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Book Review: The Lost Gospel of the Earth: A Call for  
Renewing Nature, Spirit, and Politics

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*The Lost Gospel of the Earth: A Call for Renewing Nature, Spirit, and Politics.*

Tom Hayden, with introduction by Thomas Berry.

San Francisco. Sierra Club Books. 1996.

Tom Hayden (Democrat from Santa Monica) is a sitting politician (California State Senator) who joins the small number of politicians who have published their analysis of our cultural malaise and their visions for the 21st century. However, Hayden's book is more than an academic exercise, more than rhetoric designed to manipulate the electorate. Hayden presents an articulate call to all citizens to embrace the "lost gospel" of respect for the Earth as the basis for a new "spiritual politics."

Hayden has been a political activist since the early 1960s. He was one of the authors of the Port Huron Statement, a defining manifesto of the "youth revolt" of the 1960s. He was a peace advocate during the Vietnam War and a leader in progressive political movements during the 1970s. The idea for this book, he says, arose in 1990 "...from the despair I felt on the twentieth anniversary of Earth Day...I began a quest to understand the religious and cultural origins of our environmental attitudes." (p13) He engaged in a process of deep questioning, examining his own actions. This is the process that Arne Naess says is the foundation for articulating our own ecosophies.

Hayden sought out some of the best teachers in his quest including Joanna Macy, Joan Halifax, Thomas Berry, and Thich Nhat Hanh. With his current wife, a Canadian, he visited ancient forests of British Columbia as well as explored his own Celtic roots in Ireland. Hayden connects his personal history with the larger, collective task of re-discovering the "lost gospel" of Earth wisdom. He understands the yearning of many people who "live across the Divide from nature." "In politics..." he writes, "I run for office as an individual, a task that requires projecting the Self and its various accomplishments in exaggerated ways. On a more basic level, I feel my physical and emotional Self as an autonomous entity. By contrast, it is difficult to feel aware of being in the universe. For many years I was never aware at all. In pursuing what I thought to be life, I forgot air, water, earth, and fire... Most of us do." (p18)

Hayden is aware of the "default of organized religion." Most organized religions buy into economic growth, anthropocentric doctrines of modernity. However, Hayden reports on the search for the "lost gospel" in Judeo-Christian tradition, native American traditions and in Buddhism. There is no discussion of Islam or Hinduism.

Hayden engaged in dialogue with students at Santa Monica City College in a course he taught on eco-theology, and has succeeded in articulating the results

of his research clearly and concisely.

In his concluding chapter, "The Lost Gospel, Environmentalism, and Politics", he calls for a new politics based on ecosophy. Although Hayden never uses the phrase "deep ecology" or "ecosophy" in his book, he clearly articulates his argument in the context of the deep, long-range ecology movement. He is critical of reform environmentalism and interest group politics. He recognizes that many people are reluctant to discuss spiritual matters in the context of politics, but he argues that if environmentalists ignore spiritual politics then, by default, the Christian right will monopolize the definition of spiritual politics for their own political agenda.

"Many environmentalists," he argues, "seem to fear that they will be scorned or laughed at if they reveal their genuine feelings. But it is unhealthy and self-defeating in politics as well as life to closet one's feelings. It is impossible to challenge the anti-environmental values of our time without expressing an alternative set of values." (p231)

In assessing the valuable contribution that Hayden has made to political discourse, it is useful to compare his work with that of other politicians who articulate a new politics for the 21st century, including books by President Bill Clinton (who continues to advocate building information superhighways and building a bridge to the 21st century ), Vice-President Al Gore, Jr. (*Earth in the Balance*), and Representative Newt Gingrich (*Restoring American Civilization*).

Bill Clinton (*Between Hope and History: Meeting America's Challenges for the 21st Century*, New York, Random House, 1996) devotes ten pages in his book to environmental rhetoric (p. 99- 110). He says "I have never believed we had to choose between either a clean and safe environment or a growing economy." (105). "Maintaining and enhancing our environment, passing on a clean planet to future generations, is a sacred obligation of citizenship and perhaps our ultimate responsibility." (111) Clinton's rhetoric is explicitly anthropocentric and his use of the phrase "our environment" indicates a subtext of resourcism. Clinton's strategy includes "partnerships" with corporations, including land-owning logging corporations, to provide them with regulatory relief from requirements of Federal environmental legislation, such as the Endangered Species Act, in exchange for minimal protection of habitat of endangered species and minimal restoration of corporate damaged landscapes. There is no indication in Clinton's book that he has gone through the reflective, indeed religious, experiences expressed by Al Gore, Jr. and Tom Hayden in their books.

Hayden understands and sympathizes with the paradox faced by Al Gore, Jr. Gore wrote *Earth in the Balance* during a period in his own life when he was suffering with despair over a debilitating injury of his son. Gore explicitly addresses what Hayden calls the "lost gospel" in Christianity and the contraction between his own ecosophy and the demands of "practical politics." As a sitting politician in the Clinton administration, Gore has not publicly challenged

the pragmatic, compromising, interest group politics that have led to increasing threats to basic environmental laws and policies.

Newt Gingrich (Republican from Georgia), Speaker of the House, created his own college course and appeared on nationally broadcast talkshows and in the halls of Congress to publicize his vision for the 21st century, *Restoring American Civilization*. Gingrich's vision of resourcism is based on corporate capitalism, reducing government regulation of polluters, and private property rights. He appeared on talkshows to publicize his book holding wild animals obtained from zoos.

It is interesting that no sitting female politician has expressed her vision for the 21st century in ecocentric terms. Leading female politicians in California have expressly stated their support of resourcism, compromise, and corporate domination.

As a member of the California State Assembly and Senate, Hayden has participated in numerous public policy debates concerning forests, wetlands, and pollution. He acknowledges that environmental policy in California is explicitly based on resourcism. The laws of the State of California explicitly state that forests, water, minerals, and soils will be used for the benefit of humans and for purposes consistent with sustained economic growth in California. Hayden says that he would like to change the name of his own State Senate committee from Natural Resources Committee to Nature Committee but this change would not be tolerated by his colleagues.

In conclusion, Hayden says,

When a system like the Machiavellian state smothers our souls, we have no choice but to respond spiritually. We need a spiritual base to sustain ourselves as human beings....The modern state and its adherents may attempt to dominate and transcend nature, but the effort is finally in vain. No state is greater than the state of nature. No government can usurp the governance of nature's laws of life and death. No executive can be the chairman of the corporate earth. No planner can comprehend what is larger than the mind.(p237)

As long as environmentalists play the game that defines environmentalists as just another interest-group in the Machiavellian state, they encourage not only the use and disposability of nature, but also the domination, use, and disposability of human beings.

This reviewer hopes that environmentalists will respond to Hayden's call for a deep, ecological politics. As an environmental activist, this reviewer has seen many environmental leaders engage in repression of any attempt to express the "lost gospel" in political campaigns. As has been frequently noted, many

reform environmentalists speak the language of "wise use" better than the "wise use" movement. Unless ecology movements reinvent themselves along the lines envisioned by Tom Hayden, there is little hope that they will be in the vanguard of social transformation at the beginning of the 21st century.

This book has resulted from Hayden's quest and demonstrates the value of self-education by a highly motivated adult learner. It also demonstrates some of the problems in self-educated learning. Like Al Gore, Jr. who made fundamental errors in his criticism of deep ecology in *Earth in the Balance* - but whose book demonstrates that he is a supporter of the deep, long-range ecology movement, Hayden misses some of the nuances of Christian and Buddhist teachings but the general thrust of his argument is firmly based in the deep, long-range ecology movement. For example he asks "Is Buddhism Green?" (p. 163) rather than asking how contemporary concerns with ecology fit with the Dharma. He cites author Stephen Mitchell, who "once told me that, in Buddhist terms, the environmental crisis is our generation's koan." (p. 182) A student who is interested in "engaged Buddhism" might be advised to read Joanna Macy (*World As Lover, World As Self*) or Gary Snyder (*The Practice of the Wild*) for a better introduction to the relevance of Buddhist teaching to our current situation.

However, Hayden has a deep, personal understanding of denial and despair and thus is able to sympathize with many people who want to connect their spiritual yearnings with social activism.

His search for the "lost gospel" is an intellectual exercise begun from his personal despair and has yielded a book highly recommended for others to read

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