

**Concepts of the Sacred in Place: Reconciling Mindscapes and Landscapes**

By Michelle Church  
B.A. (Hons), University of Winnipeg, 2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
in the School of Environmental Studies  
at the University of Victoria

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**ABSTRACT**

The concepts and issues surrounding the study of sacred places represent a complex interaction of mindscapes and landscapes. Using as the main examples Stonehenge and the Bighorn Medicine Wheel, this thesis is about these interactions in natural, community sacred places and serves two main purposes. The first is to clarify the meaning of "sacred" and the application of sacred designation to natural places. The second is to explore options for the protection, conservation and restoration of such places. In addition, an interpretation of cultural issues surrounding the understanding of the sacred in place explores and explains the connections between worldviews, stories or mythologies, and sense of place in sacred places so that a better understanding can be reached of the paradigms that underlie our conception of the sacred and of nature, and by extension, the sacred in nature. This in turn serves to illuminate the recommendation of focal restoration techniques to restore sacred places.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

*Every society needs sacred places. A society that cannot remember its past, and honor it, is in peril of losing its soul.*

*- Vine Deloria, Jr.*

What is a sacred place? That seemingly simple question is the kernel of investigation from which this thesis grew. As it turned out, answering that question is not so simple as it might first seem. There are a multitude of different answers, depending on many factors including the cultural milieu, temporal frame, moral structures, spiritual leanings and religious beliefs of the answerer. It also quickly becomes clear that any answer is bound to be open to interpretation because there are so many interpretations of the meaning of the word “sacred”. While there is not any outright disagreement or argumentation in the literature, there is much discussion, and clearly there is some disjunction, with each person bringing to the word his or her own implications and connotations, borne of their own worldviews and belief systems.

In effect, it seems that “sacred” is one of those words that has become so much a part of the common parlance that its original meaning has become rather lost – the word “sacred” is used to describe anything that has deep meaning and value, or anything to do with the spirit, rather than exclusively (and I will argue more properly) as something that can provide a connection to the divine. I will contend that this sort of definitional clarity is essential, for until the meaning of the word “sacred” can be understood with more precision, it is unlikely that any clarity and agreement can be reached about what constitutes a sacred place. This thesis will be concerned only with natural, community sacred places; that is, sacred places that are part of, or integrally situated in, natural landscapes, and which are understood as sacred by a community (as opposed to personal

sacred places). Examples include henges, medicine wheels, standing stones, sacred rocks, caves, mountains or other landscapes or landscape elements. Being inherently cultural, these sites often include cultural artifacts, such as altars or specific placements of stones or other objects. or veneration of natural elements or features.

On first glance, it might seem not to matter that everyone has his or her own understanding of the meaning of the sacred, or of what a sacred place is. And in the case of personal sacred places – those places that are sacred to an individual, such as a place of birth, or marriage, or other significant personal event – this might not be of any great concern. But when one is discussing community sacred places – those places where a community gathers to worship or celebrate or connect with their divine, or to carry out certain ceremonies or rites of passage that are important to them as a spiritual community –it does matter, especially if the value of that place as a sacred site is being challenged, or when such a place come under threat, whether from development, or resource extraction, or some other use, usually by a more dominant culture. In these situations, having a clear, cross-cultural understanding of the meaning of the sacred and significance of sacred place becomes imperative, so that those places may be protected and kept intact and in use as sacred sites.

I would like to make clear right from the outset that it is absolutely not my intention either to patronize or proselytize: this thesis is not concerned with, for example, trying to prove or disprove the existence of a deity or deities, or to question the belief systems of any religion or spiritual community. It is not, in other words, concerned with whether any belief system is “right” or “wrong”; instead all ways of believing and all systems of symbols and spirits and sprits are assumed to be equally true, equally valid

and equally valuable. This means that assessing the underlying beliefs of the cosmological reasons *why* a place is sacred is less important than accepting that a place *is* sacred, and in finding ways of validating that sacredness, rather than the belief upon which it rests.

This is the basis from which we begin this journey; the quest to understand, from various viewpoints, the meaning of “sacred” and the application of sacred to place. A second purpose of this thesis is to look at options for keeping sacred places sacred, especially when those places have already suffered some sort of damage, either peripherally or in the site itself. There are three main options that will be discussed: conservation, preservation, and restoration, or what has been termed the CPR of sacred places. The differences between these approaches, including the underlying values and assumptions that each type of intervention embodies, will be discussed, along with the benefits and drawbacks of each approach. The conclusion drawn is that, although there is no “one size fits all” way to approach problems within the immense diversity of sacred places, the best way forward in most situations will be focal restoration. The reasons for this are discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

The topic of sacred places does not fall neatly into any one academic discipline, or even, for that matter, neatly within the realm of academia at all. However, by combining research and commentary from areas such as environmental studies, philosophy, religious studies and theology, cultural geography, anthropology and sociology, as well as from sources outside of traditional academics, such as government bodies and international organizations, relatively reliable news sources (for example, the BBC) and the websites of grassroots organizations concerned with the saving of particular places, it

is possible to create a generally comprehensive and comprehensible study of sacred places.

This thesis is divided into six chapters, each addressing a different aspect of the meaning of the sacred and the function of sacred places within a modern, often largely secular world, a world that is more inclined to place its faith in science and technology than in spiritual realms. This first chapter is mainly designed to introduce the idea of this thesis, and to explain the format of the other chapters.

Chapter Two serves two purposes: to introduce a discussion of the relevant literature and to frame the discussion of sacred places generally within a survey of the recent controversies and solutions around the site of Stonehenge in England, and around Bighorn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming. These sites have been chosen as a focus for several reasons. While these two sites may seem at first glance to be very different, both have some intriguing similarities and have faced similar types of problems. Both sites were designed for, among other things, the celebration of the summer solstice, an event that continues to be celebrated annually at each site. Both have faced a number of interesting problems in terms of stewardship and access rights, as well as in restoration and conservation of the surrounding lands. The Indigenous peoples who use the site in Wyoming have also faced resource extraction issues, while those who claim Stonehenge as their sacred site have had their belief systems questioned by those with legislative power. One of the main differences between the two is that those who use the medicine wheel have a long and provably continuous history of use of the place as a sacred place, while the history of use in the henge is discontinuous, fractious and fractured, and there have been very long periods of time when the site fell into disuse. There is no provable

inherited legacy of use of the site for sacred purposes by those who claim it as sacred for their ceremonies now although as we shall see, this should not exclude the possibility that it is truly a sacred site. A discussion and analysis of the conflicts and the solutions found, as well as those issues not yet resolved, will provide some context to the questions and issues raised in the rest of the thesis.

With this background, we move on to Chapter Three: Worldviews, Sense of Place, and the Importance of Stories. This chapter provides some background to and interpretation of some of the cultural issues surrounding the understanding and significance of sacred places, and seeks to explore the connections between worldviews, stories and sense of place. The discussion of worldviews is intended to show that the current dominant Western worldview that values technology, science and wealth creation as the highest good has led to a devaluation of nature, natural systems and spiritual belief systems. This in turn has led to a dismissal and devaluation of sacred places as sacred places; instead of valuing these sites for their sacred qualities and the spiritual benefit they provide to participants and their communities, they become valued for timber, or recreation, or tourism, or other land development opportunities. I will argue that if we can come to accept and value multiple non-dominant points of view and ways of thinking, perhaps we can come to a better understanding of the important role that sacred places can play in communities. By returning to a kind of worldview that places value on concepts such as community, sense of place, and the health and integrity of the environment that encompasses us all, acceptance of natural sacred places will come more readily. This realization of other forms of value can also lead to a better understanding of

how and why economic activities either on a sacred site itself or in its peripheries, can damage or degrade the qualities that make the site sacred.

This chapter also examines the importance of sense of place. Part of what reveals a place as sacred is attachment to land, or what can also be termed sense of place. Without a worldview that values nature, environment and community, sense of place is hard to find. There is a strand of scholarly literature, particularly within cultural geography, that contends that sense of place is essential to human nature – that we need to feel that we belong, not only to a human community but also to a place, or rooted community. Additionally, this chapter addresses the importance of narratives, or stories, as a way of interpreting and validating worldviews, understanding place and belonging to place. Much of the way that we understand and express an understanding of and attachment to place is through the use of narratives or stories or mythologies to interpret the landscape and to give it meaning. These narratives provide a way to understand the history (or stories) of place, of how it surrounds and nurtures us, of how we belong to the land as much as the land belongs to us. Sacred places always have stories attached to them, and one function of these stories is to draw us into a sense of place.

Chapter Four: Defining the Sacred is where we delve into the mystery of what it means for something, or somewhere, to be sacred. It is my contention that until we can agree on a definition of “sacred”, we cannot begin to understand or define “sacred place.” This chapter provides a survey of the literature from early 20<sup>th</sup> century works such as Rudolf Otto’s The Idea of the Holy up to and including present day discussion in scholarly journals, and aims to interpret the main usages and functions of the term “sacred.” This interpretation is then applied to the word “sacred” as it pertains to place.

One of the difficulties is that often, “sacred” is defined in experiential terms, that is, through the way that people react to an encounter of the numinous or the divine. While this is a useful way of categorizing experience and reaction, it does not sufficiently provide for an explanation of the way that *places* come to be understood as an embodiment of the sacred, or as an avenue for an encounter with the divine. However, by a careful examination of previous and current discussions of the sacred in scholarly literature, it has been possible to identify four criteria of both place and experience of place that may be utilized cross-culturally as a way to identify a place as being truly sacred.

Once we have some idea of how places might be designated as sacred, the next question becomes one of how to keep these places sacred, and this forms the basis of Chapter Five. There are in general three options when it comes to the care of the natural sacred places; conservation, preservation and restoration. In particular, this thesis will focus on focal restoration as a way to restore both culture and nature, since both are important components of the types of natural sacred places discussed here. Focal restoration refers to a variety of ecological restoration proposed by Higgs (2003), in which the act of restoration becomes a focus not only of immediate personal and social engagement with an ecosystem and also a way of orienting other important personal and community-based ecological practices. Because focal restoration encourages the use of rituals and engagement with the land, it can help to restore a sense of place to sacred places.

However, any one of these, or some combination, may be a good option, depending on the geographical and cultural situation and condition of the sacred site and

its environs. Clearly, there is no “one size fits all” solution, but some discussion of options will hopefully form a useful addition to the current literature on the subjects of conservation, preservation and restoration, and of sacred places. As mentioned, the position taken here is that in most cases, focal restoration, because of its inclusive ethos and flexibility, provides the most promising way to care for sacred places that have been damaged or degraded.

The concepts and issues surrounding the study and interpretation of sacred places represent a complex interaction of mindscapes and landscapes. The ways in which we think about sacred places gives birth to the way that we act towards them. It is important to understand here that given the breadth and complexity of the whole subject of sacred places, this thesis does not purport to become a comprehensive and authoritative analysis of every aspect of the study of sacred places. What I do hope to achieve is to highlight some of the main concepts and issues that affect sacred places, to offer some useful criteria for identifying sacred places, and to suggest ways in which these places might be protected and preserved so that the special qualities embodied therein will continue to be cherished and celebrated. The title of this thesis, Reconciling Mindscapes and Landscapes, is a reminder that the way we think about the world profoundly affects the way we alter the landscapes around us. Until we understand why it is important to change the way that we think about land and nature, we will not change the way we think about sacred places. But if we can come to an understanding of the human value and natural wonder that is to be found through the recognition of the divine intersection with the human spirit, perhaps we will also come to understand the importance of sacred places.

## **Chapter Two: Some Current Issues in Sacred Places**

*That sense of sacredness, that thinking in generations, must begin with reverence for this earth.*

*- Paul Tsongas*

As we shall come to see in the course of this thesis, sacred places are cherished places, with embodied value in the eyes of their beholders. While this may hold true universally, the ways in which people understand the concept of sacredness, or of the sacred, varies immensely, dependent upon cultural, temporal, and religious considerations. Yet sacred places, however understood, are a worldwide phenomenon, spanning time, continents and cultures. These places, while valued by some are simultaneously devalued, degraded, ignored and deemed inconsequential in the eyes of others. There are disputes over access, stewardship, ownership, rights to use and rights to the natural resources contained within the parameters of the site. Sacred places, it seems, inspire strong emotions in both their adherents and their opponents.

While land comes under increasing pressure as real estate or resource, there seems at the same time to be a growing consensus that these special places deserve protection and preservation. What is harder to agree upon is exactly why, and how, and for whom this preservation should take place. Is it for posterity, for history, or for some more lived present, a re-enactment of past ritual that will revive present culture and reinforce communities? Will it bring back some lost sense of enchantment, or at least of spirituality and connectedness, with both place and the divine? Or is it to preserve interesting landscapes and monuments that might otherwise be lost?

Given the complexity and scope of issues that surround sacred places, it is unsurprising that the study of them spans many academic disciplines, including religious

studies and philosophy, history and archaeology, anthropology, cultural geography and environmental studies, public policy and politics. While it is not be feasible to cover all the literature in all of these disciplines as they relate to sacred places, this chapter serves two purposes: to trace some of the specific strands of scholarly thought in these various disciplines on sacred places, and so find answers to the questions posed above, and secondly to discuss some of the current issues in sacred places, so as to give some context to the arguments presented in the later chapters of this thesis. For this latter goal, the sites of Stonehenge in Wiltshire, England, and Big Horn Medicine Wheel, in Wyoming, will be used as the main examples.

In part this is because these two sites are much discussed in the literature about sacred places, but also because there are some intriguing similarities, and equally interesting differences between them. Both of these sites contain built, or made, features embedded within the surrounding environment; that is, they are natural places with cultural features where the natural and the cultural combine to create the overall value of the place as sacred. In both cases, the surrounding environment has significance to the site itself and the site would not retain the same kinds of value and spirit were it to be relocated. Both are aligned such that the summer solstice may be observed and celebrated within them, and both are known to be quite ancient. One main difference, however, lies in the spiritual genealogy, as it were, of the two places. There are in the present day directly traceable descendants of the original celebrants of Medicine Wheel and the cosmology of these first celebrants has never been lost. Who the original inhabitants were, and what their primary purpose was in building and using Stonehenge, on the other hand, is not so surely known. This creates some interesting dilemmas for those who now

wish to claim Stonehenge (as well as related sites such as the stone circle at Avebury) as sacred to themselves, as well as for those who wish to preserve this as a site of cultural and historic, as opposed to sacred, value. But before one can begin to address issues of use, ownership, conservation, preservation and restoration, it seemed necessary to investigate the ways in which we come to understand or recognize a place as sacred, and what significance the designation of sacred place actually has.

### *Finding sacred place*

A fundamental question in this thesis is, how to determine which sites are sacred and which are not? If we consider this question from a phenomenological point of view, we could begin by thinking about the character and characteristics of each individual site as observed and experienced by individuals or communities. Belden Lane writes in “Giving Voice to Place: Three Models for Understanding American Sacred Space” that sacred places evoke a “multifaceted conversation” with those who encounter them. When encountering a sacred place, there is a “compelling mystery” that draws the experiencer into the place.<sup>1</sup> Lane, writing in 2001, expresses well an idea that is found in some of the earlier, foundational Western academic literature in the discussion of the sacred and its relation to place.

This tradition in the literature describing this numinous quality of sacred places can be traced back to Rudolf Otto with his 1917 book The Idea of the Holy. It was in this work that Otto introduces the word “numinous” – a word coined, he explains, to try to create some clarity in the usage of the words “sacred” and “holy.”<sup>2</sup> Following on in a similar train of thought came Mircea Eliade with The Myth of the Eternal Return<sup>3</sup> in

1954 and The Sacred and the Profane five years later. In both of these works, Eliade discusses the phenomenon of hierophany – that is, an invocation of some divine other that manifests itself in the landscape, or in specific landscape features or objects. It is this that “results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different.”<sup>4</sup>

When one reflects upon various well-known sacred places, it is not hard to see that this is so. In the case of Stonehenge, while much controversy and mystery surrounds the original or intended reason for the construction of the stone circle itself, it has for centuries been at the very least a “special” place, a place of intrigue and of some “compelling mystery”. It is hard to imagine Stonehenge existing somewhere else, and it certainly appears that there was some special quality about the place when it was chosen; after all, the builders went to very great lengths to bring the stones to that particular location. It is reasonable to surmise that it had some religious and/or ritualistic function, given the careful placement of the stones, and that the site itself had certain characteristics that could not have been duplicated elsewhere. Eliade, and later Yi-Fu Tuan are among the theorists who note that many ancient sacred sites were thought to be the centre of, or else an axis upon which the universe turns. This theory is highly plausible especially when one considers the significance of the summer solstice, and of light and sun in many sacred places. A more recent work by Barbara Weightman investigates the role of light in religious experience and the way that this affects the geography of religion and of the placement of sacred sites in many diverse religions, both spatially and temporally. Light, she argues, is fundamental to religious experience.<sup>5</sup> In support of this theory, it can readily be seen that a spatial and temporal relation to the sun

and the summer solstice is a feature of many sacred places, including both Stonehenge and at the Bighorn medicine wheel.

Some commentators, including Eliade and archaeologist Mark Gillings, contend that in sites such as Stonehenge and Avebury, it is not only the place, but also the stones themselves that make the place sacred – that the stones are not only hierophanies, but also what Eliade terms ontophanies – reminders of the permanence of the world and of the divine<sup>6</sup>. However, one could easily combine the ideas of the significance of light and the significance of stones, and see that the two ideas are complementary, and serve to strengthen each other. Without the light, the stones would not receive their hierophanic or ontophanic qualities; without the stones that mark the place, the light would not be celebrated. This melding of place and light, of natural and cultural artifacts, is a very good example of the interesting qualitative “difference” found in sacred places.

### *Stonehenge*

While the role of sites such as Bighorn Medicine Wheel in celebrating the solstice has been passed on through living generations, there is no such record of this at Stonehenge, although the placement of the stones and the recent discovery of other artifacts in the vicinity certainly lends powerful credence to the theory that community solstice celebration was at least in part why the stones were arranged as they were<sup>7</sup>. Of course, it does not solve all the mysteries of Stonehenge; smaller markers could have been much more easily put in place, but these would not have the same ontophanic impress. This lack (or maybe loss) of definitive knowledge about Stonehenge’s purpose or purposes brings us to another intriguing and difficult question: what happens to a sacred place

when the original meaning has been lost? Does the place retain its sacred qualities, even when we fail to notice them? It seems at first glance that the logical answer is that it does, based solely on the fact that not everyone is attuned to the sacredness even of recognized sacred sites, but that does not detract from their sacredness. However, if we are to designate something as a community sacred place (as opposed to a personal sacred place), then one would have to find a cohesive group or community who all intuit the sacred connections found at the site.

No one knows for sure exactly why, or even when Stonehenge was built, although most estimates place the early phases of construction at around 2900 BCE.<sup>8</sup> Archeologists still have not (and in all likelihood cannot) conclusively proven whether the site was intended for some religious and/or ritualistic use, or else as a sort of astronomical observatory, but in either case it is an amazing feat of Neolithic engineering and was obviously highly significant. There are other sites nearby (such as burial mounds and smaller timber circles) that are thought to have been created at around the same time, perhaps by the same group or related groups of people; among the better known are the stones and related structures at Avebury. Speculation about the whys and hows of these structures have been on-going since the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century at least – one of the popular, or popularist, theories is that these were created by forerunners of the Druids, although this theory has recently fallen out of favour.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there are many so-called “New Age” groups who believe quite strongly that they should be allowed access to the Stonehenge site in particular on the summer solstice for their own neo-Druidic rituals and celebrations. This relatively recent claim to the stones has had a rather fractious history – on the one hand, some archaeologists are appalled that the site is being

“disturbed”<sup>10</sup> by these “fake” celebrations (although apparently they have no problem with it being used as a tourist attraction). Others, including Christopher Chippendale (in his rather wryly titled article “Stoned Henge: Events and Issues at the Summer Solstice 1985”) are somewhat more agreeable to the idea of festivities being allowed on the Stonehenge site, regardless of whether there is any real historical precedent or authenticity to the celebrations. Part of his argument is that if those who value the stones for spiritual reasons are allowed access, they will work towards preserving the site, more passionately than, say, English Heritage, which currently manages the site.<sup>11</sup> A similar view has been put forth by earlier commentators on place generally, such as Tuan, who in his 1974 book *Topophilia*, suggests that those who “visit” a site (perhaps for rituals) are “able to perceive merits” in an environment, while those merits are no longer acknowledged by those for whom the site has become mundane.<sup>12</sup>

It seems clear in any case that those currently wishing to use Stonehenge as a sacred site do not have any provable, direct connection with the builders or subsequent users of the site, either in ancestry or religious inclination. But this does not seem to matter to those requesting use – to them, Stonehenge *is* sacred. Sacredness of place when claimed as a legacy however, as Chippendale points out, “very much depends on what is meant by carrying on or reviving some tradition of religious sanctity.”<sup>13</sup> This is a thorny issue, but also a significant one: is a place eternally sacred because some now-lost sacred use was once ascribed to it, or can it only be called sacred if there is still some definite, provable connection, whether through bloodline or belief, with those who originally used the site for sacred activities? In other words, how to discern between that place which is merely historically interesting, and that which is presently sacred? This question has

obvious implications when trying to decide the best way forward – whether through preservation, restoration, or some other path– of a site that has become degraded, whether through benign neglect or deliberate actions.

In 1993, after years of conflict between the management and Druidic practitioners, the management of Stonehenge finally drew official criticism in the U.K., with the government of the day calling the conditions and surrounding landscape “a national disgrace.”<sup>14</sup> Over the next few years, a consortium of local and national governmental agencies and departments began to look at ways that the site might be made more accessible for those who wished to hold spiritual or religious ceremonies there, while still accommodating the need for roads, visitors (tourism), and preservation (heritage). Between 2004 and 2006, public consultations were held to try to find a way forward for the site that respected all concerned parties. A proposal to re-route the nearby A303 (a major roadway) through a tunnel is currently under review, while the National Trust has put forth a Land Use Plan for 850 ha of land surrounding Stonehenge. This plan, according to the National Trust “balances the needs of archaeology, farming, nature conservation, landscape and visitors... (and) aims to create a grass-dominated landscape in all areas within sight of the stone circle.” Restoring these chalk downlands is a major undertaking; in fact, is “the largest single reversion scheme in the country.” However, the report notes that “eventually the Stonehenge landscape will provide a safe natural habitat for several important species of plants, insects and birds.”<sup>15</sup>

Among the concerned parties are academics and archaeologists, (neo) Druidic followers and pagans, those involved in land management and tourism (and the attendant infrastructure, such as roads), and the farmers who own and/or use the lands adjacent to

the site. The stones themselves are, inevitably, weathered and eroded by wind and time. Not surprisingly, not all of what archaeologists have determined were the original stones are still standing; when one visits the site, several large stones can be seen lying on the ground. Nevertheless, the intentions of the original designers remain clear, and at the summer solstice, the sunrise can still be observed through the stones, as (it is generally believed) was part of the original purpose of the site. There has not been any attempt to resurrect the fallen stones, but it does not seem to matter to those who hold the site sacred or, for that matter, to the archaeologists or English Heritage.

Meanwhile, the Stonehenge Riverside Project, based at the University of Manchester, has made some interesting findings near the Stonehenge site that have archaeologists pressing for more time to complete their surveys and diggings. The project, a collaboration between five U.K. universities, has unearthed evidence of settlements, roads and shrines close to Stonehenge. This has led investigators to believe that the henge builders lived close by, perhaps as part of a much larger community. Further evidence shows that feasts and rituals, including burials and celebrations of the winter solstice as well as the more well-known summer solstice, were likely to have been carried out on the site. This lends further credence to the theory that Stonehenge was indeed used for religious, or at the very least ritualistic purposes, according to Mike Parker Pearson, a Sheffield University archaeologist and a member of the Stonehenge Riverside Project.<sup>16</sup> Much of the historic enmity between archaeologists and Druidic or neo-Druidic groups has dissipated for a variety of reasons – according to Ronald Hutton from Bristol University, while relations may be only coldly cordial, “the animosity of professional archaeologists towards Druids had largely evaporated in the atmosphere of

post-processual, polyvocal interpretation,”<sup>17</sup> or, to put it another way, as long as the Druids are not granted any sort of exclusive rights / rites, the archaeologists are willing to let more broadly based gatherings occur under the watchful eyes of the British police force as well as English Heritage.

This is not to say that the archaeologists are pleased to share what they see as “their” research space with other folks, but rather that since the archaeologists are much cosier with English Heritage than are the Druids, they feel that the weight of the establishment will back up any claims they may have. The Druids meanwhile find that “neither the state nor the public now seem willing to listen”<sup>18</sup> to their claims to use the site for religious ceremonies, mostly centering on the summer solstice. In the absence of presence at Stonehenge, Druidic groups have begun to use other sites, such as Avebury, for other types of ceremonies (such as weddings) and rituals.

What all this highlights is how very complex issues surrounding sacred places can become: there are often multiple claims to “use” of the site, whether for research or for tourism, for development or for ceremonies relating to spiritual beliefs and practices. It can be easily seen that while Stonehenge itself is a very ancient site, its use is very much a contemporary issue, arousing passionate arguments from a wide array of groups. While attempts are being made to restore the landscape surrounding Stonehenge to something closer to its original context, the debates surrounding use of the site itself are likely to continue. The popularity of pagan spiritualities in the U.K. continues to grow, and as part of this, “specific narratives are forming around individual sites... where connections can be made with the Earth Goddess/God, where the spirit/energy of the land can be most strongly felt.”<sup>19</sup> The engagements of various pagan groups with ancient sites “are diverse

and complex” and include a melding of academic interpretations of original use, “together with folkloric understandings of spirits and local deities”<sup>20</sup>. Wallis and Blain, who self-identify as both academics and pagans, theorize that at the crux of the dissonance between archaeologists and pagans is that the former seek “rational understanding” of the site, while the latter see the site as a home to “wights, land sprites and goddesses” – according to them these beings are “actually there, and sites, stones and spirits are all active contributors to stories of place.”<sup>21</sup> Attempts to verify or add weight to these understanding and stories has led to a growing body of research into the folklore of these sites, including what might be termed “fringe” research into energy patterns and lines (ley lines), and the original features and shapes of the stones.<sup>22</sup>

Stonehenge certainly provides an interesting and on-going example of sacred place, and one cannot deny that to some groups, this is a very sacred site. However, one major detracting factor in drawing out its sacred qualities is that it is inescapably set in a largely industrialized and urbanized landscape, and trying to find a calmness in which one might reflect upon the sacredness of the site is nearly impossible. Anyone who has traveled around the U.K will know that here are few places one can go in England, and certainly in the south of England, where the sights or at least sounds of the contemporary world cannot be seen, felt, or heard. Finding sacredness in place when the modern secular world is so intrusive can be hard to do. This intrusiveness also became an issue in Wyoming at the Bighorn medicine wheel.

### *Wyoming*

Situated at the top of the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming, many of the problems that this site has had to contend with stem from the fact that it is situated within a U.S. National Forest. More specifically, it is located on a ridge of Medicine Mountain, part of northern Wyoming's Big Horn Range, within the boundaries of Bighorn National Forest. It does have some legal protection, as it has been designated as a National Historic Landmark, as it is believed to be one of the oldest medicine wheels in North America<sup>23</sup>. However, because it falls within the park boundaries, and because it is considered a historic, rather than as a contemporary spiritually significant site, there is a fair amount of tourist traffic with all the roads and other infrastructure that this sort of access requires.

The indigenous peoples to whom this site is sacred formed a coalition in 1988 to stop proposed development of a viewing platform and upgraded roads on land adjacent to the site. At the time, according to one report, federal officials told the tribal elders that “the Forest Service could bulldoze the Medicine Wheel”<sup>24</sup> without any consultation with the local indigenous people. Since then, in a sort of tacit recognition of the significance of the site (and if one is cynical, in response to public opinion), the Forest Service has allowed some First Nations input into management of the area, such the creation of an interpretive centre in 1992 and limiting vehicular and non-native visitor traffic close to the site<sup>25</sup>. Although the site is in any case inaccessible during winter months due to snow cover, the impact of tourism in the summer months was becoming quite noticeable. Chapman describes the sort of problems that occurred during the summer of 1992, including damage to both the ecosystem and the site itself: “The informal trail... became

a rutted path and the fragile alpine vegetation that normally covers the landscape had all but disappeared.” Visitors also left their mark at the wheel itself. Chapman continues: “In an apparent effort to emulate the Native American religious custom of leaving... religious offerings... non-Indian visitors attached used cigarette lighters, fish hooks, belt buckles, condoms, tampons and other inappropriate items to the fence.” To the indigenous users of the site, says Chapman, “the consequences of unregulated visitation constituted the worst kind of spiritual desecration.”<sup>26</sup>

In response, in 1994 the Forest Service began consultations with a number of indigenous and federal consultation groups concerned with the preservation of the site. In 1996, the Forest Service, acting upon the results of this consultation, “created an 18,000-acre ‘Area of Consultation’ that would encompass all of Medicine Mountain and the cultural resources associated with the Medicine Wheel, with special emphasis on protecting its sacred values”.<sup>27</sup> Included in this plan are heavy restrictions on vehicle traffic, scheduled closings to allow for indigenous religious ceremonies, restrictions (though not an outright ban) on grazing, and a ban on mineral extraction.

Even so, Medicine Wheel has continued to face environmental threats. In 2004, logging company Wyoming Sawmills tried to gain logging access to the area surrounding the wheel. The Medicine Wheel Coalition took the company to court, asking for a complete logging ban in the area and eventually the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the coalition. Part of the indigenous objection to logging near Medicine Wheel had to do with the intrusion onto their ceremonies that industrial noise and an industrial landscape would constitute. It would change the “sense” of the place. To understand this idea of sense of place, or an understanding of the “spirit” of a place, it might be helpful to think in terms

of your own home. You may well appreciate the solitude, or the warmth, or the “feel” of your home. Now imagine if your home had no walls – no buffer zone to separate your home from the outside world. The forests surrounding the Bighorn Medicine Wheel act like these walls in that they keep the place secluded and “safe” from intrusion.

Furthermore, as Fred Chapman notes, indigenous people “regard Medicine Wheel as an essential component of a much larger spiritual landscape composed of the surrounding alpine forests and mountain peaks.”<sup>28</sup> This way of thinking is also noted by Nancy Turner in her book, The Earth’s Blanket, where she writes, “First Nations spiritual life is completely tied to territory... [there are] inextricable links between their lands and their sacred territories.”<sup>29</sup> In such cases, it is not just the sacred “core” site, but the whole landscape that is considered sacred, and which must be preserved. If we again use an architectural comparison, the wheel is akin to the inner sanctum of a church: without the rest of the building surrounding it, the sanctum itself would not retain its sacred qualities. So it is with many natural sacred places – the surrounding landscapes are an essential component in keeping the place sacred.

However, there are still some who object to this setting apart of sacred places, and so the problems in Wyoming, as in Stonehenge, are not over yet. Still, according to Amy Corbin, the successes that the First Nations have achieved thus far “proved the importance of dialogue between federal land managers and traditional Native American religious practitioners in developing policy to protect sacred areas.”<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, if it is respected, this may be what keeps Medicine Wheel safe, if not restored.

The two examples described above are meant to give some context to the arguments and issues set forth in the rest of this thesis. Among these issues are problems with definitions of both “sacred” and “sacred place”, as well as of the options that exist for reviving sacred places that are under the same types of threats as those encountered in Stonehenge and in Wyoming. In the next three chapters, the literature review has been interwoven into the chapters themselves, as this seems a more logical way to present the history of ideas, as well as the proposed solutions.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Belden C. Lane, "Giving Voice to Place: Three Models for Understanding American Sacred Space," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (2001): 53.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (transl. John W. Harvey, revised ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954)

<sup>4</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> See Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*. (London: Harcourt Brace, 1959), Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1974.), and Barbara Weightman, "Sacred Landscapes and the Phenomenon of Light." *Geographical Review* 86, no. 1 (January 1996): 59-71

<sup>6</sup> See Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1959), 147-159, and Mark Gillings and Joshua Pollard. "Non-Portable Stone Artifacts and Contexts of Meaning: The Tale of Grey Wether." *World Archaeology* 31, no. 2 (October 1999): 179-193.

<sup>7</sup> Many of the most recent discoveries have been made by The Stonehenge Riverside Project, a collaborative research effort between five U.K. universities. It is co-directed by Mike Parker Pearson (Sheffield University), Joshua Pollard (Bristol University), Colin Richards (Manchester University), Julian Thomas (Manchester University), Chris Tilley (University College London) and Kate Welham (Bournemouth University). This group has been carrying out geophysical surveys and excavations and has found evidence of pathways between Stonehenge and the River Avon, as well as remnants suggesting that there were residences and possibly shrines, built near the site, and that feasts were held there during the winter solstice. This is discussed a little further on in this chapter. For more information on this project, see <http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/subjectareas/archaeology/research/stonehenge/>

<sup>8</sup> To review all the literature about Stonehenge would require a whole separate essay. Speculation about the uses and construction of this Neolithic monument has been on-going since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and continues to be debated today. However, the date given here seems to be generally agreed among archaeologists and other commentators. There is much less agreement about the use that Stonehenge was originally created for, and about whether it ought still to be used for ceremonies in the present.

<sup>9</sup> This dismissal of the creation of Stonehenge as a sacred place may well be tied, albeit unconsciously, to the presuppositions and worldviews of those present-day scientists. As we shall discuss further in Chapter Three, the current dominant worldview values science and technology more highly than things spiritual: perhaps overlaying Stonehenge with some scientific use makes more sense to those who value science. In other words, perhaps the move to assert that the main use of Stonehenge was scientific ties in with the general movement in the modern world to elevate science above religion. However, it is not proven that Neolithic people held the same sorts of values at all – in fact, it is far more likely that they saw religion and veneration of whatever god or gods they worshipped, as of prime importance in their worldview.

<sup>10</sup> See Simon Denison, "Archaeologists divide on Stonehenge solstice: Is it right to share Stonehenge with all? Or to keep the 'prancing mystics' out?" *British Archaeology*, no. 54, (August 2000), 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Chippendale, "Stoned Henge: Events and Issues at the Summer Solstice, 1985," *World Archaeology* 18, no. 1 (1986): 50. This idea, that those who value a place are its best caretakers, shall be referred to again later when we discuss restoration.

<sup>12</sup> Tuan, *Topophilia*.

<sup>13</sup> Chippendale, 43. Denison gives equal space in his editorial piece to both sides of the debate.

<sup>14</sup> From The Stonehenge Project website. Available: [www.thestonehengeproject.org](http://www.thestonehengeproject.org).

<sup>15</sup> "A Green and Pleasant Landscape" from The Stonehenge Project website.

<sup>16</sup> BBC News, January 30, 2007, "Stonehenge builders' houses found." BBC News website, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/6311939.stm>

<sup>17</sup> Ronald Hutton, "From Universal Bond to Public Free-For-All," *British Archaeology* 83 (July 2005). Available: [www.britarch.ac.uk/ba/ba83/feat1.shtml](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/ba/ba83/feat1.shtml).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Robert J Wallis and Jenny Blain, "Sites, Sacredness, and Stories: Interactions of Archaeology and Contemporary Paganism," *Folklore* 114 (2003), 310.

<sup>20</sup> Wallis and Blain, 310.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>22</sup> Wallis and Blain provide an overview of these research activities, including references, in the above-cited article.

<sup>23</sup> There is some dispute over this. While there is evidence that the site itself has been in use for up to 7,000 years, it is not clear exactly when the wheel was constructed. Some sources say it was built perhaps 6,000 year ago, while others say it was only created 500 years ago. There is another ancient wheel in southern Alberta, the Majorville Cairn, which is believed to be 5,500 years old. References for this information include the Sacred Lands Film Project web site ([www.sacredlands.org](http://www.sacredlands.org)), and Fred Chapman, "The Bighorn Medicine Wheel 1988-1999," CRM no.3, 1999, 5-10. Designation of the site as a historically significant site was finalised in 1970.

<sup>24</sup> Fred Chapman, "The Bighorn Medicine Wheel 1988-1999," CRM no.3, 1999, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Amy Corbin, "History of the Conflict," Sacred Lands Film Project web site, [http://www.sacredland.org/historical\\_sites\\_pages/medicine\\_wheel.html](http://www.sacredland.org/historical_sites_pages/medicine_wheel.html), and Kevin McCullen, "Forest Service bows to Indians' wishes on religious site," Rocky Mountain News, 26 July 1992. Available on-line: <http://nativenet.uthscsa.edu/archive/nl/9207/0077.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Chapman, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Corbin, "History of the Conflict," Sacred Lands Film Project web site, and Chapman, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Chapman, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy J. Turner, The Earth's Blanket: Traditional Teachings for Sustainable Living (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 100-101.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter Three: Worldviews, Sense of Place, Stories and Sacred Places

*“When people lack a sense of pure spiritual piety  
Toward natural life,  
Then awful things happen in their life.  
Therefore, respect where you dwell.  
Love your life and livelihood.  
One of whole virtue respects his own life,  
But is not egotistical.  
He holds a sense of spiritual serenity for all things.”*

*- Lao Tzu, The Tao Te Ching, 72.<sup>1</sup>*

*Whether the universe is a concourse of atoms, or nature is a system, let this first be established, that I am a part of the whole which is governed by nature.*

*-Marcus Aurelius, The Meditations, Book 10*

Throughout recorded human history, the question of how to fit thinking about the environment and our relationship to it, or our place within it, has been addressed in many ways. Up until very recently, in terms of the whole panoply of human history, the tendency has been to construct a worldview in which a belief in the divine was combined with a sense of the world as sacred, as divinely created and given, and in which the natural world was seen as having its own intrinsic value. In many instances, these worldviews were strongly tied to place, and in light of this, places in the landscape came to have sacred value in the mindscape of local inhabitants<sup>2</sup>.

Then, in parts of Europe during the late 15<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the scientific revolution gained momentum and in its wake there came a new, scientific worldview in which the divine was distant and disciplinarian, where the sacred was relegated to relics in churches and cathedrals, while the natural world was objectified and understood increasingly in terms of instrumental value. In the Western world, our sense of wonder, of mystery and mythology in nature began to fade, replaced by a cooler,

more detached view of nature as something “other” than the newly exalted human nature. Yet somehow this way of thinking has proven unsatisfactory and there has persisted in many minds, a quest to reconcile and unite some kind of theology with ecology, to re-create a worldview that cares for Earth, cares about creation, and finds a place for humanity to dwell within, rather than merely upon, Earth, and to seek ways in which to connect with the divine (which is often thought to exist outside of Earth), within the natural world.

In order to better understand the nature of sacred places and the function these places fulfill in our world, and how and why our perception of what is sacred in place has changed, it would be helpful to understand how the shift in focus of the dominant precepts in western worldviews has affected our perception of what kinds of knowledge are important, and what sorts of values ought to be held most highly. In contrast to much of history, the current dominant worldview values scientific knowledge over other ways of knowing, and values “progress” primarily in terms of economics and industry, rather than valuing other sorts of growth and understanding.

As a result an increasingly scientific and secularized understanding of the world has come to be accepted as the norm, while those views in which the sacred, the idea of sacred place, or of a religion, are of utmost importance have become marginalized and faded. Upon reflection, though, it can be realised that religion and spirituality are part of any worldview – even saying that one does not believe in any religion, divinity or spirituality is a point of view, and is incorporated into one’s worldview. It can be argued that the conception of things spiritual relates directly to our perception of the environment, of ecology, of our place on or in Earth, and our role and relationship with

and to the rest of the natural world. One's conceptions of God, and/or the divine (not necessarily a deity and not necessarily external to oneself), and the first causes of the universe, are crucial in the development of a worldview, and in how the place of humanity within the world is conceptualized. Many commentators have noted that our theologies, whether explicitly expressed or implicitly understood, have a direct bearing on our views of nature. For example, M.B. Foster points out in his paper "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature," that our "philosophy of nature is dependent on theology... a world which is of divine creation is one thing, a world which is the product of divine information is another, and a world begotten by God is another world still."<sup>3</sup> And Lynn White Jr., in his well-known essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" writes that "what people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion."<sup>4</sup> The way that we think about ourselves in relation to our landscapes – the way in which we reconcile mindscapes and landscapes – affects how we learn to recognize and understand sacred places.

In this chapter, we shall first look at what a worldview is and how worldviews act as mediators between people and environment. We will also examine the concept of sense of place and how this becomes an integral part of sacred places. The importance of narratives, or stories, in creating sense of place, making sense of worldviews, and relaying a sense of the sacred in place will also be discussed. Furthermore, this chapter will look at the role that the scientific outlook currently prevalent in western culture has played in distancing humans from the rest of the natural world and how we might learn to

balance science and spirituality to create a worldview that takes account of the way that we understand the world both as a physical and a spiritual entity.

It should be noted here that this chapter will focus mainly on those worldviews and spiritualities found in the mainstream of North American and European contexts. This is not to suggest that Eastern or other worldviews are not important, it is simply that time and space are not in any useful sense limitless, and so limits do have to be placed. Any impact this work may have is more likely to be within the Western world. In any case, in order to address these questions properly, it would first be helpful to define a few terms. What, exactly, is a worldview? What is meant by sense of place?

### *Defining worldviews*

A worldview is, in essence, a largely unconscious but generally coherent set of beliefs about how the world operates and our role within it. It encompasses many spheres – physical (the material world and all that it comprises); psychological (the role and perception of self); social (how self fits with other, however defined); and metaphysical (how we understand divinity, first causes, and our place within that milieu). There are of course many different worldviews; in a sense, every person's worldview is slightly different, given that they are relating *themselves* to the *rest* of the world. In fact, William McNeill, perhaps somewhat wryly, notes that “Since we habitually entertain contradictory worldviews, there are more worldviews at any given time than persons walking the face of the earth.”<sup>5</sup> There are two ways of speaking about worldviews: as a set of beliefs held by an individual, or as a more widely held cultural set of beliefs. The latter is also sometimes referred to as a paradigm, but as Fritjof Capra notes, “a single

person can hold a worldview, but not a paradigm. A paradigm is always shared by a community.”<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that a community cannot also share a worldview; however, there are subtle but significant differences between the terms “worldview” and “paradigm”, as we shall see shortly. First, however, both individual and community worldviews are discussed below, beginning with individual worldviews.

According to the Belgian philosopher Leo Apostel, a worldview contains seven elements: an ontological model of the world; an explanation of first causes and how the world came to be; moral and ethical values as to what is and is not permissible; a vision of the future; praxis as to how the permissible and imperative should be achieved; a theory of knowledge that allows one to determine what is true and what is not true; and finally, an account of how these elements combine to form a cohesive and intelligible whole.<sup>7</sup> Apostel and his colleagues go on to suggest that “variations and combinations” of diverse worldviews might act as a catalyst for both confronting and solving many social and ecological problems across the globe.<sup>8</sup>

Personal worldviews can be categorised by any one of their features, and in each case, this is the feature that holds primary importance for the individual. For example, a worldview can be defined from an economic perspective, such as is the case with the expansionist worldview, which holds that the economy has the potential to grow indefinitely, limited only by the human ability to create value and commodities. Usually, a person with this kind of worldview will value monetary wealth very highly. This is closely related to political worldviews, such as capitalist or Marxist (both of which, incidentally, also include expansionist principles). Alternatively, a person might embrace a psychological worldview, in which the most important factor in one’s world is the

individual's psychological and emotional healthiness, as defined by mental and emotional processes and perceptions of self. Alternatively, there is a social worldview, common among teenagers as they explore their place in the world as related to others, and in which they see these relationships as paramount. Or, a worldview may have as its axis, metaphysical beliefs and notions, holding that spirituality and religion are the most important components of our being.

Another way of conceptualising worldviews is to think of them as a set of cultural values, held to be true by a community, and mediated by history. This is what is meant when one speaks in broad terms of a "western" or "modern" worldview, as opposed to an individual worldview. Often, the term "paradigm" is used as a synonym for "worldview", but, as alluded to earlier, this is not entirely correct. Capra states that a paradigm is "a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions and practices shared by a community," and further states that while, as we have seen, each individual holds a worldview, "a paradigm is always shared by a community."<sup>9</sup> A paradigm, then, can be thought of as the foundational concepts and precepts upon which the community worldview is built.

In this thesis, we will not be specifically addressing the foundational paradigms of Western thought, although certainly these become apparent as worldviews are discussed. But worldviews, I would argue, are more morphous than paradigms; there are different ways of arranging various moral, ethical, spiritual and philosophical precepts without necessarily changing the underlying structure, in the same way that one can remodel a house without necessarily having to rebuild the foundation. The reason for this sort of remodelling can simply be changing times; as we discover new facts about our world and ourselves as a society (either local or global), we find it necessary to readjust some of our

thinking. Sometimes, as in the Enlightenment, these shifts can be quite monumental, and in such cases, the paradigms do shift. But the paradigms laid down in the Enlightenment have remained largely intact over the last few centuries, while the changes in knowledge and values have updated the worldviews. Bruce Ward writes that worldviews are “the fundamental principles of human thought and action... determined by their historical milieu.”<sup>10</sup> The significance of the historical and cultural milieu in worldviews cannot be overstated. As Apostel et al write, “Worldview construction is always connected to a culture... a worldview comes from our inner experience and our practical dealings with things, as well as from the interpretation of history.”<sup>11</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, in his reflective essay, “Continuity and Discontinuity”, muses that these differences in conception of time and space / history and culture have been responsible for the diverging values of east and west worldviews.<sup>12</sup>

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, many scholars have pointed out that worldviews matter in our understanding and use of our environment. J.R. McNeill, for example, writes that “the grand social and ideological systems that people construct for themselves carry large consequences.”<sup>13</sup> Others, such as Christopher Chapple, argue that not only do our worldviews matter, but so too do the stories, or narratives, that allow us to hold those beliefs to be true in the first place. Chapple writes that “Cosmology orients us. It provides us a place within the universe, a home where our story can be told in such a way that it makes sense to ourselves and the people with whom we live.”<sup>14</sup> Chapple, along with others including White, Thomas Berry and James Parks Morton, argue that we need to get our stories straight, to rediscover the wonder and mystery of the divine in the natural world, and then we can, as Parks Morton urges, “re-create our role as caretakers

of creation to include the nurture and preservation of all life... humanity must take responsibility through science, through the arts, through religion, to care for the sacred universe.”<sup>15</sup> We shall discuss the importance of narratives more a little further on in this chapter, but for now, it should suffice to note that narratives play an important role in the formation and continued acceptance of worldviews.

The most common metaphysical worldview, at least in the western world, is the Judeo-Christian worldview, with God as the focal centre and the Bible as handbook. Even though, as White notes, we like to say that we live in a “post-Christian”<sup>16</sup> or secularised world, Christian notions of morality and teleology still prevail throughout much of western civilisation. This is not to say that we all hold all Christian beliefs, principles, and stories as being wholly true, or as incontrovertible; rather, it is that this way of thinking dominates much of western culture. Obviously, other religious precepts and spiritualities may also be at the heart of a metaphysical worldview both in western and non-western cultures. Cultures, however, as Apostel et al note, “are not monolithic entities, but are always in a process of change,”<sup>17</sup> and so worldviews evolve to take account of those shifts and changes, including changes in moralities, principles and stories. Capra would characterise this as a shift in the dominant social paradigm; he writes that we only when we come to realise the limitations of our paradigms will those paradigms begin to shift, and the shadow of a new paradigm will begin to form.<sup>18</sup>

Still, whether we understand our culture to be more heavily influenced by Christianity or post-Christian secularity, the one common dominant feature of most worldviews in the western world is that scientific way of thinking that dissected the

sacred out of nature, replaced it with technology, and left us feeling that somehow, we had lost our sense of place in the world.

### *Defining sense of place*

Sense of place is a difficult thing to define. It is, after all, a *sense* – something intuitive, emotive, not scientific. According to Kent Ryden, author of Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and Sense of Place, there are four elements in sense of place: location, history, identity and emotion.<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Cross, addressing a conference on sense of place in 2001, names six elements in defining sense of place; biographical, spiritual, ideological, narrative, commoditisation, and dependence.<sup>20</sup> There are commonalities here, although the words used are different. History and biography are closely related, as are emotion and spirituality. The essence of both these definitions (and others) is that sense of place involves a kind of rootedness, a close, emotive connection to a place, or that the place holds significance and meaning.

However one chooses to phrase this, to have a sense of place means that there is significance to that place, and for that significance to be made explicit, there must also be stories attached to it. We cannot relay history, or biography, or emotion or spiritual meaning, or an interpretation of first causes, without telling stories. Stories are a big part of what connects us to land. Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes that throughout history and across cultures, stories have been told to give (or explain) deeper meaning to landscapes. He notes that stories, or myths, are “a way of guiding the attention of listeners and readers”<sup>21</sup> to a better understanding of place. Eric Higgs, in his book Nature by Design, adds that these stories become part of the history and meaning of place,

adding significance through “narrative continuity.”<sup>22</sup> I would argue that narrative *continuity* is not a necessary precondition for sense of place, or for sacredness of place, but that narratives *themselves*, whether continued, recovered or newly created, are necessary. For example, as Wallis and Blain write in “Sites, Sacredness and Stories”, “narratives of interpretation become part of how individuals and groups understand sacredness” within particular pagan sites<sup>23</sup>. It would, presumably, be necessary for the stories to be shared in order for a community to come together in a sense of place – like worldviews, sense of place can be, I would argue, either personal or communal. However, as with sacred places, our focus here is on the communal.

David Salvesen, of the Urban Land Institute, notes that “a sense of place means different things to different people... it derives from shared memories, experiences, traditions, and history.”<sup>24</sup> Again, all of these elements are connected by narratives or stories that connect us to place. Salvensen goes on to note that “place” is a wholly human construct, and that having a sense of place is, seemingly, an emotional necessity. Yi-Fu Tuan defines sense of place, or what he calls topophilia, as “the relations, perceptions, attitudes, values, and worldview that affectively bond people and place.”<sup>25</sup> As with worldviews, Tuan emphasises the role of culture in the perception of environment; in other words, two people with differing worldviews and cultural precepts will perceive the same environment in different ways.<sup>26</sup> This has very significant implications for sacred places; perhaps once we understand the reasons why we value place differently, we will become more open to accepting these different types of values. Of course, this works only if credence and validity is given to differing worldviews and cultures, and history shows us quite clearly that this is not always the case.

There are, it seems, many ways of understanding what sense of place is, and what it means. Perhaps the best way to understand it is to say that sense of place is something innate, a sense of what a place means to us, and what our response and responsibility to that place becomes. In a way, sense of place is about feeling that we belong somewhere, that somewhere is “home”. This ties in with worldviews, as these are a way of *making* sense of our place in the world. Indeed, Apostel uses the metaphor of a house to convey how we use worldviews to feel “at home” in the world.<sup>27</sup> Sense of place is also an important component of how we think about ourselves. As Michael Harkin writes, in a discussion about the way that landscapes become inhabited, “a sense of belonging to place, replete with its possibilities and limitations, constitutes the sense of self.”<sup>28</sup>

Environmental philosopher J. Stan Rowe titled his 1990 collection of essays on ecology Home Place; his sense is that Earth is our home; it is where we belong and it is a place to be valued<sup>29</sup>. Again we see that sense of place becomes intricately tied to worldview: the value we place on place, will depend on the values we give to the environment – whether we see it as something sacred, as something to be cherished, or as merely some *thing*, that exists only for our continued existence. If we choose the former, this would not necessarily mean that we must see all nature as sacred; there may be certain places (sacred places) or certain objects within those places, which act as hierophanic connectors between nature, the divine, and ourselves. These places become special; we feel spiritually “at home” there, even if we do not actually inhabit these places full-time. If we choose the latter, we will tend towards a scientific, and likely desacralized, view of nature. In order to understand the difference between the two, we need to understand what is meant when we say that something is sacred. While this will be addressed in

greater detail in Chapter 4, it is still worth discussing this topic briefly here as it relates to worldviews.

In general, to conceptualise of something as sacred, is to assign it some value as part of, or as related to, or connecting us to, the divine. It is something that is seen as of highest value, as something that is part of us in a deep and meaningful sense, that without it, we would be something less than whole. In the context of this paper, we are only interested in the sacred as it relates to place (as opposed to objects, such as sacred relics). One of the most renowned scholars on sacred places is Mircea Eliade, who in his book The Sacred and the Profane writes that sacred places have a certain numinous, or hierophanic quality that “results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different”<sup>30</sup>. This qualitative difference can be understood as a signal of divine presence in place. Here it becomes important to briefly state that the divine does not have to be understood in a solely deistic sense – the divine, like the sacred, like sense of place, is mediated by the individual’s cultural and temporal milieu. Thus, a person with a strong Christian faith will likely experience the divine as the presence of God; for a Buddhist, the divine experience is through the meditative process. Each person will experience the divine within his or her own spiritual framework. In cultures where all nature is perceived to be imbued with a living, feeling, responsive spirit, the divine may become manifest in an animal, or in a rock or a tree. David Kinsley in his book Ecology and Religion gives examples of the Cree First Nation, and of the Ainu in Japan, among others, as those for whom the divine may be found in all that surrounds us.<sup>31</sup>

*Science, the sacred, and the human/nature question in worldviews*

What would be the elements of a worldview that valued the interrelationships between humanity, Earth, and the divine? What would it mean to our sense of place – our sense of belonging in the world? Such a worldview would probably include a sense of the world as being creative and living, rather than inert, and would also include an understanding that the relationship between humanity, Earth, and the divine is one that needs to be understood and respected, if only for the purely anthropocentric reason that unless we do pay attention to the effects of our actions upon Earth, Earth will not continue to sustain us. If we can come to an understanding of our dependence on Earth, then we might also reach an understanding of how best to live on / with Earth.

In a worldview that promotes an ethic of care for Earth, we still should not completely disregard the contributions of science – it pervades our daily lives, makes some things much easier, and informs our actions and choices. We have learned much about the mechanisms by which Earth renews itself, and how to coax the best from nature. We have certainly also made mistakes along the way, although this thesis does not even begin to purport to catalogue those. But it does seem that we have yet to learn how to balance the positive contributions that science has made to our lives, while remembering that science will not solve those ecological problems it has created. In his essay, “Some Reflections in Recent Philosophy of Religion,” William Horosz writes, “perhaps it is time to give science and nature the same par value”<sup>32</sup> when considering how to balance the two. He goes on to muse that “in an age when nature and science play such a significant role... the question is bound to be asked, what role does nature play in shaping man’s dimensionality?” Still, he warns that finding ways to balance science and

nature in any theological context will not be easy. First, he says, we need to reassess the relationships between the divine, the human, and all the rest of the natural world.

The history of these relationships has long been one, and has produced a rather bewildering, often contradictory, array of answers. Even the great philosopher Cicero, in his 45 BC work On The Nature of The Gods, notes that given that the opinions of philosophers about the relationship between the divine, humanity, and nature are “so various and so mutually opposed [that] it [is] of course possible, upon the one hand, that not one of them is true, and certainly impossible, upon the other, that more than one should be true.”<sup>33</sup>

For most of humanity’s time on Earth, humans were for the most part considered an integral part of nature, part of the divinely created world. Indeed for most of human history there has existed an enchantment with Earth; the idea of any radical separation of subject / object, or of I / other was not part of the paradigm. Ian Simmons notes that “the mythologies of many hunter-gatherers [tell of] the relations of individual humans to each other, to their ecosystems and to the cosmos”<sup>34</sup> in a single, continuous narrative. While there have been over the centuries many disagreements about the nature of the divine, and the nature of man’s relationship to the divine, it still appears that in the long history of the pre-Christian era, and for several centuries afterwards, there was little attempt to show that the natural world was not intimately and inextricably connected both to humanity and to the divine. In fact, there was no perceived need or desire to do so. In the world of the ancient Greeks, nature was seen as something to be honored. As Bruce Ward writes, “for the ancient Greeks, nature itself sets the moral limit to its own subjugation for human benefit... the law of limit, inherent in nature, makes beauty possible. And where

beauty is present, human consent to the order of nature can be elicited.”<sup>35</sup> While one could devote many pages to the history of the philosophy of nature, it would not be particularly useful for the purposes of this thesis. However, perhaps the quote from Marcus Aurelius at the top of this chapter describes the old perspective best: “Whether the universe is a concourse of atoms, or nature is a system, let this first be established, that I am a part of the whole which is governed by nature.”<sup>36</sup>

As the early Common Era section of history unfolded, the previously mentioned enchantment became less compelling; humanity was wresting control from nature, learning how to shape it to fulfill human wants and needs. We began to see the world as “other”; a view made explicit in the philosophies of Bacon and Descartes. The “soul” or the “mind” was now understood as separate from physical reality, from the Earth and from the “rest of” nature, and mankind too was now set apart from his natural surroundings. This philosophy pervaded religion also, and Christianity, as a religion that promises a better life in another world, became the perfect receptacle for these ideas.

Up until the time of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, humans had held onto the belief that the “rest” of the natural world was connected to humans, in ways they could not understand, to be sure, but connected nevertheless. Science as understood after the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century changed all that. As Keith Thomas writes in Man and the Natural World, the invention of the microscope, and the subsequent revelations about nature in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries had a profound and unsettling effect on previous assumptions about the relationship that existed between human actions and the natural world. By revealing that the natural world abided by its own rules and laws, “naturalists completed their onslaught on the long established notion that nature was responsive to

human affairs... they constructed a detached natural science to be viewed and studied by the observer from the outside.” In so doing, science, and scientists “shattered the assumptions of the past.”<sup>37</sup> But Thomas also notes that despite this new world and emerging worldview, there were still those who held on to the notion that the world, natural and human, were interconnected, and that it still mattered. A nature so separate from humans and from the divine was still, in this new era, “an almost impossible lesson to grasp.”<sup>38</sup>

So as theologian James Park Morton puts it, when Christianity took root and grew throughout the western world, “something went wrong in the development of the western church”, and the sense that the created world was a world of wonder was lost, with “catastrophic” spiritual results.<sup>39</sup> There are many who place the blame for the subjugation of nature squarely at the feet of the Christian religion. One of the best known is Lynn White Jr., with the well-known essay “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”<sup>40</sup>. Others include Albert Camus, who writes in The Rebel that “the delicate equilibrium between humanity and nature... which elevates and makes resplendent all ancient thought, was first shattered... by Christianity.”<sup>41</sup> Camus theorized that the Christian expectation of a new world to come means that Earth is seen as only a temporary home, and therefore, our actions upon it are of little consequence.<sup>42</sup> Many commentators since have also put forth this view. As long as other world personal salvation remains the goal of any religion, that religion will never provide an adequate response to ecological concerns in this world. We don’t have to believe that nature itself is sacred to have a sense of the sacred in nature. But without a worldview that values something within nature as being attached in some way to the divine, there is little to connect us to that

natural world in any meaningful way. This is where sacred places become important; they provide that connection.

But there are also those who say that a union between theology and nature will bring us closer to the divine. Thomas Berry, theologian and philosopher, makes the point that nature as a representation of the divine serves to enrich our spirit. In his book The Great Work, he writes that without the beauty of the natural world, “we become impoverished in all that makes us human.”<sup>43</sup>

Mary Midgley, in her book Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning, is more blunt than Thomas. She writes that with the commencement of the Cartesian mindset, “wonder itself was to cease. Explanations were to become so clear that there was to be no more mystery.”<sup>44</sup> It seems that part of wanting to hold on to a sacred aspect of the world lies in our need to allow the world to retain a certain mysteriousness – we don’t need to dissect and examine and analyse everything natural. We need instead to celebrate its wonderfulness, to let nature hold on to some element of the numinous, of the divine. As Berry writes, it is in mystery and wonder that “the presence of the sacred reveals itself.”<sup>45</sup> This ties in with Otto’s description of the “mysterium tremendum”, that feeling that there is something beyond the world as we see it and experience it as part of a secularised way of life – some form of the divine that inspires awe.

The currently dominant worldview values industry, expansion, and personal wealth over environment, integration and community well-being. As Ward writes, “nature [has] come to be regarded as merely the subordinate precondition for the historical activity of humanity, which then transforms it according to human needs.”<sup>46</sup>

Yet, even though that may be the dominant view, it is certainly not the only one. As described earlier, each person has his or her own worldview. It is just that underlying these worldviews are certain basic structures (paradigms) – economic, social, cultural – that are common to the western industrialised world. These structures were set up by the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, reinforced by a certain reading of Christianity, and as the divine receded in importance, science stepped to the forefront, and with it, the idea of the dominance of man. Francis Bacon gave voice to that perception in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when he wrote that humans “may be regarded as the centre of the world insomuch that if man were taken away from the world, all the rest would seem astray, without aim or purpose.”<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, as Eliade writes in the introduction to The Sacred and the Profane, “man’s reactions to nature are often conditioned by his culture, and hence, finally, history.”<sup>48</sup>

Now, however, there is a sense that this view, and the structures upon which it both built and now depends, are changing. Some scholars, for example Dunlap et al, in Viewing the World Ecologically, observe that “a broad new worldview is emerging in the United States and other industrial societies... (and) reflects fundamental social changes.”<sup>49</sup> While their list of the environmental components of this new, post-industrial worldview sound suspiciously like the platform principles of Arne Naess’ deep ecology, this in a way proves their point: that a new, more integral worldview is starting to take hold.<sup>50</sup> However, as Duncan Taylor warns in “Disagreeing on the Basics”, “if a new worldview seeks to emerge, its proponents must first be willing to take time to identify, clarify and evaluate the underlying assumptions of the existing dominant worldview.”<sup>51</sup> Apostel et al make a similar point, noting that “the construction of worldviews is not an

easy enterprise. Indeed the fragmentation of our present world has deep structural causes that are ultimately related to the turbulent processes of modernisation that society has known during the past centuries.”<sup>52</sup>

If a new dominant worldview is emerging, it has yet to become fully formed. What lies at its heart? What are the roles of science and the sacred, of humanity, nature and the divine, within it? While many writers have argued that in this new worldview, science is the new religion, others contend that more and more people are rejecting the scientifically based worldview altogether, and are seeking instead a more spiritual basis for their worldviews. In both cases, though, new stories are needed to describe our place, and to anchor our sense of place, on Earth.

#### *A synthesis of stories and worldviews*

Whether discussing worldviews or sacred places, or any connections between the two, it becomes increasingly clear that stories, or myths, or narratives, are an important way of knowing and understanding. As Larry Shinn writes in Two Sacred Worlds, myths are central to the experience of the divine.<sup>53</sup> Without stories, the experience of the divine can never be carried forth, and our sense of the sacred in the world (however that ends up being defined) is lost. Without good stories, in other words, we lose our understanding of such central, universal human inquiries about things such as first causes and about the purposes and meanings of our lives.

Shinn writes that “those sacred stories, or myths, [which] arise from personal experience are valued as being especially true and as pointing to that which is ultimately

real.”<sup>54</sup> He goes on to point out that those sacred stories, or at least the moral, ethical, and/or factual elements contained therein, form, inform and legitimise our worldviews.

Thomas Berry meanwhile believes that humanity needs to find a “new story”, or a new way of conceptualising first causes because we have somehow lost our way on Earth. Berry proposes that we find a way to tie religious or spiritual experience with scientific understandings, to find a new story that we can incorporate into our worldviews in order to make sense of the world as we now experience it. He does not see any need to entirely separate science from the sacred, nor does he assume that accepting science means that all the mystery and wonder will disappear from the natural world— instead, it simply needs to be integrated into our myths and stories. “We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story,” Berry writes. “We are in between stories.”<sup>55</sup> Berry’s view is that “the epic of evolution does present the story of the universe as this story is now available to us out of our present experience. This is our sacred story.”<sup>56</sup> Berry puts his faith in the fusion of science and religion, writing that “The limitations of the redemption rhetoric and the scientific rhetoric can be seen, and a new, more integral language of being and value can emerge.”<sup>57</sup>

Midgley, while agreeing to a large extent with Berry, also observes that “the idea that we can reach salvation through science is ancient and powerful.”<sup>58</sup> She goes on to develop the idea that science has become more and more ingrained in our daily life, in our concept of what the world is, while the divine has beat a concomitant retreat. We are all still searching for salvation, she argues, and so we need to come to a reconciliation of science with spirit. She concurs with Berry’s view that science can become part of our stories about how the world is, and writes that “a belief in the endless evolutionary

escalator exalting the human race, which is often seen as part of science, is a prime example of the dreams, dramas, myths or fantasies which... fill the vacuum"<sup>59</sup> when our old stories die out, or cease to be seen as relevant. This is echoed to some extent by Hindu scholar Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who notes in his discussion of the difference in approach and temperament of science and religion, that "no religion can hope to survive if it does not satisfy the scientific temper of our age [and] sympathise with its social aspirations."<sup>60</sup> He goes on to discuss the need that humanity has for belief in *something*, in order to have a framework for action. He ties this in with the need to belong *somewhere* in order to combat both spiritual and physical isolation that, he says, destroys the human soul. In this quest for a sort of scientific spirituality, he notes, "attempts to save the individual on a secular rather than a religious basis have become popular."<sup>61</sup> Horosz takes a similar view, writing that if we are to find a meaningful story, it needs to affirm that humanity "should be saved *with* the world and not *from* it"<sup>62</sup> (Horosz's emphasis).

These sorts of stories are undoubtedly important, and do indeed help forge connections with place. Christopher Chapple, in his essay "Thomas Berry, Buddhism, and the New Cosmology" writes that "for millennia, the earth and water, the light, the weather, and the heavens have been accounted for in myriad tales from diverse cultures. Humans have found meaning in reading their own story against the story of the place in which they find themselves."<sup>63</sup> Kenneth Hamilton, in his essay "Homo Religiosus and Historical Faith", notes that there is something in humanity that needs stories of some sort that give us some information about our place on Earth, whether we realise this or not. Our unconscious mind, he says, "still thinks mythologically, using symbols to

comprehend the universe.”<sup>64</sup> I.G. Simmons agrees, noting that even scientists are looking for stories that connect science and spirit. As an example, he cites the Gaia hypothesis, which, he writes, “has captured the imagination of both those scientists who are looking for testable hypotheses... and those who are seeking a kind of spiritualized holism.”<sup>65</sup> William McNeill takes the view that science and religion can be fused into a single, compatible story that takes account of the evolution of thought as much as the evolution of the natural world. Both religion and science, he observes, “are clearly conduced to survival by concreting common action and by making everyday experience meaningful.” Furthermore, he adds, “since religion remains a necessity for human beings, a workable *modus vivendi* is very much needed... a symbiosis of secular science with sacred religion will remain important.”<sup>66</sup>

It seems clear, then, at least according to those scholars noted above, that science and the sacred can, perhaps must, learn to speak with a common, combined voice. This makes sense, since science is a part of our everyday, lived experience, and makes possible much of what we do on a daily basis. Spirituality, or the care of the soul too, is an integral part of the human lived experience.

However, many other scholars also contend that while we must make room for the sacred and the spiritual in any worldview that seeks to make sense of our place in Earth, science needn't necessarily be explicitly or implicitly included. Rowe writes that “clearly a new faith is needed, a faith in other-than-human Creation, a faith in planet Earth... as long as it places the source of spiritual values in Earth.”<sup>67</sup> And of course, there is Lynn White Jr. who writes that we will not begin to care for the environment, or find our place within it, “until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.”<sup>68</sup> Although White's

article popularized this idea, there are some earlier writings that proposed much the same thing. One example can be found in the 1947 issue of the Journal of Philosophy, in which Corliss Lamont wrote that in the development of naturalist metaphysics, there is a “constant emphasis on the fact that the great realm of Nature is man’s sole and sufficient home.”<sup>69</sup> Lamont adds that being attuned to the divine within the natural world is “one of the most pleasurable experiences... a sense of profound kinship and oneness with nature.” This sense of awareness of the sacred or divine within nature becomes an important part of a worldview that acknowledges the importance of the connections that exist between humans and the divine, as seen through the natural world. Rowe, in “Ecocentrism and Traditional Ecological Knowledge”, cites Fritjof Capra’s book, The Web of Life as defining this ecological awareness as “a sense of belonging, a sense of connectedness to the cosmos, and therefore (he says) ‘ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest essence’.”<sup>70</sup>

### *Conclusions*

Given the contrasting views about the connections and balances that exist between science, the sacred, and the stories that we use to make sense of these, it is tempting to go along with Cicero’s frustrated comment that these views are “so various and so mutually opposed [that] it [is] of course possible, upon the one hand, that not one of them is true, and certainly impossible, upon the other, that more than one should be true.”<sup>71</sup> But perhaps truth is not what we should be seeking here, at least not if “truth” is seen as some single “right” way of understanding. Perhaps what we should instead seek is multiple

understandings. There are a multiplicity of ways and worldviews, it seems, which can help us to understand what it means to live in place.

The arguments seem to show that we need a sense of the sacred as part of our worldview in order to find a sense of place, and that we need a sense of place in order to feel “at home” in Earth. Sense of place matters, because, as Salvesen points out, “place shapes who we are and what we will become. A sense of place provides a sense of belonging and of commitment,”<sup>72</sup> and belonging and commitment translate into care – care of natural places, including of course, and perhaps especially, natural sacred places.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> In Roger S. Gottlieb, ed. This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment. (New York: Routledge, 1996): 70.
- <sup>2</sup> See, for example, Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and The Profane, transl. Willard R. Trask (London: Harcourt Brace, 1959), chapter 1. Also Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), chapter 4.
- <sup>3</sup> M.B. Foster, "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature," Mind 44, no. 176 (1935): 440.
- <sup>4</sup> Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," Science 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.
- <sup>5</sup> William McNeill, "History and the Scientific Worldview," History and Theory 37, no. 1 (1998): 1
- <sup>6</sup> Fritjof Capra, "Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts," Journal of Consciousness and Change (Summer/Fall 1986), 11.
- <sup>7</sup> Leo Apostel et al, World Views: From Fragmentation to Integration, (Brussels: University of Brussels Press, 1994.) Available: <http://www.vub.ac.be/CLEA/pub/books/worldviews> section 2.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Capra, "Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts," Journal of Consciousness and Change (Summer/Fall 1986), 11
- <sup>10</sup> Bruce K. Ward, "Christianity and the Modern Eclipse of Nature: Two Perspectives," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 63, no. 4 (winter 1995): 826.
- <sup>11</sup> Leo Apostel et al, /, section 1.2.2.
- <sup>12</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, "Continuity and Discontinuity," Geographical Review 74, no. 3 (July 1984), 245-256. Tuan also addresses the conceptual differences between cyclical and linear time in Topophilia, written a decade earlier.
- <sup>13</sup> J.R. McNeill, "Ideas Matter: A Political History of the Twentieth-Century Environment," Current History (November 2000): 382.
- <sup>14</sup> Christopher Chapple, "Thomas Berry, Buddhism and the New Cosmology," Buddhist Christian Studies 18 (1998): 147.
- <sup>15</sup> Parks Morton, 129.
- <sup>16</sup> White, 1205.
- <sup>17</sup> Apostel et al. section 1.2.2
- <sup>18</sup> Capra, 11.
- <sup>19</sup> Kent C. Ryden, Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 88
- <sup>20</sup> Jennifer Cross, "What is Sense of Place?" Archives of the Twelfth Headwaters Conference, November 2-4, 2001. Available: [http://www.western.edu/headwaters/archives/headwaters12\\_papers/cross\\_paper.html](http://www.western.edu/headwaters/archives/headwaters12_papers/cross_paper.html).
- <sup>21</sup> Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," World Archaeology 25, no. 2 (October 1993): 153.
- <sup>22</sup> Eric Higgs, Nature By Design: People, Natural Process, and Ecological Restoration. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003): 148.
- <sup>23</sup> Robert J. Wallis and Jenny Blain, "Sites, Sacredness, and Stories: Interactions of Archaeology and Contemporary Paganism," Folklore 114 (2003), 311.
- <sup>24</sup> David Salvesen, "The Making of Place," Montana Associated Technology Roundtables website. Available: <http://www.matr.net/article-4108.html>.
- <sup>25</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, Topophilia (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1974), 4.
- <sup>26</sup> See in particular, Tuan, 70-74.
- <sup>27</sup> Apostel et al.
- <sup>28</sup> Michael Harkin, "Sacred Places, Scarred Spaces," Wicazo Sa Review 15, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 59.
- <sup>29</sup> J. Stan Rowe, Home Place: Essays on Ecology (Edmonton: NeWest, 1990), 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, 26.
- <sup>31</sup> David Kinsley, Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995), Chapters 1 and 4.
- <sup>32</sup> William Horosz, "Some Reflections in Recent Philosophy of Religion," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 20, no. 3 (March 1960): 898.
- <sup>33</sup> Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods, Book XII. Transl. Francis Brooks (London: Methuen, 1896). This version accessed on-line: <http://www.epicurus.net/deorum.html>

- <sup>34</sup> Ian Simmons, "Making a Mark: Two Thousand Years of Ecology, Economy and Worldviews." Journal of Biogeography 27, no. 1 (January 2000), 2.
- <sup>35</sup> Ward, 830.
- <sup>36</sup> Marcus Aurelius, "Harmony With Nature", Book X (6), in The Enduring Questions, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Jerry H. Gill and Melvin Rader (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 376.
- <sup>37</sup> Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983): 89.
- <sup>38</sup> Thomas, 91.
- <sup>39</sup> James Parks Morton, "Environment and Religion: The Evolution of a New Vision," in Earth and Spirit, ed. Fritz Hull (New York: Continuum, 1993), 124.
- <sup>40</sup> White, 1206.
- <sup>41</sup> Albert Camus, The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 190.
- <sup>42</sup> For an absorbing and insightful account of the views of Camus and Dostoevsky on nature and the divine, see Ward, "Christianity and the Modern Eclipse of Nature: Two Perspectives."
- <sup>43</sup> Thomas Berry, The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future. (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 200.
- <sup>44</sup> Mary Midgley, Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning (London: Routledge, 1992), 75.
- <sup>45</sup> Berry, The Great Work, 53.
- <sup>46</sup> Ward, 826.
- <sup>47</sup> Francis Bacon, quoted in Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983): 18.
- <sup>48</sup> Eliade, 16.
- <sup>49</sup> Riley E Dunlap, Dora G. Lodwick, and Marvin E. Olsen, Viewing the World Ecologically (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 3-5.
- <sup>50</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the principles of deep ecology, see Alan Drengson, "Ecophilosophy, Ecosophy and the Deep Ecology Movement: An Overview," The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy 14, no. 3 (1997): 110-121. For a more detailed inquiry, see Bill Devall and George Sessions, Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1985).
- <sup>51</sup> Duncan Taylor, "Disagreeing on the basics: Environmental debates reflect competing worldviews." Alternatives, 18 no. 3, (1991): 32.
- <sup>52</sup> Apostel et al.
- <sup>53</sup> Larry Shinn, Two Sacred Worlds: Experience and Structure in the World's Religions (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), Chapter 5, especially 92-96.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 93.
- <sup>55</sup> Thomas Berry, The Dream of the Earth (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1988), 123.
- <sup>56</sup> Berry, The Great Work, 31
- <sup>57</sup> Berry, The Dream of the Earth, 136.
- <sup>58</sup> Midgley, 1.
- <sup>59</sup> Midgley, 146.
- <sup>60</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Recovery of Faith (New York: Harper, 1955): 10.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 41.
- <sup>62</sup> Horosz, 397.
- <sup>63</sup> Chapple, 147.
- <sup>64</sup> Kenneth Hamilton, "Homo Religiosus and Historical Faith." Journal of Bible and Religion 33, no. 3 (July 1965): 213-322
- <sup>65</sup> I.G. Simmons, "To Civility and to Man's Use: History, Culture and Nature." The Geographical Review 88, no. 1 (January 1998): 121.
- <sup>66</sup> McNeill, 13.
- <sup>67</sup> Rowe, "Eden in the Service of Humanity" (book review).
- <sup>68</sup> White, 1206.
- <sup>69</sup> Corliss Lamont, "Naturalism and the Appreciation of Nature." The Journal of Philosophy 44, no. 22 (October 23, 1947): 597.
- <sup>70</sup> J. Stan Rowe, "Ecocentrism and Traditional Ecological Knowledge," (1993). Available: [http://www.ecospherics.net/pages/Ro993tek\\_1.html](http://www.ecospherics.net/pages/Ro993tek_1.html).
- <sup>71</sup> Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods, Book XII. Transl. Francis Brooks (London: Methuen, 1896). This version accessed on-line: <http://www.epicurus.net/deorum.html>
- <sup>72</sup> Salvesen, 5.

#### **Chapter Four: Interpretations of the sacred in nature and in place**

*What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know.*

*- Augustine*

What does it mean for something to be sacred? We all have an intuitive sense of what it means, yet, to paraphrase Augustine, if we wish to define it, the meaning suddenly escapes us. Similarly, when we encounter the sacred in place, and in an atmosphere that is culturally available to us, we are able to recognize it, yet we may not be able to put into words exactly what it is about the place that makes it sacred. We know that to say that something is sacred is to set certain boundaries on what we are allowed to do with that place or object – it becomes something that deserves particularly respectful treatment. It is, after all, a reminder to us that something greater than ourselves exists in the universe. In one sense, we can say that the sacred is the opposite of the secular, or of the profane, but this in itself raises more questions. What is the profane? How to distinguish between the secular, the profane and the sacred? Perhaps these concepts all sit along a continuum, but then we will need to set parameters and quantitative measures for something that seems innately qualitative. Indeed, one would expect to find qualitative differences between a sacred place and one not sacred. Then there are questions about the meaning of the quality and permanence of sacredness. Can a place lose its sacred qualities if those who held the place sacred have died out or moved on, or does it retain its sacred qualities whether we recognize them or not? If in fact those qualities exist only in relation to our use for or recognition of them, does the place remain sacred nonetheless? And if not,

would we then be allowed to do as we wish with that site? What would this imply about the temporal or eternal nature of religion, of spirit, or of the holy?

All of these questions, in some form or combination, have been asked about many sacred places around the world, with varying degrees of urgency and import. Yet before any of these questions can be adequately addressed, we will need to try to answer that seemingly simple, deceptively complex, prime question: what does “sacred” mean, especially in relation to place?

Understanding the meaning of the sacred is imperative if we are to understand the concept of sacred place. The task of defining of what is sacred and why has been undertaken in many different sectors; not only by theologians and religious scholars, but also by philosophers, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and even lawyers. Every person has his or her own personal interpretation not only of *what* is sacred, and what it means for something to be sacred, but also of *why* something may be sacred and how it may be recognized. Even when the denotation remains constant, the connotations vary tremendously.

The word sacred is commonly used in two basically different ways: to describe things that are *personally* venerated, (for example, a wedding ring) and those more widely revered things that represent some connection with, or manifestation of, the divine or of a greater power (for example, a rosary, or in a larger context a church, temple or cathedral). In any case, these objects are held in a special kind of esteem, and it is understood that there are certain boundaries about acceptable ways to handle or treat or respond to them.

No longer used only in the context of religion, the word “sacred” has (rather frustratingly) become somewhat overused. It has developed into a sort of catchall phrase to describe anything that is important, or valued, and in the process, it has lost some of its cachet. To put it another way, the generally accepted connotations of the word keep changing in ways that are not particularly helpful if one seeks to find a clear definition. This frustration has been around for some time; Otto observed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that “the fact is that we have come to use the words holy [and] sacred in an entirely derivative sense, quite different from that which they originally bore”<sup>1</sup>. And as recently as 2003, this lament is echoed by Matthew Evans, who writes in the Review of Religious Research that the word sacred “is unselfconsciously used in such disparate ways that meaning is sometimes unclear.”<sup>2</sup> Again it seems that in many cases, the word “sacred” is used to describe something very valuable, but not necessarily sacred in the sense of being associated with the divine. This ambiguity becomes increasingly problematic when attempting to identify sacred places – that is, perhaps part of the reason we are unclear about what constitutes sacred place because we are not all using the term “sacred” in the same way. Given this situation, it is logical to assume that statements regarding sacred places will be interpreted differently depending on one’s perception of what “sacred” means. For example, in the introduction to their book Sacred Sites, Sacred Places the authors write that “a landscape is sacred because humans perceive it as such.”<sup>3</sup> While the authors go on to acknowledge that there are different ways of knowing the sacred, such blanket statements are not particularly helpful until we can agree upon what is understood as “sacred.” Furthermore, it does not definitively prove that (a) perception of the sacred is a necessary precondition of the place being sacred; (b) it does not define how sacredness

is understood; and (c) it ignore the fact that not all people recognize the sacred in place when they do encounter it. As noted above, problems are amplified when both definition and connotation are ambiguous, and so it soon becomes very clear that defining the sacred is certainly not an easy task. As Evans notes, “both meanings inferred and meanings intended are more complex than explicit definition may allow.”<sup>4</sup>

What follows in this chapter, then, is a review of the ways in which the term “sacred” has come to be understood in a wide variety of disciplines –religious studies, philosophy, sociology, history and law – all of which deal with some aspect of sacred place. The outcome of this process will be to come up with some markers of sorts that will allow us to understand more clearly what it is that makes a place sacred, and why these places matter for us all. It is important to note at the outset of this journey that the discussion of what is sacred is one that that has spanned millennia and myriad cultures. Many of the earliest recorded texts reflect religious ideas or stories, which by their very nature imply an idea of the sacred. I will not attempt here to discuss concepts of the sacred as put forth by ancient philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, and their contemporaries, or even more (relatively) recent philosophers such as the Stoics (although this is certainly an interesting area for further study). Rather, I will deal with more modern interpretations of the sacred, starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with Rudolf Otto and his successor of sorts, Mircea Eliade. References to Durkheim’s theories of religion will be interwoven throughout this section, although his works will not be addressed separately. Durkheim’s earlier work remains crucial, as it forms a rich base for comparing later theories and discussions. Otto and Eliade will be treated more in-depth, as Otto’s The Idea of the Holy and Eliade’s The Sacred and the Profane are widely

regarded as essential reading in coming to an understanding of the sacred, and are still widely discussed in scholarly literature on the subject of the sacred.

So to begin, let us take a look at the work of these two scholars in the study of religion and sacrality to see how they have used and defined the term sacred in their work, and how they relate the idea of the sacred to the idea of the sacred in place and in nature.

*Otto and The Idea of the Holy: explaining the numinous*

Both Otto and Eliade tend to approach their descriptions of the sacred experientially – that is, they interpret the recognition of the sacred through a person or peoples’ experience of a place or thing as sacred, rather than by describing the qualities of a thing itself as sacred. Otto’s 1917 book The Idea of the Holy is often seen as a milestone in the modern interpretation of the sacred, while Eliade’s The Sacred and The Profane, published 40 years later, is widely acknowledged as essential reading for anyone interested in the history and philosophy of religions. It is interesting to note, as Evans does, that in the original German, Otto’s book is titled Das Heilige, and the German title of Eliade’s book is Das Heilige und Das Profane. Yet the English translations translate the former as “holy”, and the latter as “sacred”.<sup>5</sup> In part, perhaps, the problem in defining the sacred lies in the linguistic structure of the English language.

Given this situation, Otto’s introduction of the word “numinous” is of particular interest. The idea of the numinous is an important category for discussion, as it has been widely used since Otto coined the phrase in The Idea of the Holy to fill what he saw as something of an identity crisis for the word sacred. Robert Streetman, in his essay “Some

Later Thoughts of Otto on the Holy”, suggests that Otto believed that the “primary meaning” of the word holy – the experienced meaning – had been submerged and obscured by a secondary meaning of the holy “as ethical righteousness, or even moral self-righteousness”<sup>6</sup>. Otto wished to have a word that would recall that experiential, primary sense of holy, or the sacred, and to do so he came up with the word “numinous”<sup>7</sup>. Both Otto and later Eliade come to define a place or thing as sacred via the numinous experience, and other, later scholars, such Thomas Berry, also use the term extensively to describe that non-rational (in the classical or philosophical sense of the phrase) feeling of awe in the presence of a divine or sacred place or thing.

John Harvey, translator of the 1923 edition of The Idea of the Holy, carefully assigns the phrase numinous “no moral import”, but instead describes it as “non-rational religious apprehension and its object.” In so doing, he reserves the more rational religious import for words such as “holy” and “sanctity”<sup>8</sup>. Otto, Harvey and Streetman are all careful to distinguish between *value* (as something to be cherished) and *values* (as morals). Otto suggests that “numinous” is a “category of value and... a state of mind”<sup>9</sup> and as such expresses the experience of the divine, or the holy. It does not usually describe a particular thing, but rather the experience of the thing. So, according to Otto, one may experience the numinous (or have a numinous feeling or experience) in a sacred place, but the place is not itself numinous: it is merely the vessel by which the numinous is experienced, much as a book is a vessel by which we experience events to which we would not otherwise have access.

But let us consider for a moment what Otto may have meant by a “category of value”. If “value” indicates something that ought to be cherished, then it would be logical

to assume that Otto believes there are different types (or categories) of objects that ought to be cherished in different ways. (This, of course, is quite reasonable, as there are obviously a variety of ways in which an object acquires worth or value.) If, however, this value comes from a state of mind, (rather than from a tangible quality of the object) then the sacredness of the cherished object becomes entirely subjective, and is therefore only accessible through the conscious experience of any individual. Otto points out that being experiential, the numinous “cannot be strictly defined”, but nevertheless, it is an important way of thinking about the concepts of sacredness and holiness. Indeed, according to Streetman, Otto “admits that the Holy can be truly understood only when there has been an existential experience of it.”<sup>10</sup> Joseph Campbell also emphasizes this aspect of Otto’s numinous experience, that “talking and teaching cannot produce it... only the accident of experience and the sign symbols of a living myth can elicit it.” Campbell goes on to point out that these symbols “cannot be invented. They are found.”<sup>11</sup> Still, this does not explain how the qualities that elicit this numinous experience are discovered in the first place.

However, Otto himself later writes that a “numinous object” – which he defines as an object descended from the gods – would have both subjective and objective value. That is to say that this object would require both our fascination (subjective) and our homage (objective).<sup>12</sup> Thus, we must experience (subjectively) what is numinous in order to understand it. Here Otto adds other now common phrases – the “creature-feeling” that one feels in numinous encounters and the related “mysterium tremendum”, which is the sense of “awe before the mystery of a presence and the presence of a mystery”.<sup>13</sup> Whether the numinous objects that inspire these feelings can be *found* in nature, or

merely *observed* from a *place* in nature, is a thorny subject; in part, this could depend on the cosmology of the individual or community seeking the experience.

It may seem, at first, that this experiential approach to defining the sacred may not be relevant to the discussion of the sacred as a category of place. But it is worth considering the notion that a place must be experienced as sacred in order to be known as sacred – what we are trying to do here is to discover, if in fact it can be discovered, how it is that that numinous experience comes to occur in some particular places and instances, and not in others, and what, if any, conditions or criteria must be met other than experience, in order for a place to be recognized and respected as sacred. In this quest, we will now turn to Eliade.

*Eliade, the place of the sacred, and sacred place*

Eliade, in *The Sacred and the Profane*, discusses Otto's ideas from a slightly different angle. Eliade agrees with Otto's use of numinous experience to define an encounter with something divine and "wholly other", but then introduces his own term - "hierophany" – to "designate the act of manifestation of the sacred."<sup>14</sup> This replaces Otto's numinous object and in so doing, makes a clear distinction between object and subject, an idea as we saw in Chapter Three, that the Western world inherited from Descartes. Eliade goes on to note that any object – a tree or a stone are his prime examples – may be hierophanic, and may thereby invoke a numinous experience. For Eliade, then, at least in theory, all nature and all natural objects hold the *possibility* of becoming hierophanies, although in practice, of course, not all natural objects do become hierophanic. Where

hierophanies do occur, Eliade finds that such places become recognized as sacred, and therefore as qualitatively separate from the surrounding topography.

Even when we accept Otto's numinous experience and Eliade's hierophanies to clarify the basic concepts of what sacred means, or what it means for something to become known as sacred, we find many differing opinions and perspectives in the debates about how a *place* may come to be recognized as sacred. In other words, we may now have a better idea of what qualities a sacred thing may have, but we still have little idea about how (or in this case, where) these qualities may be recognized, other than through an intuitive recognition. While one could certainly argue that this is enough, there are problems with this approach, for where one person may recognize some thing or place as sacred through their intuitive experience of it, another person may not have that same "creature feeling" when in the presence of that same object or place.

Belden Lane, in "Giving Voice to Place: Three Models for Understanding American Sacred Space", identifies three main academic approaches – ontological, cultural, and phenomenological – that have been used to define and describe sacred places in the last half century or so<sup>15</sup>. The first he ascribes to Eliade, noting that in Eliade's work, there is a sort of setting apart of sacred place, a way of seeing it as that wholly other, and implies a wholly separate way of experiencing place. However, Lane takes exception to Eliade's approach inasmuch as Eliade "fails to recognize that sacred and profane, religion and culture, are inevitably *overlapping* dimensions of human experience. The 'sacred' never appears as a full-blown transcendent reality." (Lane's emphasis)<sup>16</sup>. Lane then outlines the cultural approach to sacred space, citing the work of David Chidester and Edward Linenthal, who take the approach that "the human construct

of sacrality is always a social construction of reality.”<sup>17</sup> In this, it would appear that they are following a somewhat Durkheimian model, in which the social experience is the driver of the sacred vehicle. In fact, according to Lewis Coser, in Masters of Sociological Thought, Durkheim’s position was that “distinctions between the sacred and the profane are always made by groups”<sup>18</sup>, although this approach again causes problems in terms of the individual’s experience of a place or object as sacred, particularly if that individual comes to this experience without being part of a group. Lane would disagree vehemently with Durkheim’s assertion, as much of Lane’s essay is concerned with individual experience of sacred place.

According to Douglas Allen, in his essay, “Mircea Eliade’s Phenomenological Analysis of Religious Experience”, Eliade did not agree with the sociological or psychological approach to understanding religious phenomenon, including numinous experiences. Eliade’s refutation is grounded in his assertion that this reductionist approach “misses the one unique and irreducible... element of the sacred.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, for Eliade, the religious experience is what it is: religious (something “other”, indefinable in scientific terms) and in a way existential, but not social, cultural, or psychological, although those elements of human nature certainly play a part in our ability to recognize and affirm the sacred. Eliade would not necessarily agree with Durkheim’s need for a community to ratify the sacred, although he does place the sacred firmly within the context of culture. Indeed, in terms of discussing sacred places, there has to be a cultural context, and more than one individual would need to experience a place as sacred for it to be considered a community sacred place. Whether those experiences need be in unison is still open to debate, and it is of course entirely possible

that a place can be experienced as numinous by both individuals and by groups. In fact, in one early commentary on Durkheim's The Religious Life, the author contends that religious experience "remains a purely individual affair; other individuals are understood to be there, but... their part is that of a stage setting,"<sup>20</sup> thus suggesting that the experience of the sacred, or of a sacred place, is at once both individual and communal.

In any case, Eliade and Lane agree that a sacred place is noticeably distinct from other, non-sacred space, regardless of whether that surrounding space is seen as profane or neutrally mundane. Eliade writes that "every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different,"<sup>21</sup> while Lane describes a "curious transformation of consciousness" that draws a person into "the compelling mystery of the place"<sup>22</sup> in a sacred place. (This last echoing, to some extent, Otto's description of the *mysterium tremendum*.)

We have not yet discovered how we know when a place is sacred, how we recognize these hierophanies, these compelling mysteries. The general consensus thus far from Durkheim, Otto, Eliade, and those commenting on their works, is that this is not something that can be taught, or learned, or described, but rather is something intuitive, something that must be experienced. Eliade offers some theories as to ways in which places may be revealed as sacred, such as a sign from the divine, whether spontaneous or evoked<sup>23</sup>, but here we must keep in mind that cultural and historical factors will mediate the interpretation of any signaling of the sacred. Eliade emphasizes that in any case, the sacred is revealed, not chosen. This is an important consideration when debating whether any given place is truly sacred – perhaps one key aspect of sacred place is that it has a

revelatory quality. Put another way, revelation is a necessary (but not necessarily sufficient) component in confirming sacredness of a place.

If this is the case, then this may supply an argument against the claim, found in some literature regarding sacred place, that all nature is sacred. The main thrust of this argument is that if all the world is created, then all creation is sacred, and therefore all nature is sacred. However, as Jane Hubert points out in “Sacred Beliefs and Beliefs of Sacredness,” even when “the whole landscape may be considered sacred, there are differences between this and the sacredness of sites that have particular significance.”<sup>24</sup> Hubert asks the question of whether this implies degrees of sacredness. While she does not provide any definitive answer, she does point out that it may depend on one’s definition of the sacred. And while Eliade writes that the whole cosmos is “at once real, living and sacred; it simultaneously reveals the modalities of being and of sacrality,”<sup>25</sup> he later refers to an “economy of the sacred”, which seems to imply that there are different levels, or degrees of sacredness, or else perhaps a distinction between what *reveals* the sacred, or aspects of the sacred, and what *is* sacred. As Allen explains, “that which appears from somewhere else is the sacred; that through which it appears is the profane.”<sup>26</sup> For now, let it suffice to say that Eliade seems to make a distinction between those revealed sacred places and sacred objects, or hierophanies, and those places that hold intrinsic value and are worthy of our respect, if not our veneration.

We must be both thoughtful and careful in our interpretations of Eliade, for he also writes that for the religious person, “nature... is *always* fraught with religious *value*” (my emphasis). This, he makes clear, is not the same as that hierophany, that signal of a sacred place, but instead is evidence that a divine presence or being did in fact create an

ordered cosmos out of the ancient chaos. Nonetheless, we must keep in mind that when an object does become a hierophany, it is a sign of the sacred being more directly present, or accessible, willing to be revealed if called upon, and thus becomes something more than its previously mundane, or profane, self. Thus, a sacred place for Eliade “is not merely the dramatic experience of the presence of the sacred... it is a point of communication” *with the sacred*.<sup>27</sup>

Eliade also neatly addresses the question of whether a place remains sacred even if those who considered it sacred are no longer present in that physical landscape. He asserts that “a religious symbol conveys its message even if it is no longer consciously understood in every part.”<sup>28</sup> Thus it is that we can intuitively know a place to be sacred, even if we are not part of the story of that place. This, I think, alludes to the idea of a sort of universal recognition of the sacred, or the divine, that exists quite apart from those culturally mediated meanings and symbols connected with various religions. The caveat to that, as Eliade and others observe, is that we must be open to the experience, and open to the paradoxical coexistence of the sacred within a mostly profane, or at least mundane, world. Here we see that Eliade diverges from Durkheim, whose position is that, as Coser writes, “an object is neither intrinsically sacred nor profane. It becomes one or the other depending on whether men choose to consider the utilitarian value of the object or certain intrinsic attributes that have nothing to do with its instrumental value.”<sup>29</sup> This is closely echoed by anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, who writes, in The Nature of Human Society: The Savage Mind, that “all sacred things must have their place... it could even be said that being in place is what makes them sacred” and is what gives meaning to the world<sup>30</sup>. In a more thoroughly culturally based approach, Christopher Witcombe points

out that all religious experiences are “invariably interpreted or identified within the context of the religious beliefs of the beholder or... with respect to the prevailing religious beliefs of their culture.”<sup>31</sup> Both approaches allow us to justify the continuing sacredness of such disputed places as, say, Stonehenge, providing that it fulfills any other qualifications we may find for defining a sacred place. If, as Eliade would have it, the site (and the stones contained within it) retains its hierophanic qualities whether we recognize them or not, then it still ought to be seen as sacred.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, if it is interpreted within the context of the beliefs of those who currently hold it as sacred, it should continue to be respected as such. In either interpretation, a case can be made for Stonehenge to be recognized as a currently sacred site.

Lane emphasizes that the “voice” with which the sacred site bespeaks its sacredness “is heard by thoroughly culturally conditioned ears”<sup>33</sup>, a statement with which Eliade might at least partially disagree. However, this does bring up another point: that sacred spaces are inevitably “storied places,” and it is vital to our understanding of sacred places that we listen to these stories<sup>34</sup>. These stories both evoke and support the religious beliefs of those who understand the sacredness of the place, and give us a second criterion with which to adjudge true sacredness in place; that a sacred place will have stories attached to it. According to Eliade, one function of these stories, or myths is to “describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthrough of the sacred into the world.”<sup>35</sup> These stories give meaning to feeling, and to experience. They validate our understanding of the place as sacred.

Ultimately, the sacred needs a comparative value; it is impossible to understand one thing as sacred unless there is something not sacred for comparison, much as one

cannot understand the concept of light unless one is aware of what it means to be dark. It is often the stories which provide us with just such a comparison.

*The sacred as understood within religion*

It is impossible to discuss the sacred without including a discussion of religion. The sacred exists only within a framework of religious beliefs, or at least of spiritual awareness. However, it is important to make clear here that I will not be attempting to define the sacred within any specific religion, as each religion has its own set of sacred objects, texts, ideas, rituals, and places. It is also worth pointing out that, as N.J. Demerath noted in his 1999 Presidential Address to the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, that "Religion is not a synonym for the sacred... surely there are sacred entities and symbols that have a compelling power without being religious."<sup>36</sup> Demerath appears to agree at least to some extent with Durkheim, in that Demerath allows that the sacred "is part of any society's cultural stock."<sup>37</sup> However, Demerath also allows that "religion remains as important sacred source in its own right, and the study of religion offers important lessons for the study of the sacred."<sup>38</sup>

As we have already noted, both Otto and Eliade frame their discussions of the sacred and the numinous within the context of religious experience. Durkheim also includes the sacred within his definition of religion, although Durkheim's conception of the sacred has more to do with community than with individual experience<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, let us now turn to some more recent works and commentaries on the role of the sacred within religion to see if any further light can be shed upon the role of the sacred within place.

Richard Comstock, in an essay titled "A Behavioral Approach to the Sacred: Category Formation in Religious Studies", argues that "sacred" is the sum of feeling (as described by Otto) and object (as described by Eliade). This sacred feeling, postulates Comstock, is "determined by an intentional reference to some sort of object,"<sup>40</sup> although he does not specify whether this object need be natural or man-made. Comstock goes on to make the argument that behaviors naturally follow on from feelings, therefore, it ought be possible to assess sacredness based on the behavior of the person claiming to have had a sacred feeling. This seems to be in line with Goldenweiser's interpretation of Durkheim, as he writes that when participating in sacred rites, the individual "is transformed... he feels himself acted upon by a power which is of himself, yet also external to him."<sup>41</sup> As this sort of thing is patently observable, Comstock sets forth his thesis thus: "A model of the sacred based on behavior rather than inner feeling is capable of development in a way that is open to public observation and verification."<sup>42</sup>

This has some interesting ramifications for sacred places: if Comstock is correct, then we could, at least in theory, evaluate the sacred status of a contested site based upon the behavior of those who are claiming it as sacred. If their behavior follows a pattern that can be said to reflect the sacred inner feeling, then, logically, we can assume that their claim of sacredness for that site is valid. This is applicable regardless of whether those "behaving" (so to speak) have inherited these sacred rites or not. Comstock writes that "sacred behavior seems to be determined by a positive motivation combined with great circumspection."<sup>43</sup>

However, one major objection to this immediately becomes clear; we would need to understand the ways that different cultures express, or act out, or respond to, the

numinous experience. Otherwise, we run the great risk of accusations of cultural imperialism, something we are trying to avoid in creating a cross-culturally understanding of sacred places. Comstock does acknowledge this, but also notes that the feelings that Otto ascribes to numinous experience, such as awe and/or fear, can be easily observed in actions. The experience of the sacred, then, becomes the motivation behind certain actions, or types of actions. If Comstock is right, then we now have a third necessary condition for ascertaining sacredness of a place – the types of behaviors it inspires.

If we return to Lane's "Giving Voice to Place", we find some descriptions of the ways that experiences of sacred places can affect a person, that "transformation of consciousness"<sup>44</sup> referred to earlier. Lane believes that in sacred places, the environment "participates in the experience" of sacredness, that for those who have felt some connection to the sacred in place, "the experience 'had' *them* as much as they could be said to have 'had' *it*" (Lane's emphasis). However, since Lane doesn't go on to describe the actions of these participants, it is not possible to know whether they would have fulfilled Comstock's criteria. If we return also to Eliade, we find in his work innumerable examples of the ways in which religious experience is acted out in place, so it would be safe to assume that he would not object to Comstock's criteria of actions being a necessary component in the identification of a place as truly sacred. Lane too, I think, would agree that behavior is an essential expression of the experience, although he might have some qualms about what sort of actions might be accepted as proof of sacred experience. Still, Lane does note that "one's actual embodied experience in encountering a place perceived as sacred is crucial to the sense of magic or awe one finally attributes to

it.” Both Lane and Comstock recognize, though, that a preconceived notion that a place has sacred qualities might also act as a motive for engaging in particular types of behavior. Comstock writes that sacredness “might be understood as reference to the capacity of humans to behave in certain carefully prescribed ways in respect to their environment,”<sup>45</sup> while Lane notes that people will often journey to certain places with the expectation of a numinous encounter – an expectation that may well end up being a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>46</sup> As an example of this, we can cite Eliade’s description of ways in which, “when no sign [of the sacred] manifests itself, it is *provoked*... a sort of *evocation* is performed with the help of animals; it is they who *show* what place is fit to receive the sanctuary” (Eliade’s emphasis). In other words, when people go looking for something sacred, or for some sign of the presence of the divine, they will find it. Still, he emphasizes that even in these cases, “men are not free to choose the sacred site... they only seek for it and find it by the help of mysterious signs.”<sup>47</sup> Comstock warns against an over-simplification of the action-feeling relationship, noting that “the connection between the two terms requires a complex understanding.”<sup>48</sup> In any case, though, the basic premise remains that sacredness is essentially experiential, and the experience may define the place.

#### *Other approaches to defining the sacred*

Thus far, we have found that the foundational scholars in the discussion of the sacred – Durkheim, Otto and Eliade – have all based their discussion of the sacred on experience. However, more recently, some alternative approaches have been put forth which should be helpful in finding a more place-based definition of the sacred. Matthew Evans, in his

recent discussion of conceptualizing the sacred, finds that the word sacred is currently used in the religious scholarly literature in three main ways: as a synonym for “religion” or “religious”; to indicate “transcendent reality”; or to refer to those things “set apart”, as opposite to the profane.<sup>49</sup> Evans himself prefers to conceptualize the sacred as a thing “set apart”<sup>50</sup>, which may work well when defining sacred place, especially when this approach is combined with Eliade’s concept of hierophanies as things that break with the surrounding mundane or profane spaces. Evans still brings behavior into the picture, in the sense that people will engage in certain behaviors to protect what they deem sacred, although he does not see sacredness as a particular category of behavior, as Comstock does.

Demerath’s discussion of sacred categories also relies heavily on experiential and behavioral definitions of the sacred. He offers an interesting perspective for setting the sacred just outside of a religious context with his typology of sacred experiences. Demerath’s four categories are the integrative, the quest, the collective, and the counter-culture.<sup>51</sup> Integrative experiences are those that act as confirmation that there *is* in fact a sacred. As examples, Demerath lists religious healings, falling in love, and encounters with nature (though not specifically with sacred places in nature). The second category, the quest, is described as those spiritual (but not explicitly religious) experiences that bring new meaning to a person’s life. Many of these, says Demerath, lead individuals to participate in “new spirituality movements” such as Wicca. Demerath would presumably include in this category the “neo-Druids” and pagans who claim Stonehenge and other Neolithic sites as their sacred places.<sup>52</sup>

Demerath's third category, the collective, is, as Demerath states, a highly Durkheimian interpretation of the sacred. The collective experience of the sacred refers to the defining experiences of any community – whether explicitly religious or not. For example, Demerath cites the Salem witch hunts, many sporting events, and the Eastern European attempts at communism as collective sacred experiences. However, it seems to me that this is an example of where the term “sacred” is used to describe something of social and cultural value, rather than as something that provides a connection to the divine. It is, I think, something of a misnomer to refer to culturally valuable rituals as sacred. Demerath's last category, that of the sacred as counter-culture includes “non-religious counter-cultures that carry potential sacred significance for the participants.”<sup>53</sup> Again, Demerath's examples include such groupings as the British soccer hooligans, rappers, hippies, Trekkies and others. Again, I would argue that while culturally, socially and psychologically significant, these types of groupings do not generally provide their adherents with an experience of the divine, and so would not really qualify as sacred, despite their value. For the purposes of defining the sacred in place, the category of the quest has the greatest significance, as it offers an understanding of how places and rituals may be part of a sacred experience. And ties in with both Lane's and Eliade's ideas about seeking out sacred places and experiences.

Meanwhile, Arnaldo Vento, in his wonderful essay, “Rediscovering the Sacred: From the Secular to a Postmodern Sense of the Sacred,” initially offers what he terms a “functional” definition of the sacred as being that which exists outside of the “worldly, humane or mundane.”<sup>54</sup> The sacred involves the worship of the divine; it is particularly set apart from the secular or profane. Vento also points out that in many indigenous North

American societies, the sacred was simply part of the whole. There were, to be sure, places where one could come into closer contact with the divine, but there was no explicit dualism. In this worldview, “the cosmos was one inseparable reality forever in motion, alive, organic, spiritual and material at the same time.”<sup>55</sup> To these cultures, the idea of “sacred” as a dualistic concept, such as Eliade in particular suggests, would be puzzling. Vento suggests that we may construe sacredness as a way of living harmoniously within the world. In this interpretation, sacredness again becomes behavioral, but it also becomes part of a worldview that regards all life and all living, as part of an overall sacred act.<sup>56</sup>

This dovetails nicely with the idea of all nature as being valued, as opposed to being sacred. It allows for an interpretation of the world in which all of the non-human natural world has *intrinsic* as opposed to *sacred* value – that is, it has its own way of and right to, existing, and its value is not tied to any usefulness to the human world, whether as physical resource or as spiritual aid. To be sure, humans can still interact with this world in ways that provide meaning and connection, but with the understanding that these other-than-human ways of being have autonomous lives. Dolores LaChapelle, in her book Sacred Land, Sacred Sex, Rapture of the Deep, describes rituals from several cultures and times, in which participants learn to “include [non-human] beings, those which we used to think were outside of us, within our boundaries”<sup>57</sup> and so come to better understand the intrinsic value of non-human ways of being. These rituals can be undertaken in medicine wheels, in henges, on sacred mountains or rocks; each of these places embodies some aspect of the sacred in that they engage the person in a ritual to proclaim a love for the non-human natural world in which we are all embedded.<sup>58</sup>

While this does not particularly help us to find a singular definition of sacred places, it does offer a vision of the future in which we treat all natural places and beings with respect, if not veneration. In a way, this gives us a definition of “sacred” as a way of living in and thinking about the world. If we combine this idea with Durkheim’s assertion that the sacred is that which benefits the community, then perhaps we can now add another criterion for sacred place: that it be a place which helps a community to find a connection with the divine in such a way that the whole community connects with, and benefits from, the place-based experience. In fact, one commentator on Durkheim’s Elementary Forms of The Religious Life states that for Durkheim, “conceptions of the sacred... in one way or another mirrored or duplicated the form of society itself.” In this interpretation, “religion and the sacred have a ‘functional’ role in that they place the social on an unquestionable level.”<sup>59</sup> “Social” would not need to be defined as anything other than simply “community” – the particular beliefs of any social group or community of like-minded individuals could always be ritually enacted in sacred places.

A more classically Durkheimian use of the word “sacred” can also be found, albeit somewhat obtusely, in Bryan Wilson’s 1979 essay “The Return of the Sacred.” Since Wilson never explicitly defines his use of the term, the reader is left to make his or her own assumptions about just what Wilson means by the sacred. It seems that by sacred, he means the whole of religious life – the “social perceptions of the cosmic and social order.”<sup>60</sup> This lack of explicit definition, and the resultant lack of clarity, highlights the need for some sort of consensus, or at least some wider understanding, of what the phrase “sacred” means within religious discourse. This is the point that Evans makes in his essay quoted earlier; in the end Evans allows that the word sacred will likely continue

to mean different things in different contexts, both in language at large and in scholarly discourse. If this is the case, it is logical, then, to also say that the term “sacred place” will continue to mean different things to different people.

But perhaps we can move beyond this to create some clarity of definition. After all, in this chapter we have so far come up with four necessary conditions that a place must meet in order to be recognized as sacred. Firstly, as we have discerned from Eliade, the place, or the object that exists in place, must be revealed, not chosen, nor constructed by humans. Secondly, as explained by Lane, the place must have stories attached to it, stories which reinforce the beliefs of those who hold the place sacred. Third, according to Comstock, this place will inspire certain types of behaviors (and incidentally, one must suppose, will discourage others). Lastly, by combining the ideas of Durkheim, Vento, and others with the concept of rituals, we can propose that a sacred place must be one in which the community can participate and from which all in the community can receive some (spiritual) benefit. If all four of these are correct, then the “sacred” can include object-centered, experiential, psychological and social meaning.

#### *Legal aspects of defining the sacred*

One aspect that we have not yet considered are the legal ramifications of this work. Given that many (but by no means all) sacred spaces are also contested places, it is not surprising that the concept of the sacred should be discussed in journals devoted to the study of law. It is also unsurprising to find that these discussions usually do not offer any model for adjudicating whether a site is sacred; instead, this dialogue is usually set within the context of rights. In North America, the right of indigenous peoples to have

communal access to their sacred sites is usually set against the rights of the state, or of private interests, to exploit the natural resources on that site for economic gain.

In his essay "Legal Protection for Indigenous Cultures: Sacred Sites and Communal Rights," Richard Herz discusses the fact that it is usually the economic argument that wins. This, according to Herz, may in part be attributable to a fundamental difference between indigenous and western worldviews. Herz observes that "to the extent one can generalize, Native American cosmology is based on the sacred primacy of the natural world, of which man is merely a constituent." On the other hand, the dominant Judeo-Christian conceptualization of the world is that man has primacy, and of which nature is merely a constituent. Therefore, concludes Herz, those deciding the fate of a claimed sacred place often hold a "directly antithetical worldview" to those making the claim, and as a result are often "insensitive to [their] concerns."<sup>61</sup> This observation is repeated by Robert Michaelsen in his essay, "American Indian Religious Freedom Litigation: Promise and Perils." As noted earlier in this thesis, most indigenous cultures do not hold compartmentalized or dualistic, views of the world. This means, as Michaelsen points out, "the modern western tendency to break up human life into such categories as religion, politics, economics, etc., is not very useful in describing or understanding traditional Indian life... these difference become especially evident in cases dealing with religious claims involving land."<sup>62</sup> Bruce Miller, in his essay "Culture as Cultural Defense", notes that "efforts to construct a notion of sacredness in court (means that) the court must accept premises which are neither shared by the judges' own cultures or the legal sub-culture and thereby stand outside of their values and experiences."<sup>63</sup> However, according to Durkheim, the decision whether to value the

intrinsic (sacred) or utilitarian (mundane) qualities of an object or place is entirely subjective<sup>64</sup>. If the adjudicator does not understand or accept the intrinsic value of a place, it becomes unlikely that the place will be adjudged to be worth protecting rather than exploiting. This underlines the necessity of finding a mechanism by which places can be cross-culturally understood as sacred. This viewpoint is backed up by Miller, who writes that “it is difficult to demonstrate that an area or object is sacred... in the absence of a legal test of sacredness.”<sup>65</sup>

While neither Michaelsen, Herz nor Miller enter into the discussion about the meaning of the word sacred, all highlight the differences between individualistic and dualistic (mainly Western), and communal and holistic (mainly indigenous) worldviews, and note that the community ties forged through rituals, ceremonies and celebrations held on sacred ground are an integral part of Native American religion. Thus, the damage inflicted upon an indigenous community when a sacred site is destroyed “cannot be overstated.”<sup>66</sup> This again highlights the need for some sort of accepted criteria for adjudging sacredness of any disputed site in order to protect the rights of religious freedom.

Miller does, however, offer a way of categorizing sacred sites in such a way that courts might understand the different ways in which sacredness is understood to reside in place. There are eight different categories, including “transformer” sites in which “feeling is evoked more than physical nature”, spirit residences, ceremonial areas, traditional landmarks, questing/power sites, legendary and mythological sites, burial grounds, and “other”. Miller goes on to point out that while the significance of these sites may vary, “each class of sites does incorporate cultural significance, and each may be considered of

equal value within an overall ideological context.”<sup>67</sup> This has, in a number of cases, been an issue: just how sacred is the site in contention? As Michaelsen writes, the question the courts often ask is “whether the contested areas are of some relevance to the religious practice of the complainants. The question is one of degree.”<sup>68</sup> One problem with such an approach is that it would not then consider landmark sites to be relevant to practice. For example, a place such as Devil’s Tower<sup>69</sup>, with its prescribed times of rest might not qualify as a sacred place simply because it is not used; the argument that it is not used because it is sacred might end up sounding rather circular, even though there is much truth in it.

From a legal point of view, Michaelsen suggests that the best way to protect sacred sites in North America may be by claiming the right to freedom of religious practice. If this route is followed, Michaelsen gives four criteria that must be proven. First, it must be proven that the religion being practiced is authentic and thus worthy of protection. Secondly, “the nature, length and current status of the use of the area should be detailed.” Third, he urges tribal councils to keep careful records of “the role of use of the area” in any religious ceremonies, and fourth, the benefit derived by the community from such rituals and ceremonies should be made clear.<sup>70</sup> These four criteria fit in well with those suggested in this chapter: the main difference being that the criteria set forth by this author do not rely on a legal argument, which gives a certain degree of autonomy from the courts. In other words, sacred place contestation would not have to go before the courts before our four criteria could be evoked. Ideally, with the adoption of our criteria, sacred places would be recognized by society as a whole, and so would not come under threat in the first place. This is not such an impossible dream: after all, there are many

sacred places in major world religions (including Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism) that are recognized as sacred even by those who do not follow or agree with that particular religion. The authors of Sacred Sites, Sacred Places urge “people from all spheres and with widely diverging interests [to] work together to reach a situation in which everyone will respect and protect sacred sites, regardless of who they are.”<sup>71</sup>

In England, issues surrounding sites such as Stonehenge and Avebury are not so much about imminent destruction as about the exclusion from the site of those for whom these sites have sacred significance. Although some progress has been made – for example, allowing access to Stonehenge during the summer solstice, issues of access and management continue. In part, these disputes stem from the lack of ways to confirm the sacredness of the site. However, if a clear set of criteria can be established, then perhaps these issues can be resolved peaceably, and boundaries set for the use or non-use of the site by various parties.

### *Conclusions*

Now that we have set forth our own four criteria, and reviewed the ways in which these might find their way into legalistic definitions of the sacred, it is worth adding a few thoughts on why defining the sacred, and recognizing sacred space, matters. It seems clear that there are many reasons to preserve sacred sites. These include religious, moral, legal, social, historical, ecological and aesthetic reasons. It involves respect for people, for their beliefs, and for the land. Sacred places are important because, as one commentator puts it, these places have “the capacity to open us to the transcendent”<sup>72</sup> – they connect us with a power greater than ourselves, whether that power is seen as simply the whole of Earth

being greater than the sum of its parts, or a extraterrestrial divine power that created an ordered world out of cosmic chaos. These places also help to create community and cultural continuity, and as demonstrated by LaChapelle and Vento, to bring people to an understanding and appreciation of the need to preserve the other-than-human parts of the natural world.

In our quest to understand the meaning of the sacred in place, we have investigated the writings and commentaries on some of the most significant scholars on the history and meaning of religion, and on the nature of the sacred. In so doing, we have been able to identify four possible criteria to help identify places that are sacred. To reiterate, these are: that the place is revealed by the divine, and not by chosen by humans; that the place has sacred stories attached to it; that the place evokes certain types of behaviors that are in turn caused by the emotion of a numinous experience; and that the place brings benefit to the community of believers as a whole. While this is not meant to be taken as an exhaustive or even authoritative list, it is hoped that by moving towards a clarification of meaning of sacred in relation to sacred places, those truly sacred places will be afforded protection from future harm, and those sacred sites that have been disregarded will be restored to their divinely intended use.

It is worth noting that what all four of the above criteria have in common is that all include *people* – whether as the finders of place, as the tellers of the stories about the place, as the enactors of rituals, or as a group who have come together for a reason connected to the divine presence in that place. This then brings us back to the quote from Carmichael et al near the beginning of this chapter – “a landscape is sacred because humans perceive it as such.”<sup>73</sup> While not wishing to be anthropocentric, it is, essential to

understand that ultimately it is people who benefit from the use of, and the preservation of sacred places. That other-than-human nature is worth preserving for its own, intrinsic values is, I think, a story for another time.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, transl. John W. Harvey, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), 5.
- <sup>2</sup> Matthew T. Evans, "The Sacred: Differentiating, Clarifying and Extending Concepts," Review of Religious Research 45, no. 1 (2003), 32.
- <sup>3</sup> David L. Carmichael, Jane Hubert, Brian Reeves and Audhild Schanche, Sacred Sites, Sacred Places (London: Routledge, 1994), 7.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.
- <sup>6</sup> Robert F. Streetman, "Some Later Thoughts of Otto on the Holy," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 48, no. 3 (September 1980), 369.
- <sup>7</sup> The root of the word is the Latin "numen", meaning "deity".
- <sup>8</sup> John Harvey, in the translator's introduction to Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, xvii.
- <sup>9</sup> Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 7.
- <sup>10</sup> Streetman, 369.
- <sup>11</sup> Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), 519.
- <sup>12</sup> Otto, 54.
- <sup>13</sup> Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God. In The Idea of the Holy, "creature-feeling" is discussed in Chapter III, while the "mysterium tremendum" is the subject of Chapter IV. Streetman discusses these concepts briefly in "Some Later Thoughts of Otto on the Holy", an essay which offers an excellent explication of many of Otto's concepts in The Idea of the Holy.
- <sup>14</sup> Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, transl. Willard R. Trask (London: Harcourt Brace, 1959), 11.
- <sup>15</sup> Belden Lane, "Giving Voice to Place: Three Models for Understanding American Sacred Space," Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation 1, no. 1 (2001): 57.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.
- <sup>18</sup> Lewis A. Coser, Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 137.
- <sup>19</sup> Douglas Allen, "Mircea Eliade's Phenomenological Analysis of Religious Experience", The Journal of Religion 52, no. 2 (April 1972): 173.
- <sup>20</sup> A. A. Goldenweiser, "Religion and Society: A Critique of Emile Durkheim's Theory of the Origin and Nature of Religion," The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods 14, no. 5 (1917), 114.
- <sup>21</sup> Eliade, 26.
- <sup>22</sup> Lane, 53.
- <sup>23</sup> Eliade, 27.
- <sup>24</sup> Jane Hubert, "Sacred Beliefs and Beliefs of Sacredness" in Sacred Sites, Sacred Places, eds. David Carmichael et al, (New York: Routledge 1994), 18.
- <sup>25</sup> Eliade, 116-117.
- <sup>26</sup> Allen, 179.
- <sup>27</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot", The Journal of Religion 52, no. 2 (April 1972), 141.
- <sup>28</sup> Eliade, 129.
- <sup>29</sup> Coser, 137.
- <sup>30</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, The Nature of Human Society: The Savage Mind, transl. George Weidenfeld (Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 1966), 10.
- <sup>31</sup> Christopher Witcombe, "Sacred Places". Available at: [http://witcombe.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/sacredplaces\\_intro.html](http://witcombe.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/sacredplaces_intro.html).
- <sup>32</sup> This interpretation only works if one accepts the theory that its creators indeed initially used Stonehenge for religious purposes. This is still under dispute amongst archaeologists and other commentators, however, it is clear that many pagans currently interpret Stonehenge as sacred and use it as a sacred and celebratory site. Among the literature pertinent to this discussion, see in particular, Christopher Chippendale, "Stoned Henge: Events and Issues at the Summer Solstice, 1985." World Archaeology 18, no. 1 (1986): 35-58, and Jenny Blain and Robert Wallis, "Sacred Sites, Contested Rites/Rights: Contemporary Pagan Engagements with the Past." Journal of Material Culture 9, no. 3 (2004): 237-261.

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- <sup>33</sup> Lane, 70.
- <sup>34</sup> These concepts are discussed more fully in Chapter Three of this thesis.
- <sup>35</sup> Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), 6.
- <sup>36</sup> N.J. Demerath, III, "The Varieties of Sacred Experience: Finding the Sacred in a Secular Grove," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 39, no. 1 (March 2000): 3.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>39</sup> Daniel L. Pals, in Eight Theories of Religion explains Durkheim's idea of the sacred as "things [which] involve large concerns: the interests and welfare of an entire group of people, not just one." Pals also points out Durkheim's warning that the sacred is not necessarily equivalent to moral good, much as Otto also warns. However, Goldenweiser points out in his early critique of Durkheim, that Durkheim recognizes that religion must have both individual and social aspects in order to be validated by the community, (Goldenweiser, 115).
- <sup>40</sup> Richard Comstock, "A Behavioral Approach to the Sacred: Category Formation in Religious Studies," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 49, no. 4 (December 1981): 627.
- <sup>41</sup> Goldenweiser, 115.
- <sup>42</sup> Comstock, 629.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> Lane, 53.
- <sup>45</sup> Comstock, 630.
- <sup>46</sup> Lane, 61.
- <sup>47</sup> Eliade, 27-28.
- <sup>48</sup> Comstock, 631.
- <sup>49</sup> Evans, 33.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>51</sup> Demerath, 6.
- <sup>52</sup> The claims of the neo-druids and other pagan groups to Stonehenge as a sacred place are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis. One excellent resource for an overview of these issues, however, is Christopher Chippendale, "Stoned Henge: Events and Issues at the Summer Solstice, 1985." World Archaeology 18, no. 1 (1986): 35-58.
- <sup>53</sup> Demerath, 8.
- <sup>54</sup> Arnoldo Vento, "Rediscovering the Sacred: From the Secular to a Postmodern Sense of the Sacred," Wicazo Sa Review 15, no. 1 (2000): 193.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.
- <sup>57</sup> Dolores LaChapelle, Sacred Land, Sacred Sex, Rapture of the Deep (Colorado, Finn Hill Arts, 1988), 214.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.
- <sup>59</sup> R.L. Stirrat, "Sacred Models," Man, new series 19, no. 2 (June, 1984): 200.
- <sup>60</sup> Bryan Wilson, "The Return of The Sacred," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 18, no. 3 (September 1979), 278.
- <sup>61</sup> Richard Herz, "Legal Protection for Indigenous Cultures: Sacred Sites and Communal Rights," Virginia Law Review 79, no. 3 (April 1993), 692.
- <sup>62</sup> Robert Michaelsen, "American Indian Religious Freedom Litigation: Promise and Perils." Journal of Law and Religion 3, no. 1 (1985), 50.
- <sup>63</sup> Bruce Miller, "Culture as Cultural Defense: An American Indian Sacred Site in Court," American Indian Quarterly 22, no. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1998), 83.
- <sup>64</sup> Coser, 137.
- <sup>65</sup> Miller, 90.
- <sup>66</sup> Herz, 703.
- <sup>67</sup> Miller, 92-93.
- <sup>68</sup> Robert Michaelsen, "'We Also Have a Religion': The Free Exercise of Religion among Native Americans," American Indian Quarterly 7, no. 3 (Summer 1983), 131. In this essay Michaelsen discusses a

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number of specific cases brought before U.S. courts, where either land, or religious practices, or both, were under dispute.

<sup>69</sup> Devil's Tower is a 600 feet high monolith in northeastern Wyoming, close to the Black Hills of South Dakota. It is sacred to the Lakota people. However, because it is also a National Monument and is situated with a national park, it has attracted the attention of climbers. The Lakota religion calls for the site to be used only for spiritual ceremonies, mostly during the summer months; at other times, the site is to be allowed "time for itself". For further information, see Amy Corbin, "Devil's Tower" on the Sacred Land Film Project website: [http://www.sacredland.org/angered\\_sites\\_pages/devils\\_tower.html](http://www.sacredland.org/angered_sites_pages/devils_tower.html), and Allison M. Dussias, "Cultural Conflicts Regarding Land Use: The Conflict Between Recreational Users at Devil's Tower and Native American Ceremonial Users," Vermont Journal of Environmental Law, vol. @, 2000-2001, available at <http://www.vjel.org/journal/VJEL10005.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Michaelsen, "We Also Have a Religion", 135.

<sup>71</sup> Carmichael et al, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Maria Luisa Cohen, "Sacred Spaces: Beyond the Concept of Resource Exploitation." The Environmentalist 11, no.1 (1991): 58.

<sup>73</sup> Carmichael et al, 7.

**Chapter Five: CPR – Saving Places, or the Roles of Conservation,  
Preservation and Restoration in the Future of Sacred Places**

*People need beauty as well as bread... places where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.*

*-John Muir*

If we are to keep the legacy of sacred places alive, then there need to be strategies in place for doing so. Obviously, the diversity of sacred places is such that there can be no single solution that will work in all cases. However, there are many tools that can be utilized in various ways and combinations so that sacred places that are under threat from encroaching developments or sprawling urban areas or other environmental intrusions, can indeed remain sacred. Some will argue that it is not the place nor function of scholars to dictate how places sacred to (metaphysically or physically) distant or even just non-mainstream / non-dominant culture communities ought to be looked after, and I agree. Ultimately the community that values the place ought to be empowered to make the decisions regarding that place, and there should be legal and legislative mechanisms in place through which those decisions can be implemented and respected. These communities have a closer connection to that place – they know its stories, its history and usages, its special, hierophanic qualities. They know what makes the place “feel” right. But scholars may be of use in identifying viable options to help a sacred place that is threatened and in identifying ways in which the community may be able and enabled to use those options.

Broadly speaking, the three main categories of restitution are conservation, preservation and restoration – or the CPR of sacred places (and for that matter, of ecosystems generally). The first order of business in this chapter is to define what each of

those terms means, especially as the first two are often, and I will argue mistakenly, used synonymously<sup>1</sup>. Conservation implies involvement, planning and action, whereas preservation implies keeping something the same – more hands off and non-action. Both have benefits and drawbacks in the case of sacred places, especially when one considers that in some sacred places – for example, Devil’s Tower in Wyoming – tradition and legend dictate that there are certain times of the year when no one is to visit the area while the land rests<sup>2</sup>.

Restoration, meanwhile, has suffered from much the same sorts of problems that we encountered in defining the sacred in Chapter Four. Restoration has been interpreted in many different ways by various groups of people, and so has come to signify a variety of very different approaches to the recovery of degraded ecosystems and / or places. In this thesis, we will be adopting the definitions and processes of focal restoration as described particularly in Eric Higgs’ book, Nature by Design.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I will argue that restoration of this sort is almost always the best way to approach the restitution of degraded sacred places, as it combines the best aspects of both conservation and preservation, but with the added advantage that it takes cultural and spiritual factors and attachments into account in ways that the former two are not designed to do. And since sacred places will inevitably have some cultural and spiritual meanings and stories that must be listened to in the process of restoring them, focal restoration is best placed to weave together the social, cultural, spiritual and environmental threads. While we will come to define this in greater detail later in this chapter, it is worth pointing out here that in focal restoration, the act of restoration becomes a focus for personal and community engagement with place, and ecological practices.

But first, in order to understand the meanings and connotations of the other two terms (conservation and preservation), we will go back a bit in American history to see how the two terms have been used and what they have come to stand for today.<sup>4</sup>

### *Conservation and Preservation*

Conservation is about careful use. We speak, for example, of “conserving energy” when the intent is to continue to *use* energy, but to do so carefully and prudently. Preservation is about keeping something in a certain state – for example, artifacts in a museum are “preserved” so that no further degradation occurs. The two terms, while certainly connected, are not synonymous, especially when applied to an environmental framework. A quick glance at the way in which the conservationist and preservationist movements developed in mainstream North American culture will help to highlight the difference between the two approaches.

An influential early figure in the environmental history of the U.S. is George Perkins Marsh, who recognized early on that the relentless onslaught against natural landscapes – such as the cutting down of forests and the conversion of prairie to farmland – was perhaps not a such a good idea after all. He realised that there was a need to conserve (though not preserve) natural spaces and resources, and in 1864 wrote “man has too long forgotten that the earth was given to him for usufruct alone, not for consumption, still less for profligate waste.” He further adds that “the earth is fast becoming an unfit home” for humanity.<sup>5</sup> Marsh succeeded in bringing the idea of conservation to the mind of the American public, and his writings were one of the main catalysts in the creation of the federal conservation program for natural resources in

1891.<sup>6</sup> But Marsh's objective was not that nature, whether part of a sacred place (a concept, incidentally, which he does not address in his book and which, in the context of wilderness he may well have found incomprehensible) should be preserved, as in left untouched. Instead he was concerned with sustainability and conservation, so that the natural resources would not be depleted or destroyed, but would be sustained for use by his own as well as future generations. In fact, historian David Lowenthal suggests that it may be precisely because he did not advocate wilderness preservation that his ideas became so widely accepted. Lowenthal writes that "Marsh framed his warnings within an accepted goal of environmental exploitation; he disputed not the desirability of conquering nature, but the bungling way it was being done."<sup>7</sup>

Marsh certainly was not alone in this view of natural places and spaces: his contemporaries and allies included Gifford Pinchot and members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.<sup>8</sup> Pinchot's enthusiasm for Marsh's ideas, coupled with his training as a forester and a good sense of politics and public relations garnered him the reputation as the founder of conservation in the United States. Pinchot's 1910 book The Fight for Conservation, in which he wrote that "the first duty of the human race is to control the earth it lives upon,"<sup>9</sup> exalted the idea of careful extraction of natural resources. Pinchot was also an advocate of the creation of national parks, but only if the material resources of those parks were made available for future extraction and use. It is this sort of thinking that has led to problems for sacred places such as the Bighorn Medicine Wheel; located within the boundaries of a national park, there would under Pinchot's reasoning, be no reason to stop logging (done for course with the utmost of care and in a conservationist approach) right up to the edge of the stone circle itself.

Meanwhile, Pinchot's contemporary and adversary John Muir was the rising new hero of the preservationists. Muir called for wild places to be left wild, and not exploited for material resources – wilderness, said Muir, had a value of its own and was more than just “resource” for human wants and needs. Influenced by the writings of Emerson and Henry David Thoreau (who saw wilderness as “a source of vigor, inspiration and strength”<sup>10</sup>) and inspired by his travels through the then largely wild American West, Muir wrote that “people need beauty as well as bread... places where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.”<sup>11</sup> Muir came to be seen as the leader (if not the originator) of the new so-called transcendentalist movement in U.S. ecological thought, a movement that valued nature on its own terms, urging the creation of national parks *without* the conservationist proviso that the resources of those parks should still be accessible and extractable. Muir helped to found the Sierra Club in 1892, and until his death in 1914 fought many political battles on behalf of the American wilderness<sup>12</sup>.

However, a careful reading of Muir's works reveals an underlying nod to conservation of a kind. While not advocating *extraction*, Muir nonetheless advocates *use* – he is not suggesting that wilderness ought to be preserved for the sake of wilderness, but rather for the solace of humanity. There is a profound distinction between preservation for the spiritual benefit of humankind and preservation for the benefit of the place, and the other than human inhabitants of the place. However, both people and place can benefit at the same time, if we are careful in our approach and clear about our intent. Indeed in the case of sacred places, human spiritual benefits in many ways rely on the preservation of the place for its own qualities. Therefore this sort of non-extractive, preservationist type of approach might be a key in the preservation of some sacred places,

and would be certainly be preferential to sort of extractive conservation that would still allow, for example, logging or dam building.

Muir in his turn influenced the thinking of another key figure in environmental thought, Aldo Leopold. Best known for his Sand County Almanac published in 1949, Leopold made “a plea for the preservation of some tag ends of wilderness”, adding that “the creation of new wilderness in the full sense of the word is impossible.”<sup>13</sup> This is another point well worth considering, especially in the context of sacred places. Often, the reasons given for preserving or setting aside land for national parks is to retain a sort of snapshot of the world as it once was; however, neither the world as a whole, nor wilderness as a part of it are static, and wilderness needs a certain (not always easily defined) amount of space in which to continue to grow and evolve. Yet while “tag ends” may not be enough to allow wilderness to survive, it may be enough to preserve the special qualities of sacred spaces that are set within wild places, or at least within wild (not tamed) landscapes. But just as a “new” wilderness cannot be created while the former is bulldozed for development, neither can a sacred place be replicated somewhere other than in its original location. This is something, it seems, that those whose worldview doesn’t allow for the sacred in place find hard to understand; natural sacred places are not, for example, like churches, where the building can be decommissioned and a new place of worship created and consecrated in the neighboring county. As noted in Chapter Two, it is often the case that the natural landscape surrounding the cultural “nub” of a sacred site is an intrinsic part of the character of the place.

It is worth pointing out that all four of the early environmental leaders described here – Marsh, Pinchot, Muir and Leopold – were, rather obviously, part of the

mainstream dominant western culture; the concept of natural places being sacred for specific cultures, for specific reasons, was not part of their cultural and temporal milieu. That they did not consider sacred places in the formulation of their ethos may be forgivable given the time and social climate in which each one lived. However, that does not mean that we cannot use their ideas and theories to create conservationist and preservationist policies and ideas that might be usefully applied to sacred places. So now, let's look at how first conservation and then preservation might work to benefit such places.

Marrying the ideas of conservation to the ideals of sacred places holds both problems and promise. Given that the places will be those with cultural influences, the idea of control inherent in conservation may prove useful, although it must be used with caution and care. While we have not traced the development of conservationist thought in the U.K. for reasons addressed earlier, there are some interesting commentaries in the subject. For example, as W.M. Adams notes in his essay on the development of conservation practices in the U.K., "conservation embraces a complex range of social practices relating to the human use of non-human nature."<sup>14</sup> However, those practices will be driven by the dominant culture and the values that underpin it, and as such might rather miss the point of conserving the sacred in place. Admittedly Adams addresses the issue of conservation in relation wildlife, rather than in the context of natural sacred places, but he does emphasise the point that "values are inscribed on terrain... through social meanings,"<sup>15</sup> and asserts that many conservationists are passionate about their causes and their efforts to "save" landscapes and ecosystems.

Still, the driving forces behind conservation practices in the U.K., according to Adams, have been twofold: the advancement of scientific knowledge, and the “rational utilization” of nature. If these are indeed the ideals of conservation, then a conservation ethos will not sit well with the more intuitive approach needed to conserve sacred places. Equally, in North America, the conservation ethic supported by the U.S. Forest Service includes a mandate to “manage national forests for multiple uses and benefits and for the sustained yield of renewable resources such as water, forage, wildlife, wood, and recreation... while conserving the environment for generations yet to come.”<sup>16</sup> This service of multiple masters has often put the Forest Service in a tough spot, as highlighted by the legal battles fought over logging around Bighorn Medicine Wheel.

Because it maintains a bias for the economic and the scientific rather than spiritual, conservation often does not serve the interests of sacred places. Although it does often try to accommodate cultural values, if the paradigms of the dominant culture place economic growth or scientific advancement as the highest values, then any other value that the land may possess will be either overlooked or subsumed.

If there are problems with applying a conservation ethic to the care of sacred places, then perhaps a preservation approach will work better. However, difficulties are also encountered when trying to apply a truly preservationist framework to sacred spaces. One problem is that many in the (largely biocentric and ecocentric) preservationist camps will assert that the reason for preserving something is because that ecosystem or area has value in and of itself – that is to say, that nature has intrinsic value quite apart from any value to humanity, whether extractive, as a resource for economic growth, or non-extractive, as a source for spiritual growth. Yet when assessing the role of preservation

for sacred places, we are not necessarily trying to preserve nature or an ecosystem *per se*, but a particular quality that nature or natural objects have in a given place, or a particular setting that has been used – non-extractively to be sure, but used nonetheless – by humans. It is more precisely this *use*, or this relationship, rather than this *nature* that is being preserved. (One could argue that since culture is by its own nature fluid, that the use is being accommodated, rather than preserved, but in either case it is still use.)

Literature that deals specifically with the preservation of sacred places is fairly scarce. One of the difficulties is that sacred spaces are by definition neither wholly wild, nor wholly cultural, and so do not fall neatly into the sights of the preservation advocates, yet it is often this combination of natural and built artifacts that mark out a place as special. However, sacred places are often situated in environments or ecosystems that are in need of some sort of intervention to prevent them from becoming degraded. Since this intervention should disallow any sort of destructive or extractive activities (such as logging, mining or hunting) as well as limiting recreational activities (such as rock climbing or tourism), then preservation – not conservation – may be the most healing way forward. One potential problem with this, though, is it often necessitates a limiting of human activity – in this case, a closing off of the sacred site, making access for ceremonies more difficult, though certainly not impossible.

Given these complex interactions between the needs and desires of various groups involved, one commentator notes that if sacred places are to be preserved, “a sort of bridge will have to be built between the religious and the intellectual powerhouses of the ecological movement, and the politicians and administrators.”<sup>17</sup> Only then can conditions be created in which needs and desires of the general public, as well as those with

religious and / or spiritual ties to a sacred place, and those who are charged with the executive power to make and enforce decisions, can all be met. There is a certain pragmatic realism behind this observation, one that is not often explicitly acknowledged. However, as the tensions at places as diverse as Stonehenge, Bighorn Medicine Wheel, Devil's Tower and the Black Hills of the Dakotas, and even Uluru (Ayers Rock) show, consideration must be given to the practicalities of any proposed intervention at a sacred place. In the three latter examples, agreements have been reached with the Indigenous populations who have historical claims to the use of the site for sacred rituals, and this has included a limiting of other activities. While these agreements have not been specifically labeled as "preservation", the tone and the effect is essentially preservationist. In the first, historical links cannot be proven, and as previously noted, this has caused problems. Therefore, it seems that establishing parameters for what does or does not constitute a legitimate claim to sacred space (as discussed in Chapter 4) is essential before any agreement over how to ensure its future integrity can be reached.

David Lowenthal, in his paper "Material Preservation and its Alternatives", discusses both natural and historic preservation<sup>18</sup>. He makes the point that any attempt at preservation is bound to encounter difficulties in that there are multiple claimants to any given area or object, and each may have different objectives in mind. Certainly this has been the case at Stonehenge, where some archaeologists think of preservation as granting them exclusive access to the grounds; English Heritage believes that preservation is only worthwhile if access can be granted (at a price!) to the general public, while those who feel a spiritual connection to the site believe that they ought to be granted free access (in terms of both time and money), and that the monuments should be preserved or at least

reserved for use at the summer solstice. Lowenthal also makes the point that often, only “fragments” of an ancient site can be preserved (thus echoing Leopold’s plea for tag-ends), and he questions whether this is sufficient. Lowenthal makes a good point: one of the issues in sacred places is that both the cultural / historic artifacts as well as the natural environment or setting are inextricably bound together. In some cases, the fragments that are left may be sufficient, while in other cases, it may be possible to rebuild or replace certain cultural elements, even if the entire surrounding landscape or ecosystem cannot be reinstated. In the case of Stonehenge, it might not be appropriate to try to rebuild those parts of the stone circle that have succumbed to age and weathering, but it does seem both possible and appropriate to restore the surrounding landscape, at least as far as is possible given the severity of human-initiated landscape change. At the Bighorn Medicine Wheel, on the other hand, rebuilding, or recreating parts of the stone circle that have been disturbed might be necessary, as well as protecting the surrounding mountain ecosystem.

Once again, the need for culturally appropriate decisions based on specific situations become apparent. Stonehenge and Medicine Wheel exemplify the need for an individual, case-by-case approach. While we may be able to set some parameters for designating places as sacred, we may not be able to set the same types of parameters when it comes to restitution within that place. In the case of the former, only the site itself – a fragment of the ecosystem in which it was originally situated – remains. Preserving this may be all that is possible, although recent efforts to begin restoration of the surrounding chalk downlands is an encouraging start<sup>19</sup>. In the case of the latter, the medicine wheel site is situated within a still functioning ecosystem of a National Forest,

and the First Nations groups there have been successful in stopping further destruction of the surrounding ecosystem (by successfully lobbying for a ban on logging), and in trying to preserve their site<sup>20</sup>. In this case, preservation of the surrounding land is seen as essential to the integrity of the sacred site itself, and for the uses to which the site is put.

So it can be seen that there is no “one size fits all” solution for degraded or disturbed natural sacred places. The diversity of such places makes this impossible, and indeed undesirable. In some cases, a new hybrid conservation / preservation / restoration approach may be needed. For example, in Stonehenge, there is a need to preserve the stones themselves, to conserve the surrounding environment, and to use focal restoration to allow for use and care of the site itself.

### *Defining Restoration*

Restoration, in its simplest terms, is about returning something to a previous state. For example, one might “restore” a work of art that has accumulated dirt and grime over the years. When speaking of restoration of ecosystems or of natural places generally, the most easily accessible definition of ecological restoration is found in the Society for Ecological Restoration primer: “Ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed.”<sup>21</sup> With sacred places, it may be that the ecosystem surrounding the sacred site is in need of restoration, or it may be the case that only the smaller sacred site itself, where the ceremonies are carried out, has become degraded. In other situations still, the area or ecosystem surrounding the site may be so built-up, or otherwise modified by human actions, that restoration is not an option. Another problem is that restoration often seeks to return

lands to “pre-disturbance” conditions, and logically, a sacred site must be “post-disturbance” in at least some sense, even if it is very ancient. In any case, restoration of the site would strive to create conditions of ecological integrity so far as is possible,

If we turn again to the example of Stonehenge, we see that is bounded on one side by a major motorway; even if the road can be successfully re-routed through a tunnel, it will be very difficult to restore the surrounding lands to a pre-disturbance state, even if some consensus could be reached on what *that* term means. One quick answer to that question is provided by J. Baird Callicott, who suggests that instead of thinking of pre-disturbance as pre-human settlement, pre-disturbance could be characterized as “prior to disturbance and conversion by industrial homo sapiens.”<sup>22</sup> This tends to make sense for culturally significant sites, as sacred places must be. Such a definition allows those human-made artifacts necessary for the spiritual significance of the site to remain, while also allowing for the surrounding ecosystem to be returned, or restored, to full viability.

### *Applying restoration*

I will argue that there is a good case for applying the principles of restoration (particularly focal restoration) over conservation or preservation when addressing issues of restitution in sacred places. The reason is simply because in sacred places the attachment to land, and to specific aspects of the land, takes place at a deeper and more symbolically significant level than in a non-sacred landscape, and more attention may need to be paid to symbolic presences and features of the land. This I think is where restoration shines: it can more easily be sensitive to the cultural and spiritual aspects of keeping a place sacred rather than simply keeping it undeveloped in an economic sense.

### *Focal Restoration in Sacred Places*

In order to better understand how restoration does fit in with the recovery or restitution of a sacred place, it will be instructive now to explore more in depth the four key concepts in restoration practice. All of these concepts play important roles in restoring sacred places, so it is worth looking at each of them in more detail. According to Higgs, in his book Nature By Design, the four key concepts of good restoration practice are:

1. ecological integrity
2. historical fidelity
3. focal practices
4. intentional, or wild, design.<sup>23</sup>

In 1986, the Society for Ecological Restoration defined ecological integrity thus:

“ecological integrity includes a critical range of variability in biodiversity, ecological processes and structures, regional and historical context, and sustainable cultural practices.”<sup>24</sup> This last condition has a great deal of relevance to the restoration of sacred places, since usually a sacred place will continue to be used for ceremony and ritual, at least by the group or groups of people who consider it to be sacred. In the case of Medicine Wheel, the long history of use by indigenous people has to be balanced with its location (in Bighorn National Forest), and, therefore, access to it by non-indigenous people. The restoration of the ecological processes also has to take into account more recent built structures that cannot be easily moved or removed: for example, there is an air traffic control tower visible from the site of the stone circle itself.<sup>25</sup>

Historical fidelity involves, in most cases “loyalty to pre-disturbance conditions, which may or may not involve exact reproduction... [and] there are social, economic, cultural, political, aesthetic, and moral goals from the present to factor in as well.”<sup>26</sup> But, as alluded to earlier in this chapter, how to define pre-disturbance? It is tempting to equate pre-disturbance with pre-human contact, but this does not hold well, especially in cases such as Medicine Wheel, or Stonehenge, or many other ancient sacred places, where humans have used the site for spiritual practices for many centuries. As Callicott notes (rather tongue in cheek), in “Choosing Appropriate Temporal and Spatial Scales for Ecological Restoration,” “Suppose we choose to think that ecological restoration should, indeed, be to restore a site to its... condition free from human influence. Then what? Back to the Pleistocene.”<sup>27</sup> Instead, Callicott suggests thinking about restoration more intuitively, making the condition of restoration about what existed in an area “prior to disturbance and conversion by industrial homo sapiens.”<sup>28</sup> As noted earlier, this tends to make more sense for sites with very long histories of human habitation, use, or veneration.

Recent archeological developments at Stonehenge show that a village may have been located close by; indications are that this village is as ancient as the monument itself. Again, restoration to a pre-human alteration condition is at the very least highly problematic, if not nonsensical. However, as noted in Chapter 2, plans are currently underway to restore surrounding tracts of land to chalk downland. Although much of this will continue to be used as grazing land for local farmers, it is at least more historically faithful than an industrial landscape. The A303 roadway could be relocated in a tunnel (not underneath the stones, so that archaeological work may continue), the existing visitor

centre will be demolished and a new improved less intrusive and more informative version built.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile in Wyoming, it is obvious that the air-traffic control tower does not hold much pre-disturbance historical fidelity with the Medicine Wheel site, and neither does the chain-link fence that has been constructed around the wheel to preserve and protect it from “non-native visitors”<sup>30</sup> (of course it also restricts access for the First Nations). But the wheel itself, constructed by humans prior to the industrial era, is consistent with maintaining historical fidelity under Callicott’s account. Evidence and tradition both suggest that the site has been used as a sacred place (for example vision quests, prayer shrine) for hundreds of years, and continues to be so used today<sup>31</sup>. The fidelity of the stone circle is paramount to these ceremonies, but ensuring its survival has necessitated restricting access. Again, pre-disturbance cannot realistically mean pre-human use, but it could be interpreted as pre-commercial (or pre-industrial) development.

Focal practices are those things we do which remind us of our connection with the environment. By including this criterion, Higgs introduces the idea of focal restoration, as opposed to more technical restoration practices. This might mean, for example, paying attention to the way that things grow, and taking care to nurture and nourish natural processes. Again, this would be important in restoring sacred places, as often the sacred value and spiritual quality of a place is tied to the natural systems of the place.

Focal restoration differs from the more straightforward ecological restoration in that it more clearly integrates focal practices into the act of restoration. Higgs characterizes focal practice as “challenging, skilful, sometimes tedious activities required to keep something of value alive.”<sup>32</sup> One sort of focal practice is the use of rituals and

ceremony, thus acknowledging, at least in the case of sacred space restoration, the intended use of the place as a focal point for a community. It also means that the site continues to be valued and used – and that the intention of the site as a way of connecting with something greater than oneself, some form of the divine, is also not lost.

Interestingly, many of those who promote the idea of all nature as sacred are also in favour of focal practices in ecological restoration, even if they do not use that exact term. For example, both Engels and Jordan have expressed the idea that the appropriate use of technology and creativity can enhance the experience of sacred space. Engels, at a 1990 conference on sacred places, reiterated his support for “community-based development, which takes a strong sense of identity and unity from the existence of sacred spaces, providing the mythical foundation for a coherent community policy.”<sup>33</sup> This approach could easily be transferred to the restoration of sacred places as we have defined them here. In many ways, this account is very like Higgs’ definition of focal restoration.

The last key component of good restoration practice, according to Higgs, is intentional, or wild design. This involves “acknowledging that restoration is fundamentally a design practice.”<sup>34</sup> Creating good design involves consideration of how the place will be used in the future, while still paying attention to the other core concepts of ecological integrity and historical fidelity. In the case of sacred places, design also means paying attention to the symbolic significance of both cultural and natural artifacts.

However, even when one incorporates all the elements of good, focal restoration practice, there are some scholars who argue against its use in sacred places. Surprisingly, one such opponent is William R. Jordan III, seemingly in opposition to his assertion that

any restored place can become sacred. In The Sunflower Forest, Jordan quotes British naturalist Chris Barnes' opinion that a restored ecosystem "won't have the ghosts in it"<sup>35</sup> that the original had. If by "ghosts" Barnes means to include (and Jordan says he does) the spirit of the place, then restoration of a sacred place might not be able to "feel" right. (On the other hand, it might make the place feel better, much as spring cleaning makes a home feel brighter.)

There are many sacred places that could benefit from the ethic of care that good and thoughtful ecological restoration would bring. Again, though, we must be careful not to seek blanket solutions that apply rigid rules to all situations. For example, in the case of the Bighorn medicine wheel, it would seem that historical fidelity would be almost impossible to achieve, given that the area is part of a National Forest, with all the visitors such a designation allows, and then there are the recent built structures, such as the aforementioned chain link fence, and the air traffic control tower, that realistically are not going to be moved. There is also the whole national forest infrastructure to contend with – roads, trails, etc. But what may more important to pay attention to is the cultural knowledge – the knowledge of what traditional practices meant, and why they took place in certain places, and to restore the site to accommodate those.

In the case of Stonehenge, it would be difficult to figure out just exactly which point in history one ought to be faithful to since the landscape has changed so often. And since the original use has been lost, and there is no continuous tradition, it might make more sense to restore the site to a condition that makes sense to those who consider it sacred, and use it as a sacred place, right now. Still, the efforts to restore the surrounding

land are to be applauded from ecological, historic and cultural viewpoints, and will serve to enhance the experience of rituals and ceremonies held there.

Part of restoration of sacred places will also involve consideration of the way in which the place will be experienced once the restoration work is completed; Jordan's warning that the place may not "feel right" after restoration does remind us that the work has to pay attention to the stories of the place, and the spirits that inhabit that place. Care must be taken not to change the "sense" of the place. Sacred places, as Lane notes, "are perceived in the richly interactive way that all deep knowing requires."<sup>36</sup> It inspires a sense of awe, of connection to something bigger than oneself. If restoration is to be undertaken in such places, then all this must be taken into account, however unscientific it might seem.

There is one issue that needs to be clarified here: I do not plan in this thesis to address the issues surrounding the concept of the ritualization of restoration, or about restoration itself being a sacred practice. To be sure, this issue is an interesting one, and has received some attention in the literature. Jordan in particular discusses this issue in depth.<sup>37</sup> Any kind of restoration involves some variation of an ethic of care: obviously, if people did not care they would not take the time to restore at all, and since usually the restoration work is done voluntarily, we can I think safely assume that restorationists care about and take care in their work. In fact, Jordan notes that restoration "has value as a way of developing... the culture of nature – that is, human caring for nature."<sup>38</sup>

Meekison and Higgs in their article "The Rites of Spring (and Other Seasons): The Ritualizing of Restoration" write that ecological restoration is "arguably an activity that will give its practitioners a chance to reconfigure their personal relationships with the

natural world”<sup>39</sup> but also point out that insistence upon adherence to a particular set of beliefs or rituals may serve more to alienate than to connect people with the restored landscape. Ritual may have a place in restoration, they argue, because “ritual has a tremendous ability to spark creativity and change,”<sup>40</sup> but those rituals do not necessarily have to connect to a clearly delineated and explicit set of religious or spiritual beliefs.

In the case of restoring sacred places, however, there maybe a good argument for applying some more stringent rules of engagement: there are likely to be sensitive cultural issues that need to be respected. For example, we noted earlier that at certain times of the year Devil’s Tower is by tradition and belief off-limits to all human actions, however well-intentioned. Any restoration work that might have to be undertaken there would need to respect those particular beliefs. Additionally, restoration volunteers, especially those from outside the religious tradition that holds the place sacred, might want to familiarize themselves with the stories and traditions of the place in order that any inadvertent affronts might be avoided. In such cases, the rituals need not alienate, but could rather serve to educate those involved.

Jordan also wants to make the case that all restored ecosystems ought to be made into sacred places, but this idea might well cause alienation among those who wish only to revive the ecosystem, not set it aside for particular spiritual practices. Furthermore this may also be inconsistent with the idea of what constitutes a sacred place. Jordan argues that if a restored ecosystem is “made” sacred, is it “therefore worthy” of being called a natural sacred place. He writes that “this sacralization might... entail the development of the whole cycle of our engagement with the landscape – restoration and destruction – as a context for the creation of rituals.”<sup>41</sup> I have two objections to this view. The first is quite

simple: rituals do not have to be sacred. Rituals can serve to remind us of many things, including the wonder and magic and peace to be found in nature, but this does not necessarily always serve to connect us to the divine.

My second objection requires a longer explanation. While I have no problem with engaging with, and finding a deeper and more meaningful connection with land, I am not comfortable with the idea of cavalierly (or even, for that matter, carefully) creating new “sacred places” wherever restoration takes place. My objection to this view lies in my agreement with the views of scholars such as Eliade and Lane; namely, that a sacred place reveals itself through its own qualities, and it is not created by human action. This is not to say that human actions cannot be used to mark out or celebrate a sacred space – this is why, as we saw in Chapter 4, definitions of the sacred are often presented in experiential terms. Furthermore, cultural or built artifacts, such as the placement of stones, or the building of simple shrines are intended to enhance (but not create) both place and experience of place in the context of rituals and ceremonies. These symbols are often created from elements of the site that hold special significance and are therefore accorded some special place. Stories become attached to certain objects and places, and this is a common feature of sacred sites worldwide.<sup>42</sup> Jordan’s suggestion one may create new sacred places through restoration seems to me to be a prime example of the way in which the term “sacred”, and the phrase “sacred place” have been overused. I would agree that restored places very often can become places of special value and meaning – that is part of what focal restoration hopes to achieve. However, this does not mean the place then represents a *connection with* (as opposed to an appreciation of) the divine on a level that cannot be duplicated in other natural places that may be appreciated for their

intrinsic value and beauty. Furthermore, it is unlikely that every restored place will then come to be used as a sacred place for a community, even if it holds special significance to individuals.

However, the idea of creating new rituals may hold promise in certain contexts – for example, in those places (such as Stonehenge) where the original intent has been lost. But I would add a caveat that the place must already possess certain hierophanic qualities – it cannot be just any place that has been restored, as Jordan suggests.

So it can be seen that given the importance and inextricable attachment of sacred places with culture, focal restoration, by paying attention to both the nature and the culture, the systems and the stories, and its flexibility in taking into account a wide variety of different factors and nuances of place and cultures, might be the best approach to take when trying to bring authenticity back to degraded, or invaded, sacred places. If we value and are willing to learn both about and from the culture that values the place, then perhaps we can learn also to value the place. Sometimes, I think, we need to pay more attention to myths and to magic than the paradigms underpinning our modern Western worldview normally allows.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary has, as one of its definitions for "conservation" the following: "The preservation of the environment, esp. of natural resources." However, it does not then give a definition for preservation that includes conservation, but rather defines preservation as: "The action of preserving from damage, decay, or destruction; the fact of being preserved." (Oxford English Dictionary, June 2007).
- <sup>2</sup> For a further explanation of this, see the Sacred Lands Film Project web site: [www.sacredlands.org](http://www.sacredlands.org)
- <sup>3</sup> Eric Higgs, Nature By Design: People, Natural Process, and Ecological Restoration. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003). See particularly Chapter 6: Focal Restoration, 225-264.
- <sup>4</sup> This emphasis on American environmental history should not be taken to imply that other environmental histories, such as those in Canada or Europe, are not of value or are irrelevant. However, in seeking to clarify definitions and usages, an American context will, I think, prove most useful. Furthermore, this thesis is not the place in which to attempt a comparative analysis of conservation and environmental history in North America and Europe; while this would no doubt prove quite interesting, it would deviate and distract from the purpose of this chapter, which is to clarify the definitions and in the basic precepts of conservation, preservation and restoration.
- <sup>5</sup> George Perkins Marsh, Man and Nature (This edition: Cambridge: Belknap University Press, 1965, original edition 1864), 36 and 42
- <sup>6</sup> David Lowenthal. "Nature and morality from George Perkins Marsh to the Millennium," Journal of Historical Geography 26, no. 1, (2000): 4.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>8</sup> Pinchot's affinity for Marsh, and Marsh's role in the creation of federal environmental protection services are discussed further in Lowenthal's essay.
- <sup>9</sup> Gifford Pinchot, The Fight for Conservation (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1910) 45.
- <sup>10</sup> Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 88. This quote is Nash's description of Thoreau, not a quote from Thoreau's writings. Chapter 5 of this book is wholly concerned with Thoreau's writings on and views of wilderness and the role of wilderness in the human psyche.
- <sup>11</sup> John Muir, The Yosemite (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, this ed. 1962), 198.
- <sup>12</sup> While this information is widely known, an easy to access resource on John Muir's life, and on the history and present day activities of the Sierra Club can be found on the Sierra Club's website: [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org). Interestingly, even the Sierra Club has now started using the term 'conservation' to describe their mandate and activities.
- <sup>13</sup> Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac (New York: Oxford University Press), 200.
- <sup>14</sup> W.M. Adams, "Rationalization and Conservation: Ecology and the Management of Nature in the United Kingdom," Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers, New Series 22, no. 3 (1997): 278.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, "What is the Forest Service?" USDA website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/aboutus/meetfs.shtml>
- <sup>17</sup> Maria Luisa Cohen, "Sacred Spaces: Beyond the Concept of Resource Exploitation." The Environmentalist 11, no.1 (1991), 57.
- <sup>18</sup> David Lowenthal, "Material Preservation and Its Alternatives," Perspecta 25 (1989): 66-77
- <sup>19</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. For further information, see The Stonehenge Project website at <http://www.thestonehengeproject.org/>.
- <sup>20</sup> This too is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two.
- <sup>21</sup> Society for Ecological Restoration International Science & Policy Working Group, 2004. The SER International Primer on Ecological Restoration. ([www.ser.org](http://www.ser.org) & Tucson: Society for Ecological Restoration International 2004): 3.
- <sup>22</sup> J. Baird Callicott. "Choosing Appropriate Temporal and Spatial Scales for Ecological Restoration." Journal of Biosciences 27, no. 4 (suppl. 2) (July 2002), 419.
- <sup>23</sup> Eric Higgs, Nature By Design: People, Natural Process, and Ecological Restoration. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Higgs, 109.

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<sup>25</sup> Belden Lane, "Giving Voice to Place: Three Models for Understanding American Sacred Space," Religion and American Culture 11, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 59.

<sup>26</sup> Higgs, 216.

<sup>27</sup> J. Baird Callicott, "Choosing Appropriate Temporal and Spatial Scales for Ecological Restoration," Journal of Bioscience 27, no. 4 (2002): 413.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

<sup>29</sup> For an overview of the alterations and restoration work being undertaken at Stonehenge, see The Stonehenge Project website: [www.thestonehengeproject.org](http://www.thestonehengeproject.org).

<sup>30</sup> Lane, 59.

<sup>31</sup> Kevin McCullen, "Forest Service bows to Indians' wishes on religious site," Rocky Mountain News, 26 July 1992. Available on-line: [www.thewildwest.org/native\\_american/places/Medwheel.html](http://www.thewildwest.org/native_american/places/Medwheel.html).

<sup>32</sup> Higgs, 224.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Cohen, 60.

<sup>34</sup> Higgs, 275.

<sup>35</sup> William R. Jordan III, The Sunflower Forest: Ecological Restoration and the New Communion with Nature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Lane, 66.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>39</sup> Lisa Meekison, and Eric Higgs, "The Rites of Spring (and Other Seasons: The Ritualizing of Restoration)," Restoration and Management Notes 16 no. 1 (1998): 79.

<sup>40</sup> Meekison and Higgs, 79.

<sup>41</sup> Jordan, 139.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Mark Gillings and Joshua Pollard, "Non-Portable Stone Artifacts and Contexts of Meaning: The Tale of Grey Wether." World Archaeology 31, no. 2 (October 1999), 179-193. This essay is about the meanings held within the stones at Avebury, a megalithic site near Stonehenge. Eliade, in The Sacred and the Profane also discusses this phenomenon, especially in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study**

*We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aid, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn.*

*Henry David Thoreau*

As noted right at the beginning of this thesis, the study of sacred places involves a complex interaction of mindscapes and landscapes, and the two are inextricably linked. The ways in which we think about land, and nature, and natural places, are based in part upon the paradigms that underpin the dominant worldview of Western culture. In challenging current thinking about sacred places, we are also questioning these assumptions. But it is only through challenges that we can hope to grow, both as individuals and as a local and global community.

Many different academic disciplines are interested in the subject of sacred places, and many other subjects help to shed light on issues involving sacred places. In this thesis, we began with an introduction to some current issues in two sacred places, Stonehenge and Bighorn Medicine Wheel. Throughout this thesis, these examples have served to remind us that while there are many differences in sacred places, there are just as many similarities, and the issues that one place has to contend with may well show up in other places too. The solutions tried in one place, then, may have application in others, although attention must always be paid to the social and cultural milieu in which each place exists.

From here, we moved on to an examination of the effects of paradigms and worldviews – both cultural and individual – on our conception of what a sacred place might entail, and in fact, on whether we chose to value sacred places at all. The shift in predominant thinking from enchantment with to separation from the natural on Earth was

detailed, and hope was expressed that we will once again return to that sense of enchantment and wonder. The importance of stories in creating or reinforcing this sense of wonder and sense of place, as well as in justifying or reaffirming our worldviews was also discussed. These stories are of utmost importance in conveying so many of the qualities and cultural significances of place, and so it becomes imperative to get our stories straight. For the stories to remain relevant, they must take account not only of the history of a place, but also of the present. We need to find ways of reconciling science and the sacred, of understanding the value of community and not just commodity.

From here, this thesis moved to a discussion of the meaning of “sacred”. This also is an essential part of understanding sacred places: unless we know the meaning of sacred, we cannot know the meaning of sacred place. A survey of the literature pertaining to the definition of the sacred was presented, and from this, four criteria defining sacred places were suggested. These are: that the place is revealed by the divine and not chosen by humans (that is, it has some revelatory qualities); that there are sacred stories attached to the place that explain some aspect of the cosmology of the group which calls that place sacred; that the place evokes certain types of behaviours that reflect the numinous experience; and that the place brings spiritual benefits to the community as a whole. It is hoped that these are criteria that can be accepted cross-culturally, and that such parameters will allow groups to more easily and definitively “prove” claims about sacred places.

Lastly, consideration was given to ways of restoring sacred places and their environs when these have suffered from degradation or damage. The three options – conservation, preservation and restoration (or CPR) were all examined. Definitions of all

three, along with both the benefits and drawbacks of each approach in the restitution of sacred places were discussed. The suggestion set forth is that of these options, focal restoration offers the most promise. This is because of its flexibility in taking cultural and other anthropological factors into consideration.

I would like at this point to reiterate a statement made right at the outset of this thesis. I did not wish to make any sort of judgments about any particular cosmology or theology, or to place any more value on any one culture or community over another. The suggestions made herein are not intended to either proselytize or patronize, but simply to suggest ways in which all the beauty and promise and wonder of sacred places, wherever they might be situated and to whomever they are sacred, might be preserved.

Given the depth and breadth of the field of sacred places, it is inevitable that there have been many limitations to this present study, and many issues that could be explored in greater depth. I have not, for example, fully explored the ideas of those who claim all nature is sacred, although this is an interesting area for further study. My initial reaction is to argue that this approach is often a mistake, for a number of reasons. Firstly, to say that all nature is sacred is to devalue those places that are particularly sacred to a group or culture – those places that embody stories, myths, legends and rituals, and which represent or affirm some aspect of a culture's religious or spiritual beliefs, or where a specific religious or spiritual function or ceremony is carried out. There is, it seems, little point in calling one place sacred, with all the limitations and connotations that have been discussed both in this thesis and elsewhere, if all places are called sacred. A distinction needs to be made between what has *value*, and what is *sacred*. It would certainly be possible to make the case from any number of standpoints that all wilderness, and all

nature, has value (intrinsic as opposed to instrumental), but value alone is not enough to characterize something as sacred.

As a counter to this is the fact that many First Nations cosmologies do hold that all nature is sacred, but in order for sacred places to make sense in this context, we would then have to devise of sort of sliding scale of sacredness. This is an interesting and very complex area that deserves further attention.

Additionally, the implications of the suggestions for identifying and then protecting and restoring sacred places both for future sacred place contestations, and public consultations about sacred places currently contested, have not been explored. These are subjects that I hope to cover more thoroughly in future research. There are also many practical uses to which all the theoretical concepts contained in this thesis may be put. For example it is my sincere hope that the criteria suggested in Chapter Four will be of use in assisting indigenous peoples and others to strengthen their claims about sacred sites that come under question. In the ideal world, of course, there would be no need for any community to have to justify their claim that a place is sacred – the fact that it is sacred to them *now* should be enough to keep that place safe and intact. However, we do not live in an ideal world, and the enticement of increasing wealth for the few, or for the elite, seems to carry more weight than do the claims of what are very often a minority to a parcel of land, be it a secluded cave, a mountaintop, or a monument in the prairies or downs.

There is also much more that could be investigated about particular sites, the history and reasons and stories that give substance to the sacredness of that place, and about the culture to which those sites are sacred. This thesis has in many ways dealt with

generalities, although I have attempted to frame the arguments presented here within the context of Bighorn Medicine Wheel and Stonehenge. That two sites that are part of such widely diverging cultures have encountered the same types of issues is evidence that although every sacred place has its own unique qualities and stories, sacred places worldwide do have some commonalities.

In some ways, this thesis is something of a lament; it is sad that we so often forget that this planet upon which we live *is* home and that home places are also special places; we forget that this home is part of a larger cosmos, that we ourselves are part of a larger cosmos. It is also borne out of frustration that those who value places, who are fiercely loyal to a sacred place, have to fight so much just to be allowed the freedom to continue to use that site as a sacred place. But it is also about hope; hope that we can remember that our home place is full of beauty and wonder and that there are places within it that are inhabited also by other spirits, whether we as individuals can all see or feel them or not. There is the hope that we will learn to respect those parts of our home that are sacred to some.

Signs of this hope can be found, when we choose to look for them, much as we find our way to new places on a road by looking for signs directing us to right way. Those signs can be found in those places where changes are slowly swinging in favour of the less dominant cultures. Change starts of course with individuals: an example of this came to me recently from an acquaintance who is (among other things) an avid amateur climber. We were talking about Devil's Tower, which is apparently a fantastic place for rock climbing. But according to the Lakota, there are certain times of year when the site is off-limits to everyone – including indigenous peoples and climbers. My acquaintance

said that he didn't see why this was such an issue. There are other places nearby where one can climb, he said, adding that "you don't have to climb on someone's altar."

It would be nice to think that this sort of attitude is on the rise, but I am not so sure that this is yet the case. But while change takes time, it is also inevitable. Of course, whether the changes that come are the ones that will lead to a greater valuation of the sacredness of places remains to be seen.

Another point is that there are linguistic problems that stand in our way in terms of changing our thinking about the environment. Aside from all the definitional issues addressed in this thesis, there is the problem that we often equate the words "nature" and "resource." We even pair them, as in "natural resource." In some ways, though, we seem to be coming around in a circle to renew our enchantment with nature, to reject Descartes' dualisms, and to reconnect with Earth. Since the time of Socrates, through to the present, via Machiavelli, Descartes, Bacon and the Industrial Revolution, we are now coming back to Plato's idea that of course we are part of the natural world, that there is much in nature that is divine, or that inspires thoughts of, or connects us with, the divine.

While many in our present time and culture may scoff at the idea of a divinity, there are many more who seem to understand that the spiritual side of our nature, wherever that may have come from and however that may be understood and interpreted, needs to be nurtured. Sacred places, including all those wonderfully diverse natural, community sacred places, are a vital component in finding that nurture in nature.

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