards that world.[14] In his conclusion, he suggests that since our environmental problems are rooted in religion so, too, should our solutions be rooted in an environmentally conscious religious response.[15]

This article provoked a variety of emotional responses from readers because, for the first time, someone attacked not the symptomatic problems evident in nature but the ideological and theological beliefs of the Christian majority in America. White's blunt assessment sparked the beginning of an important ideological conversation among theologians, Christian as well as from other religions, and secular scholars. While many Christian theologians responded by refuting White's claims about Christianity, others from across the denominations recognized the need to consider seriously what a green theology would look like and to what degree basic tenets of Christian theology would need to evolve in order for a green Christian theology to have integrity. Catholic, Protestant, and trans-denominational theologians (like the Emerging Church movement) all responded to White. What follows is an analysis of green movements that

[12] White, 20.
[13] *Ibid*, 21.
[14] *Ibid*, 19.
[15] *Ibid*, 24.

emerged in the late 20th century, including Christian attempts at developing a green theology, the *deep ecology* movement, and dark green religions.

Developing a Christian Green Theology

In the decades following the publication of White's essay, Christian theologians interested in environmentalism generally took one of three approaches for developing a faith-based green theology: they promoted aspects of Christian theology that support environmentalism and ignored the texts that did not align with a green theology; they promoted aspects of Christian theology that support environmentalism and overtly rejected those texts that do not align with a green theology; or they attempted to create a Christian green theology by reframing and reconciling those texts that do not align with environmentalism.

The "creation care" movement of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) takes the first approach of using other proof texts from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament to support a Christian green theology, while avoiding the Genesis text. According to the organization's Website, Evangelical Christians should care for the earth because:

1. Christ died to reconcile all of creation to God (Col. 1:20).
2. All of creation belongs to Jesus (Col. 1:16; Ps. 24:1).
3. It fulfills the Great Commandments to love God and love what God loves. (It's hard to love a child with asthma when you're filling her lungs with pollution.)
4. Pollution hurts the poor the most, and Christians are called to care for the poor and the less powerful (Mt. 25:37-40).[16]

[16] "Why Creation Matters," *Evangelical Environmental Network*, accessed January 28, 2015, http://creationcare.org/blank.php?id=41.

These four proof texts do not directly address the environment or a call for humanity to care for the earth, but the EEN makes a theological conclusion that caring for the earth is an expression of one's love for God and God's people. One could certainly use these texts to support an existing Christian green theology, but in no way do they demand care for the earth as a fundamental element of one's theology. As an outsider to the faith, it seems that the EEN would need to reconcile the denomination's reverence for the authority of the Bible and Genesis' notion of human dominion with their proclamation that loving God means loving and caring for the earth. That being said, in a 2006 Evangelical Climate Initiative, religious leaders signed their names in support of the following statement: "This is God's world, and any damage that we do to God's world is an offense against God Himself…. Christians, noting the fact that most of the climate change problem is human induced, are reminded that when God made humanity He commissioned us to exercise stewardship over the earth and its creatures. Climate change is the latest evidence of our failure to exercise proper stewardship and constitutes a critical opportunity for us to do better."[17] Even though this statement does not provide an explanation for why the authors chose the language of stewardship over dominion, they implicitly reject the biblical understanding of the world that White critiques. Asserting these theological beliefs has not been without consequence. The EEN received a lot of criticism from other Evangelical leaders for compromising fundamental beliefs of Evangelicalism that do not align with a green theology. Founder and president of the Evangelical media network Olive Tree Ministries Jan Markell said in the episode "Citizens Class: Religion & the Environment" of the PBS series *Moyers on America*,

[17] Matthew J. Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 244.

> …we need to preach the gospel and win the lost. And not go after a science that is not proven at all. You cannot prove scientifically that the weather aberrations that are going on are man made. You just can't prove it. And in the meantime, souls are dying. Because we're spending time and money trying to figure out if in fact there's such a thing as man-made global warming. It's a massive waste of time and of resources.[18]

Other public figures do not directly criticize the EEN specifically, but make statements denouncing religious environmentalism. During the national election campaign in 2000, democratic nominee Al Gore spoke often about global warming and the environmental consequences of drilling for oil, suggesting the creation of a national energy policy that upheld environmental standards for oil companies. Political commentator Ann Coulter responded to Gore's environmental concerns writing, "The ethic of conservation is the explicit abnegation of man's dominion over the earth. The lower species are here for our use. God said so: Go forth, be fruitful, multiply, and rape the planet -- it's yours. That's our job: drilling, mining and stripping. Sweaters are the anti-Biblical view. Big gas-guzzling cars with phones and CD players and wet bars – that's the Biblical view."[19] Coulter identifies as Christian but does not declare affiliation with a specific denomination. While Coulter did not direct this comment at the work of the EEN, it comes on the heels of the EEN lobbying the United States Congress for environmental policies and her opinion demonstrates the division that exists among politically conservative Christians.

An even bolder approach is overtly rejecting fundamental Christian texts or beliefs in an effort to create a Christian green theology. Fewer people are willing to use this strategy without

[18] "Citizens Class: Religion & The Environment," *Moyers on America*, accessed March 11, 2015, http://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/print/religionandenvironmentclass_print.html.
[19] Ann Coulter, "Oil Good; Democrats Bad," *Town Hall*, accessed March 11, 2015, http://townhall.com/columnists/anncoulter/2000/10/12/oil_good;_democrats_bad/page/full.

at least attempting to reconcile the biblical text with environmental values. White unsurprisingly suggested rejecting the biblical notions of dominion in Genesis and instead claimed St. Francis of Assisi, who lived in the 12th and 13th centuries, as the "patron saint for ecologists."[20] St. Francis recognized that humans are just one of many species on earth and preached humility and a love for all nature and animals.

At first glance Brian McLaren, a pastor in the trans-denominational Emerging Church movement, seems to take an approach similar to the EEN, by ignoring the Genesis narrative and instead focusing on the ministry of Jesus as a model for Christians to care for the earth. McLaren suggests that a reconception of Jesus' ministry is necessary to address what he calls the "spirituality crisis" of our world, which is "the failure of the world's religions, especially its two largest religions, to provide a framing story capable of healing or reducing [environmental breakdown]."[21] Contemporary American Christians neglect the calling of Jesus in favor of an imperialistic worldview, he argues, but if they were to take Jesus more seriously they would find a narrative that provides a model of hope and healing for the world. McLaren writes, "Jesus counters the imperial framing story that isolates humanity from creation by placing us back with our fellow creatures in a story of creation…. For Jesus, God's natural ecosystem is not only one of care, but also of limits."[22] McLaren calls this alternative story "God's sacred ecosystem," in which Christians hold central the belief that God dreams of a "sacred ecosystem whose dynamic dance of give and take, procreation and death, production and recycling…together produce unimaginable beauty, novelty, and possibility."[23] McLaren gets closer at creating a foundation

[20] Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in *The Environmental Handbook*, ed. Garrett De Bell, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1970), 26.
[21] Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: When the World's Biggest Problems and Jesus' Good News Collide*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 5.
[22] *Ibid*, 138-139.
[23] *Ibid*, 131.

for a Christian green theology by reframing Jesus' ministry in a way that addresses the realities and challenges of life in the 21st century.

In his book *Everything Must Change: When the World's Biggest Problems and Jesus' Good News Collide,* McLaren does not address White's critique of Christianity, but expresses his response to the Genesis dilemma in a blog post for the religious Website *Patheos*.[24] In the post "The President's 'Phony' Theology," McLaren calls for Christians to retire the "Industrial Era theology of dominion" and instead adapt a theology that reads Genesis 1:26-28 in the context of the full creation story. The first contextualization McLaren cites comes directly from Genesis 1:26, noting that human dominion "is an expression of humanity being created in 'the image of God'…. As image-bearers of God, we should, for example, show foresight to conserve God-given resources to benefit future generations rather than grasping for the most profit in the least amount of time to benefit today's one-percenters."[25] He means that God did not create humans to exploit nature without any stipulations. Rather, God created humans to have dominion over the earth in the same way that God would presumably rule the world with care and with the intent of sustainability so that the world can continue to exist in the future.

The second contextualization McLaren provides for these verses comes from the directive in Genesis 2:15 for humanity to "till and tend" the Garden of Eden. McLaren writes, "The idea is that the garden—the creation—serves us and other creatures by providing habitat, food and shelter, and beauty. And in turn we must serve it."[26] By reading Genesis 1:26-28 in the context of the whole creation narrative, McLaren explains the role of dominion as one of stewardship that demands care of the earth, balance, and forethought for future repercussions.

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[24] Brian McLaren, "The President's 'Phony' Theology," *Patheos,* accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/brianmclaren/2012/02/the-presidents-phony-theology/#ixzz3Q9ex9RFs.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] *Ibid*.

We will see in chapter two how this approach of reframing God's charge to humanity as a responsibility of stewardship resonates in a lot of Jewish writings about green theology.

Steve Bishop articulates the same idea of stewardship as McLaren, but he does so not by reframing the Genesis text but by criticizing White for not properly understanding and misrepresenting the creation narrative. According to Bishop the Genesis narrative sets up a system that is neither anthropocentric nor misanthropic but theocentric, meaning centered on God.[27] Bishop writes, "The opening chapters of Genesis show that humanity's relationship with the rest of creation is ambiguous: we are part of it and we are above it. We are part of the earth and we are to rule over it…. It is these truths held in tension that keep Christianity free of the extremes of biocentrism and anthropocentrism.... Christianity, contrary to White, is neither anthropocentric nor biocentric: it is theocentric."[28] Bishop argues that God is the central reason for why humans should take care of the earth. Humans can use the earth's resources without exploiting them because God placed humans in this unique role of stewardship, to have dominion and also to tend to the earth to ensure its longevity. Environmentalism in this form is an expression of one's belief that the earth belongs to God and that God requires humans to treat the earth in a balanced way. This reframing of the Genesis text may work for some Christians because it does not require giving anything up theologically and, in fact, supports the idea that if properly understood, Christian theology is inherently a green theology.[29]

[27] Steve Bishop, "Green theology and deep ecology: New Age or new creation?," accessed January 29, 2015, http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ecology_bishop.pdf.
[28] *Ibid*.
[29] It is worth noting that in my research I found very few academic articles on Christian green theology. Most authors who address religious greening efforts and Christian green theology are pastors sharing their personal understand of theology and biblical texts.

Deep Ecology and Pantheism

In the years immediately following the publication of White's article, a new approach to green theology called deep ecology started gaining popularity. The deep ecology movement came out of the writings and leadership of the Norwegian environmental philosopher Arne Næss. Næss was influenced by pantheism, the belief that God is not a distinct and separate force with power over the natural elements but that God is in all aspects of the natural world, and the writings of Baruch Spinoza. Næss agrees with White's criticism of modern Western culture as influenced by Christianity and felt that even environmental awareness groups failed to understand and address the underlying ideological and cultural influences causing environmental exploitation. White challenges his readers either to change Christian ideology drastically or to create a new environmental ideology, and Næss lays the foundation for the development of that environmental ideology and its practical application.

While deep ecology is not explicitly anti-Christian, its theoretical basis directly contrasts the Christian promotion of anthropocentrism as articulated by White. As previously mentioned, White criticizes Christianity for using the creation narrative in Genesis as a basis for the belief that God created humans as separate and distinct from all other living organisms on the planet in order to rule over them and the earth. Næss agrees with the pantheistic belief that God is part of all natural components of the universe; for Næss, deep ecology is not just about equality for animals, it is a theological statement about God's intention for the nature order of the universe and the way humanity has used its power perversely to take advantage of and change God's intended structure for the world. The movement tries to convey a universal accessibility by

drawing on many philosophies and religious traditions, but does not necessarily represent itself as a replacement for traditional religious affiliation.[30]

The two main tenets of the ideological foundation of deep ecology, which Næss calls "ultimate norms", are self-realization and biocentric equality.[31] Self-realization discusses the awareness of seeing one's self as part of a whole system in which all living creatures are connected to each other. Self-realization comes from a process of stretching oneself and one's ecological consciousness through "questioning of ourselves, the assumptions of the dominant worldview in our culture, and the meaning and truth of our reality."[32] Without saying it explicitly, I think the leaders of the deep ecology movement want modern Westerners to look critically at Christian theology and ideology as understood from the creation narrative. Questioning onself means looking inward to uncover beliefs about humanity's place in the world and corresponding right actions. This process of looking inward implies that the answer is not to be found in scripture or other tenet of religious belief.

Bill Devall, a sociologist, and George Sessions, a philosopher, studied with Næss and co-authored *Deep Ecology*: *Living as if Nature Mattered* in 1985. Under the leadership of Næss, Devall and Sessions along with philosopher Alan Drengson expanded on the two basic tenets of deep ecology and wrote what has become the ideological platform for the movement. Devall and Sessions write, "spiritual growth, or unfolding, begins when we cease to understand or see ourselves as isolated and narrow competing egos and begin to identify with other humans from our family and friends to, eventually, our species."[33] Self-realization is the process of

[30] My guess is that leaders of the deep ecology movement removed the theological aspect from the ideological writings as an attempt to inspire Christians to rethink their religious beliefs about their place in the world without having to actually give up the religion and replace it with something new.
[31] Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology*: *Living as if Nature Mattered*, (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1985), 66.
[32] *Ibid*, 9.
[33] *Ibid*, 67.

understanding that everything in the universe is connected and therefore considering how one's actions affect the totality of nature.[34] For Næss this understanding came out of the belief that God is in all individual aspects of nature and therefore the larger ecosystem.

The second tenet, biocentric equality, works in relation to self-realization. As opposed to anthropocentrism, which endows humans with dominance over all other creatures, biocentric equality is a belief that all living beings on the planet have equal status and rights. Therefore, humans have no justification for exploiting the resources of the planet for the benefit of humanity alone. As Devall and Sessions write, "There is a basic intuition in deep ecology that we have no right to destroy other living beings without sufficient reason. Another norm is that, with maturity, human beings will experience joy when other life forms experience joy and sorrow when other life forms experience sorrow. Not only will we feel sad when our brother or a dog or a cat feels sad, but we will grieve when living beings, including landscapes, are destroyed."[35]

The potential downfall to biocentric equality is that Næss tries so hard to counter anthropocentrism that an extremism undercuts its potential value to the environment. To say that humans are completely equal with all plants and animals means that there should never be a legitimate reason to destroy any element of the environment. To live by this tenet without going completely off the grid is impossible. There must be some concessions to this belief, and Devall and Sessions even write that humans should not destroy without "sufficient reason," implying that they believe there are legitimate reasons for taking actions that result in environmental harm. The idea comes from the intention of an ecological consciousness, same as the environmental organization Leave No Trace, but thinking through the practical application of the ideology undercuts the idea itself.

[34] *Ibid,* 7-8.
[35] *Ibid,* 75.

Deep ecology requires that believing in the two basic tenets leads to taking concrete action in the world. Biocentric equality and self-realization are insufficient and pointless if the beliefs do not create real change in the world. Likewise, action alone is equally insufficient. A person must believe in these two principles in order to live in the world with the best intentions for the environment. The deep ecology movement criticizes many people who do good environmental work but who do it from a dominant worldview of anthropocentrism. In fact, the name deep ecology came out of Næss contrasting what he calls "shallow ecology" with "deep, long-range ecology."[36] Alan Drengson writes, "The short-term, shallow approach stops before the ultimate level of fundamental change, often promoting technological fixes (e.g., recycling, increased automotive efficiency, export-driven monocultural organic agriculture) based on the same consumption-oriented values and methods of the industrial economy. The long-range deep approach involves redesigning our whole systems based on values and methods that truly preserve the ecological and cultural diversity of natural systems."[37] Essentially, the deep ecology movement's beliefs align with White's belief that scientific advancements cannot save the environmental crisis until the underlying ideologies that influence behavior change. Devall and Sessions go so far as to criticize the ideology of Resource Conservation and Development as an "ideology which sees Nature as material for human use, consumption and development."[38] Deep ecology takes this expectation of authentic belief and concrete action seriously because both are understood as necessary aspects of deep ecology's solution to the environmental problems that humanity created.

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[36] Arne Næss, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary," *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism*, ed. George Sessions (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1995), 151-155.
[37] Alan Drengson, "Some Thought on the Deep Ecology Movement," *Foundation for Deep Ecology*, accessed February 2, 2015, http://www.deepecology.org/deepecology.htm.
[38] Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology*: *Living as if Nature Mattered,* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1985), 115.

While the deep ecology movement makes attempts to ground itself in reality, its idealism falls short in terms of giving its believers a realistic way to live the values. As mentioned above, to develop a life style that aligns strictly with the basic tenet of biocentric equality would prove almost impossible. Devall and Sessions focus more on changing worldviews and less on how to live this ideology practically. They criticize the use of environmental resources for human benefit, but make no attempt to try and draw boundaries around what they might consider an acceptable level of use of natural resources in order to provide for basic needs like creating shelter, providing food, and access to water. On some level, anything humans do comes at the expense of other living organisms, so proclaiming a blanket equality that denies exploitation of natural resources is impractical.[39]

Dark Green Religion

Many people with a strong environmental consciousness, whether raised Christian or in another religious tradition, develop a spiritual relationship to nature that takes on religious-like qualities. This conclusion may intentionally take the place of a traditional religious affiliation, exist alongside a traditional religious affiliation, or exist as a form of spiritual connection and expression without any serious self-awareness or reflection. Religious studies scholar Bron Taylor coined the term "dark green religion" to signify a distinct expression of an ideology in which a person believes that nature itself is sacred. For some people who experience nature as a religion, conventional terms like "religion" and "God" may not even seem applicable to describe their relationship to nature. Dark green religion differs from more conventional notions of green

[39] I have not yet found any critiques of Deep Ecology that focus on this question about practical applicability. Most of the critiques I have found criticize Deep Ecology for being anti-human or anti-human liberty, which Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue respond to in the Introduction to *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology* (North Atlantic Books, 1995).

theology, in which one understands his or her environmental consciousness within the context of a larger religious ideology and set of behavioral obligations. For dark green religion, nature itself is "sacred, has intrinsic value, and is therefore due reverent care."[40]

Taylor expands on dark green religion through a more specific subgroup he calls "aquatic nature religion" and employs the example of the spirituality of surfing. For some surfers, many of whom identify themselves as "soul surfers," surfing is a religious experience. Taylor writes, "This subset of the global surfing community should be understood as a new religious movement…. For these individuals, surfing is a religious form in which a specific sensual practice constitutes its sacred center, and the corresponding experiences are constructed in a way that leads to a belief in nature as power, transformative, healing, and sacred."[41] Unlike the approaches to a Christian green theology discussed and the roots of deep ecology, dark green religions are not meant to be a response to White's call for a new religious ideology. Though their basic attributes happen to address White's challenge to his readers, Taylor writes that dark green religions "tends to involve two, closely related dimensions. (1) A perception that nature is sacred (in some way) and worthy of reverent care…. Conversely, damaging nature is considered to be an unethical and desecrating act. (2) Feelings of belonging and connection to the earth – of being bound to and dependent upon the earth's living systems."[42] Like deep ecology, being a soul surfer can be a religion to some people but does not necessarily require one to give up another religious affiliation.

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[40] Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 10.
[41] Bron Taylor, "Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Nature Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 75, no. 4 (December 2007): 923-51, doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfm065.
[42] Bron Taylor, "Focus Introduction: Aquatic Nature Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 75, no. 4 (December 2007): 863-74, doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfm065.

The potential problem to using dark green religion as a basis for a green theology is that it does not necessarily encompass the whole of human experience. For example, many soul surfers become advocates for beach protection and conservation of areas notoriously desirable for surfing. Though beach protection is important, they do so because the value of caring for the earth is in the context of surfing. This short-sightedness would be an example of what Næss called "shallow ecology" because it is a more isolated form of environmentalism and is essentially self-serving so that surfers can maintain beach areas to keep surfing. Again, this judgment is against beach advocacy, as Næss explains that the world needs both shallow ecology and deep ecology, but that it lacks a larger framework for understanding humanity's role in the world.

Like deep ecology, dark green religion focuses on the theoretical aspect of the human relationship to the world and God through nature, but lacks any explicit guidance for practical application. This absence could be because Taylor uses the term "dark green religion" to describe people he identifies in the world as expressing certain ideological beliefs about nature. Unlike the major religions of the world or even the deep ecology movement, no one person sat down to write the tenets of dark green religion and out of it created movements like the soul surfers. Taylor identifies other forms of dark green religion, mainly animism and Gaian spirituality.[43] Animism is the belief that non-human life forms have a soul; animalists therefore seek to communicate with those non-human life forms. Similarly, Gaian spirituality describes the belief that the biosphere has consciousness as part of or an expression of God. For these different types of dark green religions, Taylor identifies individual examples of people who live these religions, but does not reference a subset of society as with the soul surfers. Perhaps more dark green religions will develop ideological guidelines for living in the world if they gain more

[43] Taylor, 14-16.

momentum as green theologies. One important aspect of religion in general is the forming of a community when individuals with a common ideology gather together. The soul surfers have this religious attribute; perhaps, their identification as a community allows for the individuals to begin advocating for beach preservation as an outcome of their communal beliefs.

Conclusion

White specifically blames Christians for using the theology and ideology of the creation narrative of Genesis to exploit the earth and further promoting the human exploitation of the earth. In the next chapter I will look at Jewish understandings of the verses in Genesis White highlighted and evaluate how "green" Jewish theological positions are. In order to determine a Jewish green theology and its ideological applications, it is helpful to understand how other religions have attempted to define green theologies and their corresponding ideologies.

In this chapter I evaluated Christian attempts at a green theology and found solutions that either ignore the texts that do not align with a green theology, overtly reject those texts, or reframe and reconcile those texts. While it is too early to know which approach will prove most effective and long lasting, the third approach strikes me as the most honest and therefore sustainable approach. Simply ignoring the pieces of a comprehensive religion that do not align with environmentalism seems less like an ideological shift and more like a short-term compromise that acknowledges the reality of the environmental crisis. Rejecting the aspects of a religion that do not align with environmental beliefs appears to be the least popular approach among Christian thinkers. I found it surprising that the development of Christianity resulted in the resolution no longer to follow ritual commandments of the Hebrew Bible. I wonder if a similar leap could be made to ideological stances of the Hebrew Bible that modern American

Christians could no longer stand by in good faith. Perhaps this analogy is easier for me to imagine as a Reform Jew who has less trouble compartmentalizing pieces of Judaism to which I morally object.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the third approach seems to hold the most promise for wide acceptance and long-term effect because it does not require a Christian to give up a sacred text, and instead asks the Christian to read the entire creation narrative in the context of what we all know now about how humans affect the environment. To my knowledge, White never commented publicly on his essay in the following decades or to the responses his essay received. This silence is unfortunate, as it would be interesting to know how White felt about some of these attempts at creating a green theology as a response to the environmental crisis. I agree with White that the solution to the environmental crisis needs to come from ideological beliefs that change the way we act in the world. Deep ecology and dark green religions are important to bring into the discussion to see how some people are looking outside of the major religions for a spiritual community in which their environmental values align with theological and ideological beliefs.

In the next chapter, we turn our attention to Jewish responses to White, Jewish understandings of Genesis 1:26-28, and the implication of those interpretations for Reform Jewish communities.

Chapter Two: Jewish Response to Green Theology

Even though he makes his critique about how Christianity interprets Genesis 1:26-28, Jewish thinkers also respond to White's claims. All the Jewish responses I found defend the biblical text and argue that White misunderstood these three verses.[44] Most thinkers agree with White's underlying point that the cultural beliefs and attitudes of a society influence the way that humans treat the earth which is why they argue in defense of the text and call for a better understanding of it. Their argument emphasizes that Jews and Christians do not need to reframe the creation narrative because if properly understood and taken in context, the Hebrew Bible actually outlines the elements of a green theology. As Ellen Bernstein, founder of the first national Jewish environmental organization Shomrei Adamah, wrote in 2008:

> In my environmental studies courses at University of California – Berkeley in the early 1970s, we read White's article and were taught that the theology of the Bible laid the ideological roots for the current environmental crisis…. It is conceivable that people who have little experience reading the Bible could examine this verse and decide that the language of "dominion" and "mastery over nature" is anti-ecological. But a verse is not a collection of words, just like nature is not a collection of plants and animals. Extracting a word or verse out of its context is like removing a tree from its habitat…. When you read the Bible, you have to consider the derivation of the words under consideration, the meaning of the neighboring words and verses, the message of the Bible as a whole, the context in which it was written, and how others have understood the verse throughout its 3,000-year history.[45]

[44] While most of the Jewish responses represented here come from rabbis, one need not be a rabbi to have authority in the Jewish academic world.
[45] Ellen Bernstein, "Rereading Genesis: Human Stewardship of the Earth," *Righteous Indignation*, eds. Or N. Rose, Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, and Margie Klein, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 55-56.

Other Jewish scholars like Arthur Waskow, director of the Shalom Center, Nathan Lamm, former chancellor of Yeshiva University, and Neal Joseph Loevinger, who has a master's degree in environmental studies, agree with Bernstein's critique of White's shallow scholarship.[46] Echoing Bernstein Loevinger adds, "One might even point out that the unprecedented exploitation of the earth's resources of the past few hundred years coincides with a real *decrease* in the power and influence of religion in public life, not to mention the emergence of runaway capitalism and empire building."[47]

Jewish scholars often support their reading of a text by citing older commentaries, which proves difficult with regard to the debate of dominion versus stewardship. Before the 20th century development of an environmental movement that gave the world language to talk about the ecological crisis, Jewish scholars did not comment on these verses from Genesis in the same way because there was no crisis yet. Classic commentators do show an awareness of the human impact on the earth's resources in connection to the value of *bal tashchit*, the prohibition against wasteful destruction, which comes from Deuteronomy 20:19-20. Yet they do not caution against exploitation of the earth with the same gravitas as today because terms like "global climate change," "sustainability," and "ecology," did not exist. I will discuss the origin and development of the value of *bal tashchit* in more detail later in the chapter.

Bernstein was one of the first scholars to write about environmental Judaism. Since then dozens of scholars joined the conversation and published articles and anthologies dedicated to

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[46] Nathan Lamm, "Ecology in Jewish Law and Theology," *Torah of the Earth: Exploring 4,000 Years of Ecology in Jewish Thought, Vol. 1: Biblical Israel & Rabbinic Judaism,* ed. Arthur Waskow, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 107.

[47] Neal Joseph, Loevinger, "(Mis)reading Genesis:A Response to Environmentalist Critiques of Judaism," *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and Sacred Meet,* ed. Ellen Bernstein, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998), 34.

Judaism and the environment. However, few scholars write specifically about creating a Jewish green theology. Bernstein started writing about the theological elements of environmental Judaism more recently, after Shomrei Adamah closed its doors and she began her rabbinical studies. I found only two other rabbis who wrote specifically about creating a Jewish green theology, Lawrence Troster, who serves as the Rabbinic Scholar in Residence for GreenFaith, and Natan Margalit, director of the Oraita Institute for Continuing Rabbinic Education of Hebrew College. Drawing on the writings of Bernstein, Troster, and Margalit, this chapter outlines my proposal for a Jewish green theology in order to help American Reform congregations engage more successfully in the work of caring for the earth.

Genesis 1: God's creation

Genesis contains two creation narratives, the first starting with Genesis 1:1 and ending at Genesis 2:4a with the sentence "Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created."[48] The first creation story describes the six days of creation in which God turns the unformed earth into an orderly system of light and darkness, water and land, plants and animals. This section establishes that God created everything in the universe, and therefore everything belongs to God. Judaism often reminds us through liturgy and text that everything is a gift from God. God then said:

> "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created them. God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it;

[48] I label this sentence as 4a because the second half of Genesis 2:4 begins the second creation narrative.

> and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."[49]

God blessed humans with being like God though unique from God and from animals. The text reads as if God intends for humanity to be something in between the two. The role of humans is not fully established in this first creation story because God does not explicitly establish any limits here. Since God declares creation good and humans are made in the likeness of God then presumably humans should also see the world as good and thus treat it with care. This interpretation is inferred, not explicitly stated. If someone like White stopped reading Genesis here it is possible to see how he could read the text as God giving humans permission to do as they like with the world's resources. As Bernstein points out though, this section must be read in the context of the second creation story, when humanity's role becomes more nuanced and complicated.

Looking at the text of Genesis 1:28, the Hebrew word translated as "master" comes from the root *kvs* and the Hebrew word translated as "rule" is *ur'du*, which comes from the root *rdh*. Bernstein writes that the root *kvs* "comes from the Aramaic 'to tread down' or 'make a path.' In the book of Zechariah, the root *kvs* is interchangeable with the root *akl*, the word for 'eat.' Although *kvs* is often translated as 'subdue' or 'master,' it appears to have agricultural implications."[50] God continues, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food."[51] These verses do not appear to give humans free range to use the earth's resources to the point of destruction. God gives humans the gift of a food-source, which implies that these verses are about sustaining life.

[49] Genesis 1:26-28.
[50] Bernstein, 57.
[51] Genesis 1:29.

Genesis 2: Human Stewardship of Creation

The second creation narrative, which starts at Genesis 2:4b, skips all the details that each day of creation brings in the first narrative, jumps into the creation of the first human and continues into the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. In Genesis 2:7, God "formed man from the dust of the earth." God creates the first human, *adam* in Hebrew, from the soil of the earth, *adamah* in Hebrew. JPS translates *adamah* as "dust of the earth," but the word *adamah* usually refers to soil or the ground. Whereas in the first creation story God makes a clear distinction between humans and other animals on the planet, the second creation story directly connects humans to the soil of the earth. Taken together these two creation narratives tell the story of humans trying to find their place in the world. Humans may not be the same as other animals, but humans are part of the ecosystem.

After creating the garden of Eden, God "took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it"; the Hebrew roots for tilling and tending are *avd* and *shmr*.[52] The root *avd* refers both to working the land and to serving or worshipping God. The root *shmr* refers to both tending or maintaining and guarding or protecting. Bernstein writes, "Humanity's role is to tend the garden, not to possess it; to 'guard it and keep it' (Genesis 2), not to exploit it; to pass it on as a sacred trust, as it was given. Even though we are given authority to have dominion over the earth and its creatures, we are never allowed to own it…."[53] Understanding the Hebrew shows that the phrase "tilling and tending" implies more than simply gardening. God expects humans to work and maintain the land not just for the self-serving purpose of growing food, but

[52] Genesis 2:15.
[53] Bernstein, 58.

as a way of serving God. This reading shows that God does not give humans free range to despoil the earth.

Samson Raphael Hirsch, a 19th century rabbi who influenced the denomination that became modern Orthodoxy, commented on this verse:

> The terms [till] and [tend] denote not merely the literal, direct "cultivation" and "care" of the soil, but also all of man's moral conduct, his conscientious endeavor to do that which is expected of him and to refrain from doing that which is forbidden. For it is by virtue of man's moral conduct and his conscientious use of the bounties of nature that nature itself receives not only aid for its development toward its purpose but also the conditions necessary for its very survival. Hence our Sages juxtapose the concepts of "cultivation and care" with "Torah and the observance of law" which comprise the totality of man's purpose.[54]

God puts the plants at Adam's disposal and forbids only eating from the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Adam and Eve disobey this rule and God punishes Adam saying, "Cursed be the ground because of you; by toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, but your food shall be the grasses of the field; by the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat…."[55] In the first creation story God gives humans plants for food as a blessing. Here God expects humans to toil over the earth. Working the land is both a blessing and a curse, and taken together these stories remind readers that although it might feel like

[54] Samson Raphael Hirsch, *T'rumath Tzvi: The Pentateuch with a translation by Samson Raphael Hirsch and excerpts from The Hirsch Commentary*, ed. Ephraim Oratz, trans. Gertrude Hirschler, (New York, NY: The Judaica Press, Inc., 1986), 14.
[55] Genesis 3:17-19.

humans have control over the natural elements and free-will to do as they please, God maintains ultimate control over God's creation.

Turning to the competing theories of despotism and stewardship, the two creation narratives taken together can also set out a model for stewardship. Stewardship requires a feeling of responsibility, which comes from a combined sense of ownership and being accountable to someone else. Harold Kushner comments, "Presumably, God could have created a maintenance-free world but decided that it would be better for us to take responsibility for the world we live in. We tend to value something more when we have invested our own labor in it."[56] The first creation story gives humans a sense of ownership over nature and the second story reminds humans that they are expected to work and preserve the land in accordance with God's vision for the world, one that presumably does not include exploitation to the point of becoming a crisis over resources. Kushner adds that God intended that the responsibility implicit in the stewardship model would enhance humanity's desire to care for the earth.[57]

Though most American Reform Jews are not farmers, these two creation narratives represent the competing tension in the role nature plays in our lives. Generally speaking, many American Reform Jews have the financial means to make decisions as consumers about where, what, and how much to buy. Living removed from the agricultural world can make it more difficult to make purchasing choices that adhere to the stewardship model. Even though the creation narratives focus on food, use of natural resources now extends beyond food choices and includes transportation choices and products like clothing, electronics and jewelry. Looking beyond the Genesis creation narrative to other biblical texts shows that the stewardship model also includes awareness in consumption.

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[56] *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, ed. Harold Kushner, (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 15.
[57] *Ibid,* 15.

Exercising Restraint through Modesty in Consumption

In his article "Jewish Perspectives on Limited Consumption," Eliezer Diamond writes, "We are encouraged to partake of [the earth] and told that when we do, we receive a divine gift. That is why Jews are required, before partaking of any food, to recite a blessing that acknowledges God as its Creator."[58] Though today the word carries negative connotations of greed and excess, consumption need not be seen as inherently negative in Judaism. The two creation narratives and other biblical texts can promote a balance between consuming and preserving.

Genesis tells the story of the first Shabbat when God rested on the seventh day of creation. The Torah later commands the Israelites to keep Shabbat by refraining from all work.[59] God extends this concept of Shabbat to yearly cycles with the Sabbatical year in which humans must give the land a year of rest.[60] Diamond argues that, "The limitations placed on Jewish individuals and society through the laws of the Sabbath and the Sabbatical year, as well as the restrictions on governing diet and sexual behavior, are intended to help people fathom life's hidden limits, so that rather than being seen as a curse, the limits are considered the starting point from which one constructs a meaningful life."[61] Since electronics, cars, jewelry, and other manufactured products did not exist in biblical times it is up to contemporary Jews to apply the stewardship model of balancing consumption with preservation to the realities of modern life in America.

[58] Eliezer Diamond, "Jewish Perspectives on Limiting Consumption," *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and Sacred Meet*, ed. Ellen Bernstein, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998), 81.
[59] Exodus 20:7-10.
[60] Leviticus 25:1-8 and Deuteronomy 15:1-2.
[61] Diamond, 83.

When discussing modesty in consumption, many Jewish scholars often reference the Jewish ethical value of *bal tashchit*, the prohibition against wasteful destruction. The term *bal tashchit*, which literally means "do not destroy," originated from a similar phrase in Deuteronomy 20:19-20, which states:

> When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down…. Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced.[62]

In its original context, *bal tashchit* refers specifically to the prohibition against cutting down food-bearing trees during times of war. One may cut down trees that do not produce food, but only for the purpose of using the wood to construct materials for defense. Even though *bal tashchit* refers to a very specific scenario, these verses acknowledge that humans can use the resources of the natural world to produce items other than food, but demonstrates God's expectation that humans only take advantage of natural materials when necessary. The Talmudic understanding of *bal tashchit*[63] extends the boundaries of the prohibition beyond wartime to any kind of willful destruction of the environment that violates humanity's obligation to care for the earth.[64]

The commandment *bal tashchit* continued to evolve over the centuries by commentators like Moses Maimonides in the 12th century, Hirsch in the 19th century, and contemporary scholars like Bernstein and Troster. He writes about this evolution:

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[62] The Hebrew used in Deuteronomy 20:19 is *lo tashchit*, another way of saying "do not destroy."
[63] b. Shabbat 105a.
[64] Lamm, 110-111.

> [*Bal tashchit*] was expanded in later Jewish legal sources to include the prohibition of the wanton destruction of household goods, clothes, buildings, springs, food or the wasteful consumption of anything (see [Maimonides], *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars* 6:8, 10; Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb*, 279-80). The underlying idea of this law is the recognition that everything we own belongs to God. When we consume in a wasteful manner, we damage Creation and violate our mandate to use Creation only for our legitimate benefit.[65]

The biblical and Talmudic authors could not have anticipated the environmental crisis of the last century, and so in the same way that contemporary interpretations of the creation narratives evolved in light of new concerns, so too has the modern understanding of *bal tashchit* evolved.[66] Troster suggests some contemporary applications of the prohibition: "We are obligated when we have a *simchah* (a celebration) to consider whether we need to have elaborate meals and wasteful decorations. We are obligated to consider our energy use and the sources from which it comes."[67] Troster not only applies this legal principle to today, but he also ties in the implicit theological implications of this commandment. Again, modesty in consumption comes back to the fundamental recognition that humans do not own the earth and God grants them use of the natural world so long as it is done sustainability to ensure the earth's protection.

Whereas chapter one showed the tension among some Christian scholars as to whether the proper response to White's critique lies in reframing the Genesis text or a misunderstanding of the Genesis text, most Jewish scholars express responses showing that the text itself is not

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[65] Lawrence Troster, "Ten Jewish Teachings on Judaism and the Environment," *Green Faith*, accessed March 14, 2015, http://www.greenfaith.org/religious-teachings/jewish-statements-on-the-environment/ten-jewish-teachings-on-judaism-and-the-environment.
[66] Ronald H. Isaacs, *The Jewish Sourcebook on the Environment and Ecology*, (N.p.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998), 4.
[67] Troster, accessed March 14, 2015.

problematic, rather it is a problem of misinterpretation. As noted above, in the last 20 years scholarship on Judaism and the environment increased exponentially. Most scholars write about one specific element of Jewish environmentalism or respond to White's article. A few scholars including Loevinger, even responded whether or not one could incorporate elements of the deep ecology movement into a Jewish environmental perspective. Loevinger expresses skepticism on self-realization, one of the two main tenets of deep ecology. He argues, "…Complete self-realization will eradicate the need for ethics or morality. Instead, our motivation will arise from within; we will intuitively understand that by harming another species, we harm ourselves…. From a Jewish perspective, the biggest problem with this approach is that it obscures the real, everyday choices that people must make…. According to Jewish traditions, the capacity for ethical action is the blessing – and the curse – of being human."[68] Loevinger taps into one of my critiques of the deep ecology movement, which is how practical the tenets of self-realization and biocentric equality are for anyone integrated in contemporary society. He adds that this problem contradicts the Jewish understanding of what it means to be a human and to use our free will to make ethical choices.

While the tenet of self-realization may not be helpful in constructing a Jewish green theology, some American Reform Jews strongly agree with the idea of biocentric equality. In some ways this idea contradicts the biblical understanding of humanity's role in the world, which does not deny that the power differential between humans and other animals. As outlined above, the biblical environmental model is theocentric, that is, God is the central focus and consideration in how humans use and care for the environment. One could potentially show more care for the animals and plants of the world as an expression of this theocentric model and it

[68] Neal Joseph Loevinger, "(Mis)reading Genesis:A Response to Environmentalist Critiques of Judaism," *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and Sacred Meet*, ed. Ellen Bernstein, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998), 38.

might look similar to how one would express the value of biocentric equality. The difference comes in one's own theoretical basis for treating plants and animals. That being said, I have the same critique: deep ecology offers no practical guidelines for how one can express this value and still live in the world. If one truly believes in biocentric equality, how can one possibly follow this value without starving to death? Judaism recognizes the need for humans to live, and not just in a way that maintains the world, but also in a way that continues to transform and evolve the world. This commitment requires living in a way that contradicts true biocentric equality.

The other risk associated with deep ecology and found even more in dark green religions is Jewish concerns about paganism and worshipping nature. Næss found influence in Baruch Spinoza, the 17th century philosopher famously expelled from the Jewish community for his panentheistic views, which the Jewish community understood at that time as dangerous and heretical. The elements of the deep ecology movement came about in part because of Næss' pantheistic belief that all elements of nature are not an expression of God but are God. Judaism created many regulations to avoid a situation in which a Jew could be understood as worshipping nature or anything other than a transcendent, unique, strictly independent God. A defining element of dark green religions is experiencing God in nature, and that an interaction like surfing is an expression of that religious experience of connecting with God. I can see how surfing as a religious expression of dark green religions would make traditional Jews nervous. Anecdotally, my experience as a rabbinical student in Los Angeles showed me how many young Jews want to connect spiritually with Judaism but do not find that connection within the walls of synagogues. I know many Jews who spend more time and money on meditation, yoga, surfing, and other activities that connect the body with nature than they do on Jewish institutional life. They do so both because it feels good physically and because it nourishes their desire for a spiritual

connection to the earth. Dark green religion's approach of connecting one's theology to nature is very different from the biblical notion of a Jewish green theology outlined above, but incorporating it into American Reform Judaism could be spiritually powerful for many Jews. Dark green religions feel compelled to care for the earth in order to maintain the resources that enable this connection with God. This idea could complement and add to the biblical notion of a Jewish green theology.

Jeremy Benstein, fellowship director of the Abraham Joshua Heschel Center for Environmental Learning and Leadership in Tel Aviv, wrote *The Way into Judaism and the Environment* and makes a good point in arguing, "In the end, people are more moved by a promise of fulfilling an ideal rather than averting a threat."[69] Secular messages about environmentalism focus on the horrifying results our actions have taken on the environment in the past century and the race against time to avoid an unfixable situation. Perhaps framing the environmental crisis and our responsibilities towards environmental justice might be helpful if put into the context of the Jewish green theological perspectives stated above, including my suggestions for incorporating elements of dark green theology. Taking action helps fulfill God's vision of a just society in which we care for the earth and each other. Ultimately, my theological understanding leads me to believe that God cannot fix what humans have destroyed. Humans must focus on the solution instead of just slapping our wrists for causing the problems.

[69] Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006), 13.

Chapter Three: Survey of Greening in Reform Congregations

Having established a theoretical basis for green Jewish theology, one might wonder how Reform congregations implement greening and to what extent those efforts use the theories and ideas discussed above. This chapter outlines the findings of my interviews with 10 Reform congregations in the United States that either currently engage in greening, have engaged in greening in the past, or attempted unsuccessfully to engage in greening.[70] I interviewed congregations from a variety of geographic areas, including the Pacific Northwest, Northern California, Southern California, the East Coast, and the South.

Table 1 – Table of Congregations Interviewed

Congregation	City, State	Staff	Lay Leader
Beth Chayim Chadashim	Los Angeles, CA	Former Executive Director	-
Congregation M'kor Shalom	Cherry Hill, NJ	-	Green Council Chair
Peninsula Temple Beth El	San Mateo, CA	-	Founding co-chair of Green Team
Temple Bet Yam	St. Augustine, FL	-	Former co-chair of building planning committee
Temple B'nai Torah	Bellevue, WA	-	Former co-chairs of Green Team
Temple Hesed	Scranton, PA	Rabbi Daniel Swartz	-
Temple Israel	Tallahassee, FL	Rabbi Jack Romberg	Former Social Action Chair
Temple Rodef Shalom	Falls Church, VA	-	Former co-chair of Green Team
Temple Shalom	Newton, MA	-	Former members of Environmental Action Committee
Temple Sinai	Atlanta, GA	-	Member of Subcommittee on the Environment

[70] See Table 1.

When possible I interviewed both a staff member and lay leader of the congregation. I approached each interview with the following questions:

- Is the greening permanent (such as installing a solar panel powered *ner tamid*), an ongoing project (such as maintaining a garden and donating produce), or a short-term project (such as lobbying for a city-wide plastic bag ban)?
- Does the greening have a theoretical component?
    - If so, what is it?
    - If so, how does it get taught?
- Who initiated greening?
- Were there any other factors that impacted the greening efforts?

I use the term "theoretical component" to mean studying the theological and ideological reasons for why Jews should care about the environment based on biblical texts and Talmudic, rabbinic, and contemporary commentaries on biblical texts. The term "theoretical component" distinguishes studying the underlying reasons why Jews should care about the environment from how Jews should care for the environment. I wanted to separate these two approaches to studying Jewish environmentalism because I suspect that when learning does take place it tends towards the "how" instead of the "why." I assume this is the case for the same reason articulated in the introduction, that people want to see results and feel like studying "how" leads easily into action. Studying "why," on the other hand, does not always have a clear action component and can therefore feel more challenging.

I approached the interviews wondering if I could find any correlation between the existence of a theoretical component and the longevity or success of greening efforts. Based on

the data collected during these interviews, I suggest that the existence of a theoretical component is critical to the longevity and success of greening efforts. I found quite a variety in the types of greening initiatives in congregations, many of which combine multiple approaches. Three congregations completed a permanent project: Beth Chayim Chadashim (BCC) in Los Angeles, Temple Bet Yam in St. Augustine, FL, and Congregation M'kor Shalom in Cherry Hill, NJ. Both BCC and Temple Bet Yam incorporated green elements in their new buildings, and Congregation M'kor Shalom made some permanent changes to their existing building. BCC's new building meets the gold standards for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification and they are still working through the approval and certification process. BCC's building committee used a values-based approach when planning for the new building. Members of the congregation participated in a series of focus groups discussing their values and vision for their community. The building committee wanted to develop a plan out of the vision and values that emerged from these focus groups. Based on these conversations the building committee identified two overarching values: a building that is open and expresses the value of *b'tzelem Elohim* (the belief that all humans are made in the image of God) and the importance of walking lightly on the earth as an expression of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). These priorities led to construction that included reusable materials from their respective former buildings, using old jeans for insulation, solar panels, low water landscaping, electric car charging station, and more. This values driven component of BCC's approach also led the congregation to adopt the Union for Reform Judaism's (URJ's) 2009 Resolution on Climate Change and Energy, and incorporate ongoing projects like composting and purchasing green cleaning supplies.[71]

[71] "Climate Change and Energy," *Union for Reform Judaism*, accessed March 15, 2015, http://urj.org/about/union/governance/reso/?syspage=article&item_id=27421.

For Temple Bet Yam, the decision to build green was most prominently financial. The planning committee started with the question of how to build and quickly discovered that it was more cost effective to include green elements in the building. It also happened that when they cleared land for their building, someone asked if they would donate the wood to St. Augustine Lighthouse and Museum's boat reconstruction project, to which they happily agreed. To the extent that values were a driving factor in the building process, they were general environmental values with no theoretical basis in Judaism.

Whereas BCC and Temple Bet Yam came to greening through their building processes, Congregation M'kor Shalom started with the formation of their Green Council in 2006. The Green Council worked with GreenFaith to do a synagogue energy audit, which led to replacing their HVAC system. When the congregation outgrew their facility and built a new religious school addition, they incorporated green features in that building process. Similarly to BCC, the Board of Trustees of Congregation M'kor Shalom passed a Green Covenant and continues to engage in a series of short-term projects, including hosting movie screenings with speakers on environmental topics, selling reusable bags and water bottles, and raising money to plant trees in Israel through Jewish National Forest (JNF).

Table 2 – Tables of Projects

Congregation	Initiated by	Type of project	Description of Project
Beth Chayim Chadashim	Clergy and executive board	Permanent	New building that meets gold level LEED certification standard
		Ongoing	Introduced and continues to compost, buy green supplies, offer electric car charging
Congregation M'kor Shalom	Rabbi	Permanent	Building alterations including new HVAC system and green features used for new religious school addition
		Short-term	Worked with GreenFaith to do

			synagogue energy audit, multiple events with movie screenings and speakers, Going Greener Fair, sold reusable bags and water bottles, raising money to plant trees in Israel
Peninsula Temple Beth El	Two congregants	Short-term Ongoing	Guide to "greening," Tu B'shvat event, "Green Teens" high school elective Composting
Temple Bet Yam	Finance Committee	Permanent	Green features in new building
Temple B'nai Torah	Two congregants	Attempted short-term	Attempted initiating "zero waste celebrations" and installing an electronic car charging station
Temple Hesed	Rabbi	Ongoing	Work with PA-IPL
Temple Israel	Congregant	Ongoing	Sustainable Torah Gardens
Temple Rodef Shalom	Congregants and rabbi	New short-term project every year	New project theme every year that includes education, advocacy, and action (this year's theme is "bag it")
Temple Shalom	Congregant	Short-term	"Green Simcha Guide" and other articles
Temple Sinai	Congregant	Short-term	"Guide to Greening Your Simchas" and an annual event

Four congregations reported some type of ongoing project: BCC, Peninsula Temple Beth El (PTBE) in San Mateo, CA, Temple Hesed in Scranton, PA, and Temple Israel in Tallahassee, FL. As mentioned above, BCC has ongoing greening projects and continues to do green education. About five years ago, PTBE started a Green Team when two members felt the synagogue did not recycle enough and got permission to start a committee to increase recycling. The committee grew and they implemented a number of ongoing projects including switching to compostable materials and replacing the light bulbs in the synagogue. The synagogue continues to compost and use green maintenance supplies, but the Green Team has not met in about three years. Temple Hesed does ongoing work with Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light (PA-IPL), which mainly involves advocating for and helping people in low-income housing

implement greening in their homes. This advocacy includes training people how to weatherize their homes and donating compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs). Temple Hesed's rabbi, Daniel Swartz, works closely with PA-IPL and continues to incorporate a theoretical element into congregational education. For Swartz, the environmental education involves studying why Judaism mandates both caring for the earth and helping the disadvantaged. This learning gets expressed through the work of PA-IPL. Temple Israel conceived of a sustainable Torah garden with five components to be created over a 10 year period: the Bereshit Memorial Garden, Shemot Rain and Butterfly Garden, Vayyiqra Learning Center, Bamidbar Promised Land Vegetable Garden, and Devarim Meditation Garden. The idea for the sustainable Torah garden came from a congregant who loves gardening and proposed the idea to the synagogue's social action committee. The committee received a grant for the Shemot Rain and Butterfly Garden, and the woman who pitched the idea started with that section. After they completed the first section the project lost some steam, but the woman's son recently started working on a second section of the garden.

Five congregations implemented short-term projects: Congregation M'kor Shalom, PTBE, Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, VA, Temple Shalom in Newton, MA, and Temple Sinai in Atlanta, GA. Congregation M'kor Shalom hosted a kick-off event when they formed their Green Council, a "Going Greener Fair," and raised money to plant trees in Israel through JNF. Similarly, PTBE puts on an annual drive to plant trees in Israel through JNF, and held a Green Synaplex Shabbat a few years ago that included education and booths with resources for greening in the home. Temple Rodef Shalom chooses a new green theme to focus on each year and centers their education, advocacy, and action on that specific theme. The rabbi sits on their Green Team and the committee decides on the new theme together each year. They

usually kick-off each new theme with a film screening on that topic and then build projects around the film. This year's theme is "bag it," which includes Jewish and environmental education about disposable materials and needless waste, advocating for a plastic bag ban in the city, and encouraging members and the synagogue staff to switch to reusable bags. Temple Rodef Shalom continues successfully with their method of focusing on a different topic each year by tying their greening efforts to Jewish learning on the topic. This programming combines the theoretical learning as described above with action-oriented learning related to each specific theme. Temple Shalom had an Environmental Action Committee that disbanded in 2013. When the committee existed they completed a few short-term projects including the creation of a "Green Simcha Guide" and helping the synagogue take recycling more seriously. Temple Sinai's Subcommittee on the Environment also created "A Guide to Greening Your Simcha" and used to hold an annual event on Earth Day. Temple Sinai's subcommittee started about five years ago and although it technically still exists, the subcommittee is not very active at this point.

I asked interviewees to what extent greening in these congregations has a theoretical component (i.e., learning-based). I categorized the existence of a theoretical component in the table below as either substantial or minimal. All of the congregations identified some kind of Jewish tie-in to the environment, though this connection ranged from simply stating that caring for the environment is a Jewish value to citing Jewish texts on the environment and talking about specific values like *bal tashchit*. The theoretical component could be expressed through a variety of mediums including sermons, newsletter articles, religious school lesson plans, and the adoption of a resolution or change in bylaws of synagogue. To be considered as "substantial," the congregation needed to incorporate education on greening from a Jewish perspective in at least two settings. Since I am particularly interested in uncovering correlations between

education and the success or longevity of greening, I categorized greening as still happening, minimally happening, or not happening. If a congregation maintains a project like continuing to recycle or compost but does not introduce any new greening projects or continue to find ways to enhance greening in the synagogue, I labeled that as "minimally happening." As noted in the table below, four of the congregations had a substantial theoretical component and all four of those congregations continue with greening at their synagogue. Six of the congregations had a minimal theoretical component and of those six, three continue with greening on a minimal level and three no longer do greening. Only Temple B'nai Torah (TBT) attempted unsuccessfully to initiate a handful of short-term projects.

Table 3 – Table of Basic Factors

Congregation	Still Happening?	Theoretical Component?	Theoretical Setting
Beth Chayim Chadashim	Yes	Substantial	Emerged from conversations and creation of values and vision statements; adopted URJ Resolution on the environment
Congregation M'kor Shalom	Yes	Substantial	Hanukkah discussion of light conservation led by senior rabbi; Board of Trustees passed Green Covenant; High Holy Day sermon; green curriculum introduced to religious school
Peninsula Temple Beth El	Minimally	Minimal	A little learning when the "Green Teens" elective started
Temple Bet Yam	No	Minimal	Identified caring for the environment as a Jewish value in article about building
Temple B'nai Torah	No	Minimal	Yom Kippur Text Study
Temple Hesed	Yes	Substantial	High Holy Day sermon; green curriculum included in religious school; senior rabbi wrote "To Till and to Tend: A Guide To Jewish Environmental Study and Action"
Temple Israel	Minimally	Minimal	Occasional learning in the garden with the preschool and religious school
Temple Rodef Shalom	Yes	Substantial	Movie discussions; annual Tu B'Shvat seder with learning; always have a rabbi introduce the programs to put it in a Jewish setting
Temple Shalom	No	Minimal	Environmental Action Committee meetings

			started with Torah study
Temple Sinai	Minimally	Minimal	Senior rabbi introduced "Green Simcha Guide" with a letter using a Jewish text on the environment

Other factors may have impacted greening efforts including who initiated the greening and the extent of clergy involvement. As noted in Appendix 2, all four congregations that successfully implemented greening have significant clergy involvement whereas the other six congregations do not. That is not to say that the clergy do not support greening efforts, but that they are not involved in the process. This factor may be significant because in many ways the clergy direct where synagogues focus their energy. Lay leaders certainly have the power to implement important projects on their own, but for congregants who only come to synagogue a few times a year, hearing the rabbi give a high holy day sermon about climate change communicates that Judaism mandates care for the environment. Even if that congregant does not have an awareness of greening at the synagogue during the year, he or she may take the message of the sermon to heart and take a more green approach to life outside the synagogue. This potential impact supports my assertion that the theoretical component is a crucial component of implementing greening in Reform congregations; cultivating a greening culture goes beyond small projects and instead becomes a consideration in everything we do.

Joanne Poyourow, a community organizer in Los Angeles, and Episcopal priest Peter Rood founded the Environmental Change-Makers (ECM), an organization that trains community leaders, both religious and secular, to create effective, long-lasting environmental programs in their local neighborhoods. ECM came about after Poyourow and Rood brought together people from five local churches who all felt their faith compelled them to take positive action to help solve the environment crisis. After learning from their successes and challenges, Poyourow and

Rood wrote *Environmental Change-Making: How to Cultivate Lasting Change in Your Local Community* to offer best practices to other community leaders. They suggested that communities have a vision, focus on positive action, take a multi-faceted approach, and ensure relevancy outside the church.

First and foremost the congregation needs to outline a vision that includes short-term and long-term goals. The long-term goal might include congregation-wide sustainability and green building, but one also needs to start by choosing some small and manageable projects. Part of creating a vision also includes establishing a green theology to give congregants the context for why they, as a congregation and as individuals, should care about the environment. The outcome of this initial learning might be a values statement, which then lends itself to continued learning as the greening takes place. Poyourow and Rood also emphasize the importance of celebrating successes and individual victories in order to keep the momentum going.[72]

Of the four congregations that successfully implemented greening, they each have a vision, although two congregations adopted the vision of partner organizations. Congregation M'kor Shalom started greening with GreenFaith, a non-profit organization that aims to help faith-based organizations engage in greening by providing texts, greening resources, and plan of action templates. Temple Hesed does greening in partnership with PA-IPL, an interfaith community with their own vision statement that provides short-term and long-term programming for congregations involved in the organization. BCC provides an interesting example because greening became an underlying value through their congregation's visioning process, which means that caring for the environment came from the ground up and emerged organically. Replicating this commitment could be difficult since they did not use a top-down approach in

[72] Joanne Poyourow and Peter H. Rood, Jr., *Environmental Change Making: How to Cultivate Lasting Change in Your Local Community*, (Los Angeles, CA: Citi Printing, 2008), 10.

defining their values and creating a vision. One possibility is that senior rabbi Lisa Edwards laid the groundwork in the years before these conversations through sermons and adult learning that led to congregants later expressing care for the environment as an important value in Judaism.[73]

This success goes hand in hand with the second best practice of focusing on positive action. A lot of the news and documentaries about the environmental crisis can leave a person feeling overwhelmed and hopeless. Instead of focusing on what we are fighting, it can be helpful to focus on positive solutions and what we can do to care for the environment.[74] Taking a positive approach has more to do with the language the leaders use when talking about caring for the environment rather than what congregations are doing since they take positive action by virtue of creating a greening project.

Poyourow and Rood also suggest taking a multi-faceted approach in order to create traction with greening. They write, "No single-faceted solution will work. We need to implement *both* top-down *and* grassroots approaches simultaneously."[75] Top-down approaches include affecting change in policy, legislation, government, and industry. Grassroots approaches include individual and communal lifestyle changes and paradigm shifts.[76] The paradigm shift comes about through learning about Jewish ethics. Poyourow and Rood continue, "Creating real physical change is important, but it isn't the only thing. In order to create the bigger changes – the massive shifts which will become the true solutions – we must rethink. We must reevaluate the basic premises by which we make our decisions."[77] The approach ECM takes to creating a paradigm shift in environmental thinking is based on Holmgren's diagram of "The Permaculture

[73] I reached out to Rabbi Edwards asking about this idea but was not able to confirm evidence of theoretical learning prior to the congregational visioning process.
[74] Poyourow and Rood, 10.
[75] *Ibid,* 22.
[76] *Ibid*.
[77] *Ibid,* 24.

Flower."[78] Holmgren created an approach to societal change for the Permaculture movement in which the community starts by defining or re-defining their ethics. He calls this first step that sits at the center of the flower "Permaculture Ethical & Design Principles," which is equivalent to establishing a theoretical foundation. The center of the flower is the explanation for why that group holds certain beliefs and the implications of those beliefs spiral out from the center of the flower and influence different aspects of life. The first implication is education because once a group establishes their foundational beliefs, they have to teach those beliefs to the members of the group. From there the spiral continues out to concrete changes made in all aspects of life, including health, spiritual well-being, economics, governance, etc.[79] This approach reinforces the idea that congregations benefit from taking the time to establish a theoretical basis through study because doing so ultimately leads to more in-depth and ongoing greening. One approach to using this method could be that of Temple Rodef Shalom, who chooses a different green theme each year and focuses their education, advocacy, and action on that specific theme. Other congregations, like Congregation M'kor Shalom, take a varied approach by engaging in different small greening projects, but do not have the same overarching vision of Temple Rodef Shalom.

The fourth best practice Poyourow and Rood offer, ensuring relevancy with life outside the religious communities, is part of the multi-faceted approach. Religious life needs to extend beyond the walls of the synagogue if we expect congregants to take the mandates of our belief system seriously. Congregational greening should be connected to life outside the synagogue, including in congregants' homes, in impoverished communities, and in trying to affect political policies to create change. Both Congregation M'kor Shalom and Temple Rodef Shalom incorporate advocacy and encouraging congregants to increase greening in the home. As

[78] "Resources," *Environmental Change-Makers,* accessed March 14, 2015, http://envirochangemakers.org/oldsite/ECM.resources.htm.
[79] Poyourow and Rood, 82-83.

mentioned earlier, Temple Hesed works with PA-IPL to help people in low-income housing implement greening in their homes since greening can often times have a high cost up-front and then result in savings on energy bills.

Poyourow and Rood emphasize the important point that the single-most effective way of creating change in the community is by starting with changing attitudes and beliefs, which was the essence of White's solution to the environmental problem. For American Reform Jews I offer a green Jewish theology as the theoretical basis for creating that change in values that leads to long lasting change that influences every aspect of a person's life.

Appendix 1 – Tables of Projects

Congregation	Initiated by	Type of project	Description of Project
Beth Chayim Chadashim	Clergy and executive board	Permanent	New building that meets gold level LEED certification standard
		Ongoing	Introduced and continues to compost, buy green supplies, offer electric car charging
Congregation M'kor Shalom	Rabbi	Permanent	Building alterations including new HVAC system and green features used for new religious school addition
		Short-term	Worked with GreenFaith to do synagogue energy audit, multiple events with movie screenings and speakers, Going Greener Fair, sold reusable bags and water bottles, raising money to plant trees in Israel
Peninsula Temple Beth El	Two congregants	Short-term	Guide to "greening," Tu B'shvat event, "Green Teens" high school elective
		Ongoing	Composting
Temple Bet Yam	Finance Committee	Permanent	Green features in new building
Temple B'nai Torah	Two congregants	Attempted short-term	Attempted initiating "zero waste celebrations" and installing an electronic car charging station
Temple Hesed	Rabbi	Ongoing	Work with PA-IPL
Temple Israel	Congregant	Ongoing	Sustainable Torah Gardens
Temple Rodef Shalom	Congregants and rabbi	New short-term project every year	New project theme every year that includes education, advocacy, and action (this year's theme is "bag it")
Temple Shalom	Congregant	Short-term	"Green Simcha Guide" and other articles
Temple Sinai	Congregant	Short-term	"Guide to Greening Your Simchas" and an annual event

Conclusion

Environmental scientists have long documented the environmental crisis which includes global climate change and using resources like oil and water to the point of creating scarcity. When White wrote his article in 1967 and blamed environmental woes on Christian interpretations of Genesis 1:26-28 (in conjunction with advances in modern technology), theologians and scholars from Christian, Jewish, and secular backgrounds felt compelled to respond. They defended the text or agreed with White and his argument that because religious ideology created the environmental crisis, religion and a change in cultural attitudes needed to be the solution. Since White's article profoundly changed the environmental conversation in the religious sector, I started in chapter one by showing how Christian theologians and secular philosophers responded to White. Specifically, I examined different attempts at creating a green theology, including a Christian green theology, the ideology of the deep ecology movement, and the theological elements of dark green religions.

In chapter two I analyzed the way the Jewish scholars responded to White and proposed a Jewish green theology based on biblical texts. Most Jewish scholars agree that White pulled the Genesis text out of context and misrepresented the message of the Hebrew Bible. My proposal for a Jewish green theology uses the two creation narratives in context of one another and looks at the theological implications of *bal tashchit*, the biblical prohibition against waste. I also turned back to some of the non-Jewish green theologies to see how they might influence a Jewish green theology. Despite the later debunking of White's basic argument against Genesis 1:26-28, his point that religious beliefs influence the behavior of a society and that the solution to the environmental crisis requires a change in beliefs and attitudes about the human relationship to the environment.

Many people feel compelled to take action to help the environment instead of hurting it, including American Reform Jews. More and more American Reform congregations are starting green committees as a way of taking action and helping the environment in a Jewish context. This thesis began with a Talmudic story arguing that study is more important than action because study leads to action. I interpret the exchange to mean that study leads to more meaningful, well-thought out, and impactful action. I proposed that Jewish theology, to the extent that the Hebrew Bible outlines one specific theology, is a green theology, and that American Reform Jews need to shift from being Jews who care about the environment to caring about the environment because they are Jews. In order to affect this change, American Reform Jewish communities need to spend time establishing a theoretical basis through learning before and while implementing greening projects. I wondered if I could find any correlation between the success of greening in Reform congregations and the extent to which theoretical learning took place. I interviewed ten American Reform congregations around the country and found that the four congregations that exhibited signs of successful greening also did a significant amount of theoretical learning. In chapter three I evaluated some of these successes and failures and suggest some best practices for how Reform congregations should go about engaging in environmental work.

During the process of writing this thesis my internship supervisor at University Synagogue, Rabbi Joel Simonds, asked me to create a green team and implement a project with GreenFaith. GreenFaith recently launched the GreenFaith Shield program in which congregations can work to earn the Energy Shield badge or Water Shield badge. In order to get a badge congregations must fulfill certain study and action requirements. In creating the green team I deliberately asked people from different demographics and synagogue communities to

join the team and tried to go beyond the established lay leaders and ask people not already part of the lay leadership. I asked a preschool parent, one of my ninth grade students, a young parent who works in environmental policy, a retired person who sat on the building committee when they did renovations about 12 years ago, and a current board member who does a lot of advocacy with Reform California and the Religious Action Center.

We decided to pursue the Energy Shield badge, which, broadly speaking, has three requirements: doing an audit of the synagogue's energy usage, offering at least three learning opportunities, and getting at least 15 percent of congregants to commit to increase greening at home. GreenFaith wants to help congregations create change successfully by setting manageable expectations that will hopefully lead to more greening after achieving the badge. With regards to the learning, it must include at least one sermon, at least one religious school education program, and at least one newsletter article. Given the significant amount of learning required for a program that has so few requirements shows that GreenFaith also believes in the importance of setting a theoretical basis for environmental projects.

It is too early to evaluate the success of this greening process at University Synagogue. One challenge I experienced in forming the committee is that they wanted to jump right into action without taking any time for learning. Given that I was writing this thesis while developing the green team, I tried to find creative ways to deal with this challenge. Instead of spending time during meetings studying Jewish environmentalism, I had conversations over coffee with members of the green team and used email as an opportunity to share some key biblical texts and interpretations of those texts. The goal of this approach was to spend the meeting times focused on action without feeling like I have to fight to include the learning. We have a Green Shabbat scheduled for the spring, which will include a special environmentally themed Shabbat service, a

sermon on the environment, and other learning opportunities. My hope is that by including a significant amount of learning in the activities of the Green Shabbat, it will kick off an ongoing community-wide commitment to caring for the environment as an expression of their Judaism. I hope the findings of this thesis - both the elements of Jewish green theology and the findings from my interviews about implementing greening in Reform congregations - will inspire those who did not view environmentalism as a Jewish issue to think differently and congregational leaders to understand the importance of taking the time to establish a theoretical basis for greening.

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