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EDITORIAL: SUSTAINABLE BELIEF

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As editor of this issue, I've assembled two focus sections, one on religion, one on sustainable development. The contributors are by and large critical of sustainable development, and supportive of religion. Beyond that there is much disagreement - some look for solace in traditional religious categories, while others find these bankrupt. Some find 'sustainability' more buzzword than term of promise. Others hope for sustaining of wilderness instead of progress. Read on and you'll see.

I do think that these polarities, the sacred and the pragmatic, represent different directions environmental thinking is now going. We want to make a place for nature in our religious feelings, and we want to balance concern for the whole earth with the inevitable modification of environment inherent in human habitation. Nature remains more than we conceive it to be, but we yearn to keep it a part of all our tendencies and feelings.

Sustenance suggests a continuation of the way things are. Or a way of living that enables us to continue to live, rather than use up all the things we need. If conceived as too static an idea, it will sound boring, repressed, held in, limiting. If we hear it as warm, inviting, changing, moving, opening up to new possibilities, then it will seem far more attractive.

No one likes being told what to do, or especially how to live. The purpose of readings like these is to gather evidence on why we might want to live differently, from the inside out, so as to fall sway to the world rather than beat it down. Not everyone will be convinced, and nor should everyone be convinced, by the same evidence. All I can say is: think about the *diversity* of responses here, of points of view, of ways of thinking ecologically, as much as any diversity of life forms and species surrounding us.

Belief suggests holding to an opinion impervious to the taunts of evidence or explanation. Is religion natural for the human species? Every culture seems built upon it, even if God is not always in the picture. People need to believe things which they cannot have experienced, to make meaning possible. These could be rules or visions, stories or statistics. We need them to know what to do next.

Traditional religions can have much to say to the ecological seeker. The essays here tend to emphasize individual experience of a meaningful surrounding world, and do not speak as much of the collective mobilizing force of the great religions in our time and through history. In fact, much of the ecosophical 'style' of thought is introspective, of individuals writing their treks through immediate and metaphorical nature into being. There's a modern day pilgrimage here, and a journey that makes geology sound alive. A memoir of changes by the side of a country road, and a poem on the precarious poise of the world in this time.

Beleaf is shaken all the time by the jolts of experience, and images of senselessness. We watch millions flee the cruelty of one nation for an unknown fate

in another. We see forests ravaged and fish disappear. If the world is there for us as proof of a Greater Plan, where to go when it fails? As Paul Simon philosophized a while back in a song, "The information's not available to the mortal man."

A sustainable belief will be one that can weather challenge, that can survive the anomalies poked like holes through the tattered paradigm. Light may shine through these windows, suggesting somewhere else we imagine we can go. But we and the Earth are still here. There will be beliefs that should not be let go. And these will be the most important things to learn, and to teach others far into the future, even farther than we can possibly see.

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