Understanding the Role of Spirituality and Theology in Outdoor Environmental Education: A Mixed-Method Characterization of 12 Christian and Jewish Outdoor Programs

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Introduction

Spirituality is of recent interest in outdoor programming, as witnessed by the "Spirituality" theme issue of *The Journal of Experiential Education* (Winter, 2000) and the increasing number of practitioners experimenting with explicitly spiritual program elements. Although several authors have examined spirituality in outdoor education (OE) (e.g., Anderson-Hanley, 1997; Beringer, 2000; Fiscella, 2001; Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999; Haluza-Delay, 2000; Hansen, 2000; Harrington, 1998; Heintzman, 2000; Henderson, 2000; Johnson and Fredrickson, 2000; McGowan, 1997; Price, 1999; Skamp, 1991; Stringer and McAvoy, 1992), this remains an area ripe for further research. And though common sense cautions that the realm of spirit should at some level prove quintessentially mysterious and thus resistant to definitive conclusions, several directions for inquiry exist. Research interests regarding spirituality in OE have included the influence of spirituality on well-being, its contribution to wilderness therapy and healing, its potential to enhance aesthetic or recreational enjoyment, and its general relationship to leisure (cf. Zueffle, 1999).

New research directions are also indicated by the recent convergence between the spiritual and the outdoor in the context of ecological concern. In fact, developments in theological-environmental thought over the past few decades have inspired many religious programs to invest more significantly in the practice of OE and environmental education (EE), and in so doing, these programs have incorporated many of the same goals commonly championed by non-religious OE. Simultaneously, a postmodern openness to the realm of spirituality has made it acceptable for many outdoor programs (which tend already to include EE elements) to more explicitly include attention to spirit in their program ethos (e.g., Fox, 1999; Gookin, 2002). Now more than ever, theologians, spiritual directors, environmentalists, and outdoor educators stand on common ground.

Understanding in these areas has been limited by the relative infancy of OE spirituality research (Anderson-Hanley, 1997; Price, 1999; Rea, 2003; Zueffle, 1999). Understanding has also been limited by the fact that most of the emerging OE spirituality literature has approached spirituality only in a *general* way. While a general approach (one not aligned with any particular religious or spiritual tradition or theology) is fitting for many OE contexts, and reduces the risk of arousing religious controversy, this tendency to focus on spirituality only generally has left the realm of traditionally religious outdoor programs largely unexamined. As a result, the OE spirituality literature has been less able to incorporate the evolving spiritual outdoor programming insights and long-standing frameworks for understanding spirituality that are resident within religiously spiritual programs. Because OE spirituality research has been challenged by the task of appraising spirituality in OE (McGowan, 2000), and because theology

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(academically) and religion (in practice) have traditionally been the realms in which spirituality has been more systematically understood (Beringer, 2000), an attempt to translate insights from these realms can broaden the OE community's base for understanding spirituality and how it can function in an OE setting.

In order to help bridge these gaps in OE spirituality research, this paper examines the role of spirituality in some explicitly religious outdoor environmental programs. As fitting for such a complex research topic that is not yet well understood, a mostly descriptive and narrative mixed methodology is used to characterize a set of Christian and Jewish outdoor programs that demonstrate an original combination of outdoor and environmental education within their spiritual context. Such analysis can help broaden the base of OE spirituality research, can increase awareness of traditionally religious perspectives operative in OE and EE, and can suggest models for outdoor educators within religious traditions. Finally, it can aid experimentation with spirituality in non-religious OE and EE programs by suggesting frameworks for integrating spiritual themes and practices into OE.

Judeo-Christian Context and Terminology

For several reasons the sample has been limited to Jewish and Christian programs. At the practical level, Jewish and Christian outdoor and camping programs are the most common religious programs in the United States, and therefore are easiest to locate. As Abrahamic traditions, they also share some common theological ground, and because the theological expertise of the author falls within these traditions, he is well positioned to analyze them. Despite these features, some outdoor and environmental educators interested in this topic may still feel that Jewish and Christian traditions are unlikely candidates, as other traditions might have more promise as models for environmental thinking. Those influenced by the Lynn White Thesis (White, 1967) have long been wary of the ecological influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and some research suggests that American environmentalists are uncharacteristically disenfranchised from the Judeo-Christian heritage they were raised in (Shaiko, 1987). But as Randolph Haluza-Delay (2000) and many others by now have suggested (Bouma-Prediger, 2001; Christiansen & Grazer, 1996; Cobb, 1996; Fowler, 1995; *Judaism and Ecology*, 1993; McDonough, 1990; Nash, 1991; Sheldon, 1992; Wilkinson, 1991; Young, 1994), Judaism and Christianity offer great promise, both because of the rich environmental justice, stewardship, and spirituality themes within their canons (which have been rediscovered, developed, and re-championed by Christian and Jewish environmentalists (Kearns, 1996)), and because the majority of Americans continue to be deeply influenced by these belief systems (Berger, 1999; Kempton, Boster, & Hartley, 1995). Furthermore, emerging themes within the eco-theology corpus also show promise for environmental ethics, such as a spirituality of environmental kinship (Fiscella, 2001; Santmire, 2003) and simplicity (e.g., Schut, 1999). Thus, Christian and Jewish outdoor education represents an important new direction for OE, especially if it can demonstrate potential as both good OE and good ministry.

To examine religious programs and translate insights from them for a more general audience requires gaining an understanding of their underlying theology, and calls for respectful understanding of the religious integrity presupposed by such programs. It may be helpful, therefore, to discuss some of the terminology that attends the Judeo-Christian religious spiritual context of the sample. Doing so can clarify some of the religious language involved, language

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which practitioners in this study employ, but which may connote different meanings in non-religious OE circles. For example, it is not uncommon to hear someone say: "I am spiritual, but not religious." The implication may be that religion, theology, or institutionalized spirituality can stand as a barrier to authentic spiritual experience. And indeed, religion is perennially critiqued, even by its own adherents, when theology or religious structures by their formality overshadow or diminish the spirit. But there is also a positive perspective on the role of theology and religion that is indispensable to understanding how the Christian and Jewish programs in this study accomplish an integration of outdoor, environmental, and spiritual components.

Theology (*theos* = God, *ology* = study of) is adequately described by Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1998) as "the study of religious faith, practice, and experience, especially the study of God and God's relation to the world." Alternatively, theology may indicate a particular theological theory or system, such as "Eco-theology." For the relatively traditional Christian and Jewish programs in this study, theology is therefore an important resource, because it represents a repository of commentary about the religious and spiritual life. The primary theological resource in this context is the Biblical scriptures, whose texts and commentaries have been accumulating a testimony, account, and conversation about the presence of God and God's spirit in human lives for more than 3,000 years. As such, the role of theology alongside spirituality is important, because spirituality gains from theology a contextualization and understanding beyond the realm of personal subjectivity. This introduces a communal dimension to spiritual interpretation, where theology is seen as the study of a community's common experience of the divine over time (Lossky, 1976), which serves as a helpful guide.

The same sort of positive role can be posited for religion as well. Though religion is often criticized for codifying or perhaps monopolizing spirituality, or blamed for restricting spiritual expression, religious structure can also be experienced as a helpful guide. The Latin root of religion, *religare*, meaning to restrain, tie back, or connect (of the same root as "ligament"), again invokes a communal dimension, theological guidance and orientation, and something outside the self to complement the inner-voice.

Because spirituality is a universal human possibility, not owned by any particular religion or combination of religions, spirituality can be described in non-religious terms. In this general sense, spirituality is sometimes understood as the far end of the affective domain, or perhaps as a domain unto itself (the spiritual domain). It can involve transcendence, ineffability, mystery, feelings "deep in one's soul," beauty, goodness, contemplation, a sense of inspiration or renewal, encounter with sublime natural settings, and intuition of the divine; it is often characterized by a sense of awe, unity, personal balance, or inner peace (Hansen, 2000; cf. McGowan, 2000; Otto, 1923; Stace, 1960). Institutionally religious modes of spirituality add the component of contextualizing an individual's spiritual experience within the particular corporate witness of their tradition. Within this study sample the primary source that spirituality is "connected back to" is God, or God's presence, indicating a theocentric orientation, as interpreted through varieties of Jewish and Christian theology, tradition, and communal practice. As such, "religious spirituality" involves traditions of sacred encounter, relationship with God, and deference or attention to a communal witness of divine presence; typically involves spiritual practices, disciplines, rituals, or texts that re-actualize the divine presence and sacred reality; and whether as priests, pastors, spiritual directors, gurus, or counselors, involves spiritual leaders who,

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alongside or as interpreters of tradition, serve as guides or authorities in shepherding the spiritual life (Eliade, 1957; Hansen, 2000; Otto, 1923).

Of course, religious adherents may also find spiritual nourishment outside of their religious practices, and non-religious people may appropriate some of the communal dimensions of religion from other sources. In any case, wilderness or outdoor settings generally stand as places where religious and non-religious alike can enjoy spiritual experiences, and as seen in this religious OE study sample, serve as a powerful locale for engaging in spiritual practices and reflection.

Methods

The largely uncharted nature of the subject invites a mostly descriptive analysis, and the complexity of the topic commends itself to a mixed method approach, following the trend in OE and social science research generally (Ewert, 1987; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The sample is a set of 12 Christian (ten) and Jewish (two) outdoor program directors, whose programs and experience were selected to illuminate a range of emerging models of practice. Practitioners and their programs were chosen on the basis of several qualifications: had created an original religious outdoor environmental program, had 15 or more years experience running programs, identified with a traditionally religious spiritual orientation, included EE or significant wilderness learning in their programs, and preferably had written on the topic of theology and the environment. Three were identified as authors of Doctor of Ministry dissertations on the subject, two as professors who teach college-level courses and have authored books on theology and the environment, two as directors of national religious and outdoor organizations, two as Christian camp directors with long-standing environmental traditions, and three through the recommendation of one or more of the other practitioners. Several other practitioners were considered, but not included in the sample, in most cases either because EE was not a major part of their program or because their program model had not been field tested for at least 15 years.

The primary method of this study was a modified practitioner profile interview (Forester, 1999), a qualitative method of narrative inquiry that can capture specific yet hard-to-quantify aspects of a program through the details of practitioners' stories. Initial contact was established to familiarize the practitioners with the requirements of the interview and to determine if their programming was appropriate to the study. Practitioners were then asked to think about stories from their experience which exemplify their work and the challenges they have encountered in working to integrate outdoor, environmental, and spiritual aspects. A semi-structured, 90-minute, taped interview was conducted with each practitioner to elicit background information (e.g., "What has inspired you to do this work?"), practice stories (e.g., "Describe a typical program," or, "Tell me a particular story that exemplifies your work"), and to facilitate critical reflection (e.g., "What advice would you give to someone trying to run a similar program?" or, "Over the years, what *hasn't* worked?"). Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and coded for content analysis. Initial codes were borrowed when appropriate from those that emerged in a means-end analysis (following Goldenberg, 2002) of the participants of one of the programs, and also arose inductively in the transcript coding process. A chart with a cross listing of codes was then created for the full set of transcripts, and excerpts representative of predominant codes were grouped for comparison. Categorical titles were assigned to identify each group of codes and excerpts, and codes and excerpts were reviewed by another researcher familiar with the project.

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Four excerpts were re-coded as a result of this review process, and the resulting summary of themes and representative excerpts is reported in the results and discussion section.

In a final stage of the research, transcripts were edited in consultation with each practitioner to produce a richly descriptive narrative profile, or "practitioner profile." The full collection of profiles is intended to stand alone as the essential result of the interviews--the summary and description reported here is therefore intended in part as an invitation to peruse the full profiles (available from the author pending practitioner consent).

Borrowing from program theory evaluation methods, an inductive-descriptive examination of practitioner goals (following the Likert-card method of Baldwin & Persing, 2002) was conducted to augment the interviews. Fifty potential outcomes of religious outdoor environmental programs were identified, borrowing from Baldwin and Persing's list of OE outcomes identified in the literature, and adding a set of faith-based and environmental outcomes derived by the author from eco-theology and EE literatures. The 50 outcomes were each printed on a card ("Likert cards"), and at the end of the interview, each practitioner was asked to place each card in turn (order was random) along a 6-point Likert-type scale template, indicating the degree to which they agreed (6 = "strongly agree") or disagreed (1 = "strongly disagree") that each potential outcome was "what their program is about." Any of the outcomes that they were uncertain about or "didn't know" were placed in a seventh pile. Each practitioner was also invited to add any terms/outcomes they felt missing from the list (the first and third interviewees each added one term).

The interviews were also augmented by a survey questionnaire of program details, both to confirm contact information, place-names, program goals, and various demographic facts, and to indicate differences between programs (in program type or audiences served) that could affect comparability of programs in analysis, or could help explain differences in the types of stories told in the profiles. As mentioned above, a means-end analysis was also conducted for participants in one of the 12 programs, but those results are not reported here. All survey instruments, methods, and interview schedules were also reviewed by the researcher's doctoral committee.

Results and Discussion

The practitioners came from seven different states and one Canadian province, and have run trips all across the North American continent. Their combined experience with outdoor environmental ministry (hereafter OEM) programs totals 314 years. Six are ordained clergy; nine have advanced theological training (the other three have long-standing teaching roles within their denominational traditions). All have created and run programs, three of them starting in the 60s, four in the 70s, four in the 80s, and one in the 90s (because this last program was created as an outgrowth of longer-standing programs, it was included in the study). Their programs run in a variety of settings--about half in primitive/wilderness settings, and the other half ranging from semi-primitive to semi-modern in their accommodations, depending on course site (see Young, 1989)--but each significantly addresses the integration of outdoor, environmental, and spiritual elements.

Likert Cards

The averaged results of the Likert-card rankings are listed in Table 1 for the most highly ranked outcomes (those scoring 5.5 or higher on a scale of 1-6). With a non-random sample, n=12, these numbers of course cannot be considered statistically significant or representative of OEM as a whole, but they summarize responses within this purposive sample of successful program models. Not surprisingly, the top four categories are related to God, faith, and spiritual growth, with more typical OE/outdoor recreation outcomes such as fun, personal growth, community, and transference following, and with environmental education goals (e.g., respect for nature, environmental awareness) following mostly in the top 20.

TABLE 1
Top Likert-Card Outcome Emphases

Outcome/Goal	Range	Mean
Growth in relationship with God	5-6	5.91
Spiritual Renewal	5-6	5.75
Growing in one's faith walk	4-6	5.75
Spiritual growth	4-6	5.67*
Fun	5-6	5.67
Personal Growth	5-6	5.67
Experience of Community	4-6	5.67
Transference of lessons into daily life	4-6	5.58
Connection with natural world	4-6	5.58
Respect for others	4-6	5.58
Increasing one's faith	4-6	5.5
Respect for nature	4-6	5.5
Spiritual connection with nature	4-6	5.5

*Spiritual growth ranked above other 5.67 scores due to
higher frequency of 6's (n=12; scale = 1-6).

Differences in the ranking of outcomes were only a matter of degree of relative emphasis, since all but three of the 52 outcomes were ranked as being desirable, positive program goals. But these results may suggest a pattern of program emphases and priorities. As such the top priority of these programs seems to be the spiritual life (with a theocentric focus, focused first on God), then a selection of standard outdoor and experiential education outcomes, and then environmental goals. The main themes that emerged from content analysis of the transcripts reinforce these stated goals.

Content Analysis

The following seven themes and their sub-themes emerged from content analysis of the interview transcripts. The accompanying excerpts help characterize each theme.

Perceived Effectiveness. The same familiar anecdotal refrain of OE was common among the practitioners, for many indicated that OEM is one of the most effective things they have ever done. Nine of the 12 made comments directly along these lines, while the other three more

specifically commented that they are committed to this work because of an irrevocable sense of call:

> You know, I don't know how many great sermons I would have to preach before I could accomplish, or be a part of, a ministry this effective.

> It's just a good way to educate. . . . It's the most effective thing I've ever done.

> I've tasted the honey, and I know what this kind of experience can do.

Of course such self-reports have not sufficed to justify such programming, either in religious or non-religious OE contexts--at least not to most funders and decision makers. But these outdoor ministers, like other outdoor educators, perceive their vocation as having great potential.

Learn from Nature and Community. All 12 of the leaders alluded to this theme, that the trips they lead provide an out-of-the-ordinary opportunity to learn about life and about oneself, from nature and from communal experience outdoors. They suggested that in a way, their trips can teach participants about whom they are and how to live if they attend to their environs and one another:

> I think the rock and the wilderness has been a great mentor to me in my life... wilderness as spiritual director.

> [Sometimes metaphors for God are drawn from nature as a sort of "nature nugget," like comparing the shell of a turtle to the "armor of God." These can yield good metaphors, but] I believe they are not as profound as the relationship metaphors that we see in ecological interactions and lessons... These deal with relationships at a much more sophisticated level, so they have human and spiritual relationship implications... And so there are lessons that they may use as they learn to live with each other.

> The best we can do is hone in on awe and wonder, and live the experience of Christian community . . . living as part of the Body and with our differences.

Two sub-themes attended this theme, 'awe and wonder,' and 'relationships.' And both sub-themes were related to nature *and* to the communal experience.

> *Relationships.* I believe very strongly as Christ did, that when you use object lessons from nature, that they teach us about human interactions with each other. But they also teach us about how we relate to our Creator. And ultimately it's all about relationships.

> *Awe and Wonder.* I want them to catch the wonder and joy of things, more than the personal toughness act... I want them to find that wonder and that joy in those simple things, in the simple thing of a good meal, or, you know, to bake something on the trail. It's like: "Wow." I mean, suddenly bread is transformed

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into, dare we say, something holy, something more wonderful than the molecules that make it up... Those are things that can be life transforming for them. As much so or more so than being able to say they made it to the top of the mountain.

Describing a terrifying encounter with a flash flood, one leader said:

> I think the thing I learned from that, and came away with and have never forgotten, was a real sense of respect. The word awe, totally awesome, which gets used colloquially, is a very laden phrase in Hebrew. *Yirah HaShem* is a real phrase in classical Jewish tradition, and *HaShem* is the word for God, and *Yirah* means awe in both the sense of amazing and terrifying. And when we talk about the world being awesome, and when in Hebrew you use the phrase Yirah HaShem--there was something about the terror of awesomeness that I really got that night.

This leader also mentioned that such stories evoke Abraham Joshua Heschel's (1955) phrase *radical amazement*, described as a step toward religious belief--a notion that joins this theme with the next.

Connect Learning with Scripture. All of the practitioners talked directly about this theme, or gave examples of it (11 emphasized it strongly, while for one it was a minor emphasis). Many noted relevant texts, like the creation stories, various Psalms, Romans 1:18 or 8:19-23, or the theological commentaries of the Talmud or other scholarly and ancient sources. Practitioners claimed that both the ecological lessons and the community experiences, and certainly other aspects of trips, can be helpfully interpreted in light of scripture. Doing so anchors the moment, connects it in the sense of *religare*, to something more than just the participant's subjective experience of it. Since scripture describes a full spectrum of human experiences in relation to God and creation (Kathleen Norris, 1997) has suggested that the Psalms alone accomplish this), it, and a knowledgeable interpreter of it, becomes a prime resource on the trail:

> Yeah, we're going to schlep a Torah around out here; you can't be a Jewish community in the world without it!

> I'm convinced that Christian camping is successful in large part because, even almost by accident, we have copied what Jesus did. He was a teacher, a rabbi ...[and] Jesus took his 12 students, his disciples, and he took them outdoors... Colossians 1 says Christ was with God in the beginning when the things were created... As the creator he has an awareness of the intrinsic lesson that he wants to share with people, and most of his parables [found in scripture] are nature oriented.

> Don't teach and *not* connect with the Lord... Don't teach nature and not make that connection, because it's a life connection. Every time they see that tree, they're drawn back to that connection you made years before... Don't leave out scripture.

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Spiritual Growth through Experiences, Interpreted Scripturally

Beginning with the previous theme, and continuing more strongly with the remaining themes, the theological core and focus of these programs emerges. Leaders facilitate reflection upon experiences as spiritual introspection and instruction, and this theme was important for 10 of the 12 leaders. Interestingly, the two university-based leaders, who work through a particular environmental ethics curriculum on the trail, did not emphasize this theme as much as the others, though it was still important to them:

> We have to open up to the spiritual, or else we're not seeing reality.

> Education: *educare*, to draw out, I think is the Latin. The idea here on the trail is to draw out of these students what's already there. Often what's there has come out of their experience [both from the trail and from their lives], and you draw that out. And that's where we will see, I think, the presence of God, that's *been* there. And it's often only by reflecting on it that we sense that. And so in paddling in a canoe with a college student [guide] and talking, those are Bible studies, those are reflecting on scripture with a capital "S". That's what *I* like to do, now.

Some, particularly pastors who spoke of leading members of their congregations on wilderness trips, noted a balance they strike in shepherding the wilderness experience and spiritual reflection upon it. They recognize the value of an unmediated experience, but also the importance of interpreting the spiritual growth that is occurring, either generally or in theological context. Sometimes reflection just flows from the natural experience, without evoking a particularly religious dimension:

> It's this idea of living at a different cadence, living by sun-up, and moonrise, by high tide/low tide. [It reorients you, and] I think the wilderness can move in like that tide and wind that sneak up on us. . . . There are the tides of our lives, and the shifting winds of life, [and we'll reflect on that,] so that's taking that natural phenomenon, and talking about it in terms of our own experience.

But other similar moments, such as reflected in this long excerpt, reveal the spiritual dimension brought by the religious context:

> [One woman's] experience was so profound because in the desert silent time, solitude time away, she was devastated by not having a profound experience. And she was really undone by that. But in that broken place, of coming to grips with her own emptiness, emerged this totally full moment. And I remember it, you know, I remember my only words, as we gathered around her, and she was crying, and we were caught up in the emotion of that: "grace is always best poured out in brokenness," [like how water can only seep in through the fissures and cracks of the hard-panned desert]. And that was her broken place, and she kind of articulated the emptiness, and in that moment, yeah, there was a filling that was wonderful. And I remember anointing her with my tears, as we were praying for her. In the desert, what water do you have? Not for baptism, my

> theology won't quite stretch that far, but *yes*, for baptism. . . . You know, frankly, to baptize her in tears of resonant sympathy, was very powerful. And, it was hugely transformative for her.

This last example, in part, demonstrates a possibility that arises within a worshipping community. Ritual patterns can be invoked, such as the allusion to baptism, or the laying on of hands and prayer, or in other cases the sacrament of communion, that enrich the experience within the frame of the group's common religious and spiritual identity. A theologically evocative language of grace, forgiveness, purification, or love might also be employed. In this way the individual's spiritual experience, the communal perspective, and the theological traditions of the group contextualize one another.

Worship and Prayer Context

This theme reflects an obvious component of a community of faith, and all 12 practitioners mentioned it. In fact, a couple of the leaders took this component so much for granted that they only thought to mention it when asked: "Are there any worship elements to your trips?" "Oh, of course..." Nearly all of the programs incorporate "quiet time," solos, or other contemplative opportunities in their trips as part of this theme, many involving journals with reflective quotes and scriptures. All of the programs include corporate worship experiences.

Quite simply, praying together, worshipping together, singing together, or sharing and reflecting together upon individual spiritual experiences, are essential components for all these programs. Such elements often draw upon traditional forms of liturgy or any of a number of spiritual disciplines or practices. As such, these wilderness worship experiences, in the familiar form of one's faith community, can be continued in the front country, particularly when participants are from the same church or synagogue. And thus they can provide for habituation and reinforcement of new or renewed ways of living and being learned in the outdoors.

Understand the God-self-others-land Relation–Children of God Living in Grace

The culmination point for the outdoor, environmental, and spiritual intentions of these programs comes together quintessentially in this theme, which ten of the leaders mentioned directly, two indirectly. The practitioners commonly draw upon elements of the now vast field and literature of eco-theology (cf. Cobb, 1996; Sheldon, 1992) to connect spiritual and environmental themes in a way that resonates with a group's experience. These practitioners have developed standard lessons related to the integration of these topics, and often also address the themes as teachable moments.

Examples of biblical themes invoked by these leaders include:
- The interrelationship and covenantal relationship between God, people, and creation (e.g., Gen 1:28, 2:15, 9:8-13; Ps 104),
- The prophetic witness decrying land degradation and lack of faithfulness to God (e.g., Jer 9:12-14, 12:4, 23:10; Hos 4:1-3), and
- New Testament themes of cosmic redemption (e.g., Rom 8; Eph 1:10; Col 1:15-20), where human beings are understood as crucial participants in God's redemptive purposes for all creation.

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Reflection upon such ancient themes often follows from the resonant experiences of the group, as participants enjoy communal experiences and challenges in God's creation, and discern the fundamental links between God, humans, and all of creation.

Another repeated theme, similar to the sub-theme of awe and wonder noted above, was the notion of creation and one's life in it being a gift, and the appropriate response to a gift being thanksgiving, gratitude, and praise:

> You know, it's a fundamental encounter between human beings and the world, and *God*, and it's a powerful thing. And it's *there* all the time, but running around in the mundane activities of the daily life we can miss it. And a trip like that is really good for people, because it opens your eyes to what's going on around us all the time, and the gift of it. I really think that's a powerful thing that people don't forget.

Several of the leaders also mentioned acknowledging the gift of God's presence, and the blessing of seeing oneself as a child of God:

> And the *kids* feel empowered to take some measure of control. I'm not talking about getting away from your parents, or anything like that, but to say: "Yes, God is speaking to me, he is my ally, we're in this together. And where do we go, where do *we* go from here?" This is called grace here, and it has to do with the powerful reality of having God on your side and having God there with you, [and] becoming a child of God.

These themes are invoked to empower a hopeful sense of one's ability to be a part of God's work to redeem the cosmos, and to inspire participants to play an active role in God's response to the travail of creation, which as one leader put it, involves:

> ...the groaning of creation, which waits for the glorious freedom of the children of God . . . the children of the creator. . . . So while the bird praises God by chirping, I think our role is also to articulate recognition and celebration of God through our experience of creation. I think we bring to completion something there in creation. I mean, sometimes we imagine that we're intruders into that created place, and we can be. But ultimately no, we're *part* of creation. . . . And part of that is to be able to articulate the Creator's praise.

This sort of joyful, grateful, delighted, and perhaps playful condition is similar to what Richard Baer has called "praise for all things," a fundamental point of orientation for his vision for a Judeo-Christian ecological ethics (Baer, 1979; Baer, Tantillo, Hitzhusen, Johnson, & Skillen, in press). It also introduces an environmental ethics sub-theme.

Environmental ethics arising from renewed relationship with God and creation
To paraphrase themes from several of the programs: appreciating the gift of creation, and trusting God's evident and incarnate initiative to redeem all of creation, the wilderness or outdoor community experience can awaken participants to this ever-present movement to which they are constantly invited to say "yes." This is an invitation that is often muffled by the noise of

an ever-busier culture, replaced by one's consumptive drive to secure their own comfort and convenience, or obscured by an affluent urban culture's distance from the natural world:

> I think a lot of the things that we don't do environmentally are because we haven't bonded with nature, and so this nature bonding is very important. Number two, I've always believed, I think, from a very long time ago, that environmental change is not going to happen unless it's spiritual change. There has to be some kind of a spiritual base to bring about environmental change. It has to be done on a spiritual level, it can't be just done on an intellectual level.

Such inspiration to embrace a potentially healing role in the world was also coupled and reinforced with Judeo-Christian mandates to care for creation:

> [I hope that the students take away] a sense of their well-rounded environmental education--the whole thing--a sense of the beauty and the complexity, and the bigness of creation. The sense that creation is a gift, a sense at the same time of the fragility of creation, the importance of learning to care for creation. Seeing that that's a part of the gospel, it's not sort of an optional extra.

Resilient, Persevering Voices

The final theme recognizes that even an inspired and spiritually sustained people will face difficult challenges in implementing change for the sake of a better world. While some practitioners felt their programs could help students move towards better ways of living, several practitioners offered teachings that addressed this challenging reality of being wrapped up in a culture much larger than individual selves:

> What's going to happen when we get off this mountain top, and you're back into the valleys of life, where most of us live most of the time, surrounded by normal conveniences, and *all* the pressures? After kayaking, my analogy for this works, because they've been on a pushy river. I say, "Our culture is like a white water river. It pushes you in directions, and if you do nothing, it doesn't mean you stay in the same place. 'You do nothing' means you're swept downstream." And to go against that current, you've got to know what eddies are, you've got to know how the river works. . . . And preferably you're doing it with someone else, because it's hard to paddle upstream solo. . . . Our culture's like this rushing river, in lots of different ways, and structures our lives in so many ways.

And with regard to the notion that change may take a while, some of the practitioners referred to long-term vision:

> One of the other Jewish metaphors is that the generation that left slavery is not the generation that went into the promised lands. The Midrash has it that they died out in the desert. . . .They were too deeply imbued with slavery, and it needed a generation who grew up in freedom to enter the promised land. And I feel very much like an intermediate generation in that sense. That I get this stuff enough to have wanted to take steps towards making a difference, and yet I see some of the

> 20-somethings [who have been in our program], and they're younger than me,
> they've done stuff sooner, they've integrated the pieces better. They are less
> hooked into the existing rhythms of their lives, [of our culture,] and more in the
> process of *establishing* the rhythms of their lives.

These sorts of perspectives may be a valuable contribution of faith-communities to environmental education, offering far-horizon hope and trust where pessimism often overtakes environmental activism. But these leaders also suggest that their outdoor ministries tend to help rejuvenate their religious traditions, whether by connecting students to the relevance of their traditions experientially, or by helping their faith to come alive in a way that causes some to go back to church or synagogue. Together these elements of OEM programs suggest some of their potential to be both good ministry and good OE, as outdoor experiences give life to faith, and faith gives context and hope to adherents' environmental concerns.

Conclusions and Implications

The stories of these practitioners describe quite a range of programming, and on the whole they demonstrate some of the possibilities for successfully integrating spirituality into outdoor education programming. Standard OE best practices are recognized and followed by these practitioners, but in each case an additional level of expertise for facilitating spiritual experiences and growth, and for connecting with certain theologies, has evolved. It has long been clear via religious camping traditions that outdoor settings readily complement spiritual and religious programming, but these practitioners provide many examples of how outdoor and religious contexts can also complement and be complemented by environmental themes. In part this has been made possible by developments in eco-theology, which supplies philosophical and educational foundations for OEM, but many of these practitioners have also pioneered their way through trial, error, and faith to a workable integration of spiritual, outdoor, and environmental themes.

Insights about spirituality in OE gained from this religious sample may however have limited translatability. Because spirituality for these programs is tied into a religious system, some particular concepts highlighted above may not work in a non-religious system. But the larger story told by each practitioner may yet be suggestive, since narrative coherence may supply details that an analytical summary cannot. And the functional significance of themes reported above may suggest parallels for consideration by non-religious practitioners. Ritual, communal, or individual spiritual experience can be fostered by many common religious practices such as prayer, meditation, ritual, reflection on spiritual texts, and other contemplative modes. Examples of these found in religious programs might be adapted successfully to non-religious programs, just as various theologically resonant EE activities have been successfully adapted to religious settings.

Several modest conclusions can also be drawn from these results. First, these results suggest that this form of programming is viable, is already flourishing in many settings, and is worth exploring further. Second, these stories provide a picture of what OEM is that can help direct future research, and enable more specific research questions. Third, given the potential for continuity of experience as spiritual elements of the trip are revisited in daily or weekly worship and prayer contexts in the front country, OEM may point a direction toward providing longer-

lasting program experiences and influences. Finally, because OEMs often depend on the OE community to set standards for best practices, further examination of religious programs and their theological essence (Henderson, 2000) can help the OE community act as a better partner and mentor to religious programs. These conclusions lead to several questions for further discussion.

Is OEM nearing a pivotal point of development? Paul Petzoldt, who founded NOLS and the Wilderness Education Association after being the chief instructor at the Colorado Outward Bound School, noted that in the early days of Outward Bound it was possible to find instructors competent in *single* outdoor skill areas, but difficult to find anyone trained in *all* the competencies that most instructors now start with (Ewert, 1989). Today, 40 years later, a similar point might be made about OEMs: it's easy to find good outdoor leaders, and it's easy to find competent pastors, ministers, or spiritual directors, but it's difficult to find anyone possessing both skill sets and competencies. About half of the practitioners specifically noted in their stories the difficulty of finding qualified guides, mainly because so few people trained or gifted with theological or spiritual leadership qualities also have adequate wilderness and outdoor training, and vice versa. At the same time, at least three of the programs in the sample are engaged in training religiously-rooted leaders (such as seminarians) in outdoor work. Perhaps if these programs continue to succeed, within a few decades outdoor ministers will be easier to find.

Is OEM just a temporary movement? Some may argue that the future of outdoor and environmental education practice will remain only where it currently stands, within outdoor and environmental programs, often through schools, and not particularly through faith communities or religious organizations. Perhaps religious communities are too worried about filling their pews to dedicate resources to outdoor programming over the long haul, and OEM is just a passing programmatic fad supported only because of it is ability to bring in members, to complement traditional camp programs, or to generate trendy good feelings. While this study cannot settle a question like this, it is at least worth noting, as many of the practitioners did, that the wilderness and outdoor roots of Christianity and Judaism go way back, far beyond the dawn of any contemporary outdoor or environmental movements. Many outdoor themes from Jewish and Christian traditions offer deep roots to nourish the growth of OEM's, including the Garden of Eden, the formative Israelite Exodus wilderness journey, the prophetic wilderness voices, ancient Jewish *brachot* (blessings) for natural things, the desert temptation and testing of Jesus, the nature-based parables of Jesus, or the tendency of Jesus and his disciples to withdraw to natural places to pray and renew themselves. Furthermore, as Karl Johnson (2000) has noted, the praxis of experiential education is similar to that of biblical religion, suggesting a good fit, one to the other. Just as Kolb's experiential learning cycle involves experience, reflection, abstraction, and application (Kolb, 1984), so too does biblical religion in its engagement of the spiritual life. The stories of the practitioners provide many examples of groups reflecting on spiritual experiences, abstracting them together in the context of the participant's biblical faith, and then providing prayers, passages, or teachings oriented toward encouraging the adoption of new ways of being, new hope, new courage, new resolve. It would seem that OEMs are not just a fad, but rather have historic and theological resources from which to build and grow.

Are OEM models transferable to non-religious or secular OE? Practitioners of non-religious OE are best positioned to make the translation from religious programs themselves, but a couple of comments may point a direction. First, an over-arching framework or philosophy seems necessary if spiritual experiences are to be contextualized as more than just individually enjoyed "warm fuzzies" of the soul that connect us to nature. One of the reasons spirituality may be difficult to define in a secular context is that no particular framework can be committed to which would help specifically name the spiritual reality being experienced. This suggests that spirituality pursued without some religious or other large-scale framework may be problematic over the long haul, although there may be ways to bridge this gap.

Something like the neo-Platonic vision of Iris Murdoch, where encounters with the Good, the Beautiful, and the True can effect an "unselfing" sufficient to motivate and empower the moral life, might be of interest to some (see Hauerwas, 1981; Murdoch, 1971). Or, it might be helpful to reflect on the ways that outdoor recreation outcomes in particular may already have points of resonance with religious worship. Romano Guardini's "The Playfulness of the Liturgy" may suggest how good, leisurely, playful outdoor recreation may accomplish in some ways what many religious institutions often fail to provide, but which their worship traditions are actually intended to foster (Guardini, 1935). And it might be fruitful for some to examine the host of religious practices and disciplines that are shared by the world's religions, whether they be prayer and meditation traditions, forms of ritual, creation myths, or disciplines of fasting. Just as OEM practitioners have borrowed from non-religious programs at points where certain activities, ideas, or practices resonate with their tradition (e.g., Biers-Ariel, Newbrun, & Smart, 2000), so too non-religious practitioners might be able to identify points of resonance with their own program ethos that would allow them to incorporate some of the spirit of outdoor ministry practices into their own.

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