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# Toward an Ecotheological Anthropology

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

**TOWARD AN ECOTHEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS (THEOLOGICAL STUDIES)

by

PETER GARCIA

PORTLAND, OREGON

MAY, 2014

All who seek you  
test you  
And those who find you  
bind you to image and gesture

I would rather sense you  
as the earth senses you.  
In my ripening  
ripens  
what you are.

-Rainer Maria Rilke

# THESIS ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

PETER GARCIA

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TITLE:

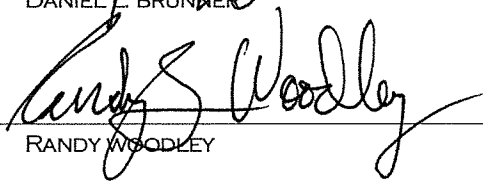
TOWARD AN ECOTHEOLOGICAL  
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THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN  
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*Abstract.* The *image of God* has carried with it a special designation for humanity within the panoply of life on earth. This project attempts to reorient and expand theological anthropology to include the ecological dimension in Christian perspective to cultivate an understanding of the ecological self. This project will place traditional interpretations of what it means to be human into conversation with twentieth-century ecological philosophies and Native American spirituality in order to broaden the Christian imagination for understanding ourselves within creation. Vine Deloria's analyses of Western temporal thinking and spatial thinking demonstrated by Native worldviews provides perspective for necessary theological shifts to support a Christian ecotheological anthropology.

## INTRODUCTION

Theology has never been a monolithic enterprise. Attempts to articulate the experience and identity of God are intricately bound up with the human experience and human identity, as we ourselves and our own experiences shape the dimensions of our abilities to comprehend and express the Divine through language. Theology is never an objective formulation. Our comprehension of God takes on the metaphysical and the philosophical, but also the biological and ecological, as we assume that examining ourselves and everything that exists—in all the world’s complexities and relations—reveals glimpses of the Divine. Our explanations and explications necessarily assume an anthropomorphic character that is often deeply relational.

Curtains and windows are appropriate imagery for the theological work at hand. A window provides a unique, though limited, vantage point from which one looks out upon the world and then records and interprets what is seen. Each window offers a slightly different take on the world outside. In the same way, the Christian tradition has offered windows through which to take in the world and those that inhabit it. The window serves as both a cosmology and an anthropology to the viewer, as its range of visibility necessarily influences the interpretations and assumptions of the viewer. How one sees, understands, and interprets the world is deeply theological and holds profound implications, not only for one’s religious beliefs, ethics, and praxis, but upon one’s understanding of self and one’s place within the grander scheme of things.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **FACING INTO THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

The purpose of this work is to examine the windows through which we look out at the world in order to arrive at a vantage point with a broad view, and one that enables twenty-first century Christianity to expand its interpretations of humanity, the other-than-human, and our place on earth. This will be achieved by drawing the curtains on the windows that have been constructed by Christianity alongside those crafted by deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology, and Indigenous North American perspectives. This project will primarily explore their congruencies in order to create a wider window, framed within Christianity, through which we can better understand the Divine, the earth, the other-than-human, and ourselves, with special attention given to theological anthropology—the positioning of and identity of humans in relation to everything else. The reason for such particular attention takes into consideration the ways in which we interpret and relate to the Divine and the other-than-human through the lens of our experience. This will lead us through explorations of multiple interpretations of what it means to be human within the cosmological constructs of Christian and ecological thought as an avenue toward greater reflection on the human experience within the world. The global context of climate change at the hands of humans demands critical evaluation of our assumptions about planetary living, and also provides fertile ground for re-evaluating the ways in which we understand our inhabiting of the Earth, our planetary home.

## NORTH AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a disruptive force in this planetary home, and while it does not affect each room in the home to the same extent, the entire home is suffering its effects, and thus, changes are called for in order to restore balance and livability to the home. Anthropogenic climate change aptly places theological anthropology and ecological thought and praxis into conversation, and encourages us to think theologically about the *ecological self*.

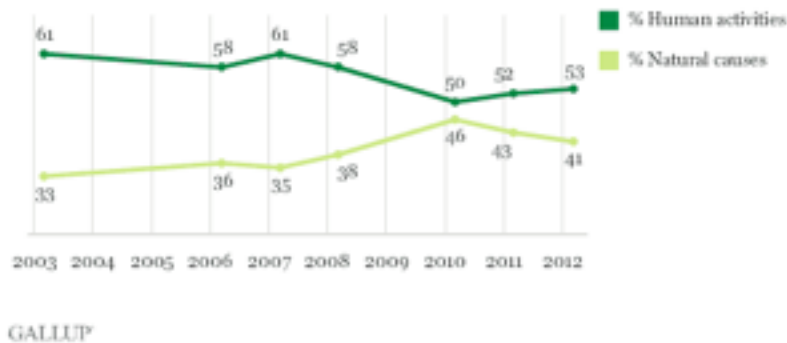
The subject of climate change remains a hot-button issue in North American politics, predictably split down party lines. While denial of climate change certainly exists within the North American political spectrum, the fact that changes in our climate have been occurring is generally acknowledged. The controversy is, in part, over the root causes of climate change and whether or not such changes are the results of human activity. According to a 2012 Gallup Poll, 53% of Americans believe that global climate change is indeed the result of human activity, compared to 41% who believe that the observable changes in the global climate—normal temperature deviations, rising sea levels, increases in severe weather—are simply natural changes occurring in the environment, the results of cyclical fluctuations in weather patterns (see Figure 1.1).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lydia Saad, “In U.S., Global Warming Views Steady Despite Warm Winter,” Gallup Politics, March 30, 2012, accessed on September 18, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153608/Global-Warming-Views-Steady-Despite-Warm-Winter.aspx>.

### Primary Cause of Global Warming

And from what you have heard or read, do you believe increases in the Earth's temperature over the last century are due more to -- [the effects of pollution from human activities (or) natural changes in the environment that are not due to human activities]?



(Fig. 1.1: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153608/Global-Warming-Views-Steady-Despite-Warm-Winter.aspx>)

More recent polls report 69% of Americans affirming the evidence of an increase in the planet's average temperature in recent decades, while only 42% are confident in the assessment that climate change is mostly the result of human activity (compared to 23% who cite natural patterns as the primary cause of climate change).<sup>2</sup> The same poll also revealed that 33% of Americans persist that climate change is a “very serious problem,” while 32% submit that climate change is a “somewhat serious problem.”<sup>3</sup>

In her book *Between God and Green*, Katharine Wilkinson traces the history of evangelical theological and political engagement with climate change from the 1970s—first

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<sup>2</sup> “Continuing Partisan Divide in Views of Global Warming: Keystone XL Pipeline Draws Broad Support,” Pew Research Center, Washington D.C. (April 2, 2013), <http://www.people-press.org/2013/04/02/keystone-xl-pipeline-draws-broad-support/>, accessed on October 31, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

emerging in response to Lynn White's famous 1967 essay—through recent years.<sup>4</sup> American Christianity has been far from silent and inactive when it comes to concern over global climate change, but the efforts of centrist groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Environmental Network have not had the greatest success in mobilizing the powerful spectrum of evangelical Christianity, which frequently aligns itself with the conservative right extension of the Republican Party.<sup>5</sup> In June 2007, evangelical leaders comprising the Evangelical Climate Initiative submitted to Congress their 'Call to Action,' driven by four strong statements weaving care for the environment together with their Christian faith. These four statements were (1) the reality of anthropogenic climate change, (2) the effects of climate change will be most drastically felt by the poor, (3) the ethics and morality of Christianity demand a response to the issues surrounding climate change, and (4) such a response is both urgent and the responsibility of individuals, faith communities, business, and governments alike.<sup>6</sup> The expressly affirmed belief in human-induced climate change guiding the

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<sup>4</sup> Katharine K. Wilkinson, *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); See also Calvin B. DeWitt, *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011); Jonathan Merritt, *Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet* (New York: FaithWords, 2010); J. Matthew Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth: Why the Good Book is a Green Book* (New York: HarperOne, 2010); J. Matthew Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); Tri Robinson and Jason Chatraw, *Saving God's Green Earth: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility to Environmental Stewardship* (Norcross, GA: Ampelon Publishing, 2006); Ian Hore-Lacy, *Responsible Dominion: A Christian Approach to Sustainable Development* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishers, 2006). Evangelical perspectives that challenge contemporary environmental efforts and deny anthropogenic sources for climate change can be found in, E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, 1997); James Wanliss, *Resisting the Green Dragon: Dominion, Not Death* (Burke, VA: The Cornwall Alliance, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Mainstream Protestant denominations such as the United Churches of Christ and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America have made strong efforts to raise awareness of environmental concerns and incorporate such concerns into educational materials and liturgy, but these branches of Christianity do not possess the political muscle of evangelicalism.

<sup>6</sup> "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action," The Evangelical Climate Initiative, <http://www.npr.org/documents/2006/feb/evangelical/calltoaction.pdf>, accessed November 2, 2013.

first statement marked a risky and bold choice in language, not by any scientific standards, but by Christian standards, as it challenges and confronts the robust skepticism of earth science within evangelicalism. Buttressing the third claim, the ‘Call to Action’ affirms that, “Love of God, love of neighbor, and the demands of stewardship are more than enough reason for evangelical Christians to respond to the climate change problem with moral passion and concrete action.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite such efforts to weave together evangelical faith and environmental concern and action in the public sphere, hearts and minds have not been deeply swayed. Data from a 2007 study led by David Kinnaman of the evangelical Barna Group found that the majority of American Christians (including a wide range of Protestant denominations and Roman Catholics) were certain of the reality of climate change, but that “Evangelicals are among the most skeptical population segments,” with numbers that showed only 27% having confidence in the reality of climate change.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, 62% of evangelicals polled believe that changes in climate are primarily natural, cyclical patterns, not largely affected by human activity.<sup>9</sup>

In the years since the data was observed, there have been significant changes within the American evangelical spectrum. In 2013, a group of 200 scientists who identify as evangelical submitted a letter to the U.S. Congress, calling upon them to seriously address climate change to ensure a stable and healthy future:

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<sup>7</sup> “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action”.

<sup>8</sup> “Evangelicals Go ‘Green’ with Caution,” Barna Group, September 22, 2008, accessed October 31, 2013, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/13-culture/23-evangelicals-go-qgreenq-with-caution%3E#.UnKNOJR4aVs>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

All of God's Creation - humans and our environment - is groaning under the weight of our uncontrolled use of fossil fuels, bringing on a warming planet, melting ice, and rising seas. The negative consequences and burdens of a changing climate will fall disproportionately on those whom Jesus called 'the least of these': the poor, vulnerable, and oppressed.<sup>10</sup>

The letter is marked by a deep regard and concern for others, namely, the poorest inhabitants of our globe. Their sentiments reflect the reality that the effects of climate change disproportionately harm those who are the least responsible, since the primary culprits of changing temperatures and greenhouse gas emissions are industrialized consumer societies in the wealthy first-world. The letter specifically requests congress to enact legislative measures aimed at reducing carbon emissions in one of the largest carbon-emitting nations on the planet.

In examining the efforts emerging out of the evangelical tradition, two primary shifts have occurred within the dominant thinking of North American Christianity.<sup>11</sup> First, whether or not climate change is human-induced or not, it *is* a reality and Christian ethics demand a response given the detrimental effects it has on the world's poor; and secondly, the primary relationship that humans have to the rest of the world is one of *stewardship* rather than *dominion*. These subtle shifts in perspective, though positive steps in the right direction, fail to address the theological beliefs that have implicated Christianity as an enemy of the environment. At the forefront of such theological beliefs sits anthropology.

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<sup>10</sup> "Evangelical Scientists Initiative Letter," July 10, 2013, <http://sojo.net/sites/default/files/Evangelical%20Scientists%20Initiative%20Letter.pdf>, accessed October 31, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> For a thorough treatment of this history, from 1970 through present day, see Katharine K. Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, especially Chapters 1-2.

## CHRISTIANITY, THE SELF, AND THE WORLD

Theological anthropology—the religious understanding and interpretation of humanity—situates itself at the nexus of theology, ethics and politics. Wilkinson notes, “Religion forms a lens through which many individuals read the world, the contemporary issues facing it, and proposed solutions to those problems.”<sup>12</sup> In addition to shifts in perspective and language, Christianity must also confront its beliefs about human persons, the earth, and its other-than-human inhabitants. These fundamental beliefs about ourselves and our species influence acceptable and unacceptable ways that we engage our world and determine the types of actions and policies to which we lend support or permit our elected representatives to allow. The question that will loom over this essay asks, *is it only a problem that requires subtle theological tailoring?*

Within the Christian tradition, conversation around philosophical anthropology has historically focused upon two streams: (1) the philosophical concepts of mind and soul, and on material bodies to the extent that they relate to and interact with the immaterial, and (2) the opening chapters of Genesis. These two traditions have mutually influenced each other and been the foundation for multiple approaches to understanding the human person.

Regarding the first stream, the priority given to the immaterial over material bodies is indicative of a Western philosophical dualism that splits reality into physical and spiritual realms; the mind and soul have the capacity to connect to the divine and are the locations of true spirituality, while the body is cursed, wicked, and a burden upon the soul. Within the second stream, it is the theological explication surrounding Genesis 1:26-28 and the emerging concept of

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<sup>12</sup> Wilkinson, 2.

the *imago Dei* that has consumed theological thought in regards to anthropology. The historical (and continuing) influence and power of Christianity upon Western thought and the shaping of our imaginations with respect to how we view ourselves as human persons makes this an important subject now more than ever.

## ON NATURE

According to John Barry, within the history of social theory ‘nature’ is “often a mute or passive object of human manipulation ... seen as something that just is.”<sup>13</sup> Conceptualizations of nature in the Western world have been largely influenced by ancient religious myths/imagination that tended to establish humanity and nature as combatants. Barry observes that the world in which these ancient religious stories emerged—including those of Judaism—had expanded beyond the hunter-gatherer phase of society and into an era in which “cities and towns were important places of political, economic, religious and military organization and power”; thus the attitude cultivated toward the natural world was a “combination of a negative view of ‘wilderness’ (viewed as chaos and a threat to human social order), coupled with a deep sense of how the environment required intensive human labour and effort ... in order that humans could survive and prosper from ‘ungiving’ and often hostile natural environments.”<sup>14</sup> Regarding the creation myth of Genesis 1, Barry contends that the importance lies not in whether the story is

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<sup>13</sup> John Barry, *Environment and Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 33-36; The view of the natural world as wilderness has a long history in Western thought, finding its apex in the colonialism of European expansion and domination in North America. This view of nature is an extension of the concept of *dominion* as found in Gen.1 and establishes the natural world as something to be *tamed* and *domesticated* (render it civilized), thus making it useful to human ends. While other metaphors for the natural world have significantly shaped the contemporary discourse, the wilderness metaphor most closely resonates with the Christian tradition. For an overview of historical attitudes toward and ideas regarding the value of nature, see Christina Z. Peppard, “Denaturing Nature,” in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Volume 63, no. 1&2 (2012): 97-120.



truthful or not, but that its “significance lies in its being one of the first systematic and most powerful stories or narratives about the relationship between humans and the environment,” and includes “a particular conception of ‘environment’ and its status as ‘home’... the crucial role of human labor,” and lastly, the “dangers inherent in particular forms of thinking about and using the environment for humans.”<sup>15</sup>

Richard Bauckham helpfully distinguishes four ways in which *nature* is commonly used within Christianity: (1) essence, such as employed in Chalcedonian Christology, (2) the entirety of the created or observable world as separate and distinctly different than God, (3) the world (including humanity) in a pre-fall state, and (4) the observable non-human world with a priority toward the natural environment and its relation to human life.<sup>16</sup> Inherent within the fourth typology is a presupposed “distinction between ‘nature’ and humanity, or rather, between nature and culture.”<sup>17</sup> Bauckham, as well as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler, Jurgen Moltmann, Stephen Bouma-Prediger, and Ian Barbour all cite this nature/culture dualism as ecologically unjust and unfaithful to the biblical witness. Val Plumwood argues that dualisms stem from the denial of dependence upon an *other* in a subordination-establishing schema.<sup>18</sup> Thus, *culture* is perceived to be entirely independent from *nature*. Bouma-Prediger simply states that the dualism assumes that “history is defined as and limited to *human* history and thereby set

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<sup>15</sup> Barry, *Environment and Social Theory*, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Bauckham, “First Steps to a Theology of Nature,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (1986): 229–244.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 41.

over against nature.”<sup>19</sup> Because of this distinction, Bouma-Prediger contends that traditional theologies have generally reserved the concepts of “redemption and grace” to “extend only as far as history, i.e., humanity.”<sup>20</sup> He states that such a reading of nature, humanity, and the scope of redemption is deeply misguided, and that “history must be redefined as inclusive of all being and nature must be reconceived as inclusive of human being.”<sup>21</sup> Lastly, Bouma-Prediger affirms that such a revision is “fully compatible with the claim that Christianity is a historical religion ... and more accurately capture[s] the comprehensive biblical vision of the redemption of bodies, of grace for a groaning creation, and of shalom for all of God’s creatures.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the culture/nature dualism is rejected along with its implications for the exclusivity of history-culture and nature, and the positioning of humanity as both different from and over and above the natural world. Rather, humanity is to be conceived as embedded in nature, which consequently draws nature into the realm of history and vice-versa. Bouma-Prediger summarizes five arguments from Ruether that emphasize the problems of the culture/nature dualism:

1) this dualism is false because the natural world is historical in its own right; 2) this dualism is false because the natural world is indelibly affected by human agency and thus a part of human history; 3) this dualism is false because, as corporeal, humans are embedded in the natural order; 4) this dualism has led to disastrous consequences since it has sanctioned various forms of exploitation; 5) this dualism conflicts with the biblical emphasis on a single all-embracing covenant.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology: The Ecological Models of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler, and Jurgen Moltmann* (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1995), 272. Within the dualistic structure at hand, culture and human history can be used interchangeably in regards to nature.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 271.

Lastly, the importance of the portrayal of humanity's fall into evil and the intrusion of evil into creation in Genesis 3 has significantly shaped the way that nature is viewed. Genesis 3 presupposes an idyllic, harmonious, and most importantly, death-free garden from which all life emerged. The disobedience of Adam and Eve invited upon all of nature death, imperfection, pain and burdensome labor. The shift from a paradisiacal earth to one marked by struggle and disconnection (among humans and between humans, the earth, and earth creatures) functions as a legitimization for present ecological realities and harmful, failing, and unsustainable relationships between earth-inhabitants. The most pressing problem facing contemporary Christianity, however, is "the disregard for the destruction of the earth's life support systems."<sup>24</sup>

## **ON GENESIS 1**

Bauckham understands the writer of Genesis 1 to see humanity as "one of the land animals, created on the sixth day," yet making a distinction between them in 1:28, while the writer of Genesis 2 envisions both Adam and the animals as "created out of the ground," invoking images of God designing clay figures; within this second creation narrative there is nothing that distinguishes אָדָם (Adam) from the נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה (living creatures).<sup>25</sup> He further claims that even if Adam was the recipient of a divine and life giving breath from God that denotes a "special *status* in God's sight, it indicates nothing about human *nature* which distinguishes it from the animals. However received, the same divine breath animates all things ... the Old Testament seems to draw no hard line of distinction between human nature and the animals."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies*, 49.

<sup>25</sup> Bauckham, "Theology of Nature," 231.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

Further, the text itself does not elucidate on the possible meanings for the designation of humans being created in the image of their divine Creator.

Similarly, Anna Case-Winters states, “there is an unbroken continuity with the rest of nature; separation is a false report on reality ... we are nature.”<sup>27</sup> This is not an expression of indistinguishability, but rather an affirmation that we are embedded within, and distinctly a part *of*, nature as opposed to over/above nature. Within this framework, the traditional distinctions between human and nature within the Christian tradition, and the subsequent posture of domination over nature, is a non sequitur. All of the hierarchical patterns of nature being subjected under human persons are based upon humans being created in the image of God.<sup>28</sup> A reading of the creation myth that posits humans as ontologically superior to the natural world must be resisted. Case-Winters suggests that the traditional conceptualizing of the *imago Dei* as firmly establishing distinctions between human beings and non-human beings “have led to separatism and anthropocentrism, which have proven both untenable and dangerous.”<sup>29</sup> Instead, she prefers to approach the difference between human and non-human as the unique contributions that humanity brings to nature. “Whether we think of the image of God in terms of intrinsic capacities such as reason/rationality or the quality of our living in relationship ... and could be seen as placing the human being on a continuum rather than in absolute distinction.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Anna Case-Winters, “Rethinking the Image of God,” *Zygon* 39, no. 4 (2004): 815.

<sup>28</sup> Bauckham claims that although the story situates humans as rulers of the earth, the parallel concept of governance as expressed in the rest of the Hebrew Bible is not one in which “subjects exist for the sake of their rulers! If anything, the reverse is the case.” This reading of the relationship between humanity and nature changes the power dynamics that undergird notions of *dominion*. “Theology of Nature,” 234.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 814.

<sup>30</sup> Bauckham, “Theology of Nature,” 817-818.

Likewise, Bauckham claims, “The recognition that the distinction between humanity and the rest of nature is not an absolute one has become very obvious through modern science, but has often been part of ordinary human reflection on humanity’s place in the world, and is in fact present in the Genesis 1 account of creation.”<sup>31</sup> As seen, the way in which one approaches a text such as Genesis 1 has significant implications for the way one’s self, nonhuman creatures, and the natural environment are seen and interpreted, which in turn has crucial implications for ethics and how one exists within an ecosystem. Indeed, it has been claimed that by examining the ways in which meanings have been thrust upon Genesis 1:26-28, “one could write a piece of Europe’s cultural history.”<sup>32</sup> The next chapters will depart from the Christian tradition and explore the ideas of humanity and nature through the lenses of three different twentieth-century ecophilosophies.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>32</sup> Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. Sierd Woodstra, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 179.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHRISTIANITY, HUMAN PERSONS AND GENESIS 1

Interpretations of the human persons vis-à-vis other-than-human creatures and the natural world within the Christian tradition have generally been oriented around the concept of the *imago Dei*, and historically fallen under two approaches, the *substantialist/structuralist* model and the *relational* model. The *substantialist/structuralist* model constructs an understanding of human persons in relation to God by way of an immortal spiritual substance or a cerebral-cognitive capacity that is distinctly and inherently human. David Cairns observes, “In all the Christian writers up to Aquinas we find the image of God conceived as man’s power of reason.”<sup>33</sup> The *relational* understanding of the *imago Dei* unfolded in the Reformation period and partially recovered Irenaeus’ second century suggestion that ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ offer two differing aspects of the human reflection of the divine image that includes both rationality and an ethical dimension compromised by sin. Another model, the *functionalist* approach to the *imago Dei*, arose from biblical studies and submits that the way human beings enact God-likeness is tied to the ways in which they relate to the rest of creation, modeling the lordship of God in an intermediary fashion. An examination of these Christian models of human personhood follows.

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<sup>33</sup> David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), chaps. 4-13, quoted in J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 19.

## SUBSTANTIALIST/STRUCTURALIST MODEL

The *substantialist/structuralist* model is the oldest model for interpreting the creation of humans in the Genesis account. It attempts to locate the image of God in universal capacities and abilities within human persons. A guiding question for this interpretive model remains *how are humans like God yet unlike animals?* The metaphysical middle ground, then, constitutes what is meant by being created in God's image. Thus, *rationality, intellect, consciousness, and will* all become associated with the exegesis of Genesis 1:26-28 and understanding of *personhood* in contradistinction to animals. These categories, however, can be subsumed into the category of *soul*, considered to be the animating spark located exclusively within the human person, and the immaterial component of humanity that corresponds to the divine and mediates between God and bodies.

Humans as the exclusive soul-bearers invites the Genesis 2 creation narrative into the conversation. In 2:7, God forms the human person from the dust of the ground. However, the אדם ('man') from the אדמה ('ground') is apparently inanimate and lifeless until God breathes a divine breath into his nostrils and he becomes a נפש (living being, soul, self, person). The text, however, summarizing what God has done, in 1:30 states that every beast, bird and creeping thing—the multitude of life forms present within creation—possesses the נפש חיה ('breath of life'). The semantic range of נפש, as well as its dissemination among all created beings, discount it as an exclusively human feature.<sup>34</sup> Thus, strong distinction and delineation between human and animal based on a reading of Genesis 1-2 is to misread the text and fail to acknowledge the co-

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<sup>34</sup> This brief treatment barely scrapes the surface of the depth of the word נפש and its use throughout the Hebrew Bible, yet it should be noted that mortality and the *nepheš* are intimately related in biblical thought.

creatureliness of both humans and non-humans, all of whom bear the divine breath. If the image of God is bound up with the soul—which is imbued by the divine breath—then it cannot be said that human beings are the sole bearers of the *imago Dei*.

There are glaring problems with an exegesis of the creation of humans in Genesis 1 that conflates *universal* capacities and abilities with being made in the image of God and interprets the status of *person* in contrast to animal. Such readings reflect an unwarranted view of humans-as-creatures in the text, as well as fail to take into consideration the particularities of embodied experience. The universalizing nature of the essentialist definitions of humanity (rationality, ability, etc.) inherent in this perspective creates great ambiguity surrounding who *is* and who *is not* considered a person. Historically speaking, the white, able-bodied male person with fully-functional mental capacity has been granted supremacy as the most fully human; deviation from this normalized ideal dwindles one's humanity.<sup>35</sup> This model of personhood and the image of God suffers from disregarding the multivalent human experience and the ranges of ability, mental capacity and health, orientation, and the interconnected experiences of sex, race and class. It presents an essentialized picture of *some* human persons as the norm for personhood, and is thus an idealized picture that fails to incorporate those who fall outside of its norms.

Inherent within this framework is also a fundamental belief that humans are hierarchically superior to animals and nature, yet inferior to God and other divine beings such as angels. This superiority has served as the historical justification for the domination of the earth

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<sup>35</sup> See Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); Deborah Creamer, "Including All Bodies in the Body of God," in *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health*, Vol. 9, no. 4 (2005), 55-69.



and its creatures (Gen. 1:28)—both non-human and human (this concept will be explored more fully below in the chapter on ecofeminism).

### **RELATIONAL-SOCIAL MODEL**

The relational model for interpreting the image of God in humans can be traced to the Reformation and the work of Luther and Calvin, which incorporated an ethical dimension following Jesus' recapitulation-recovery of full humanity. Claus Westermann notes that in the history of interpretation of Genesis 1 among biblical exegetes, such a reading is clearly divided by the East and the West. According to Westermann, it "perseveres throughout the whole of the Middle Ages, and occurs again in the Orthodox Church. It has scarcely left a trace in Protestant theology."<sup>36</sup>

The relational model looks to the manner after which humanity was molded in the Genesis 1 narrative rather than what endowments the human person has that distinguish them from the non-human. The language of Genesis 1:26 implies a divine council to which the Creator-God speaks humanity into being; male and female are created *בצלמנו* ('in our image'). In the middle of the twentieth century, Barth linked the image of God to relationality vis-à-vis sexual differentiation and the human as a whole entity. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth contends that the image of God "does not consist in anything that man is or does. It consists as man himself consists as the creature of God. He would not be man if he were not the image of God. He is the image of God in the fact that he is man."<sup>37</sup> Additionally, within this stream of interpretation is an inclusion of Second Testament passages that address creation, humanity, and

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<sup>36</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing Press, 1984), 148; Westermann provides an extensive history of interpretation of Genesis 1.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1. 184.

recapitulation through Jesus, in which we encounter expressions such as, “Man is a *Christ-centered* being.”<sup>38</sup> In this line of theology, humanity is fundamentally re-oriented by, through, and in the person of Jesus; full humanity belongs to Christ and humans thus become fully human through conformity to the image of Christ, the image of God (Col. 1:15). Thus the self is re-interpreted through Jesus (Acts 17:28-31).

More recently, the relational model has included within its scope a model for human fulfillment based on relationality patterned after the trinitarian formula derived from the divine plural (‘let us make ’). In the words of Stanley Grenz, “the most innovative result of this conversation ... has been the coalescing of theology with the widely accepted philosophical conclusion that ‘person’ has more to do with relationality than with substantiality and that the term stands closer to the idea of communion or community than to the conception of the individual in isolation or abstracted from communal embeddedness.”<sup>39</sup> This is a constructive and beneficial move away from Enlightenment isolationism that understands and interprets subjects independently and disconnected from their environments under the guise of objectivity.<sup>40</sup>

Douglass John Hall insists that “the whole intention of the relational conception of the image of God is to position the human creature responsibly to the other creatures; not to demonstrate that this creature is higher, or more complex, or worthier, but to designate a specific function of this

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<sup>38</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* II (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963), 240.

<sup>39</sup> Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 4.

<sup>40</sup> The influence of Martin Buber’s I-Thou relation plays a significant role in the relational-trinitarian conception of the self; Jürgen Moltmann submits that “the ‘I’ can only be understood in light of the ‘Thou’. . . Without the social relation there can be no personality” in *Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 145.

creature – a very positive function – in relation to the others.”<sup>41</sup> Human imaging of God, and thus, human personhood is intimately connected to *being in relation*, modeled after the way the divine council in Genesis 1:26 works in concert in creating humans.<sup>42</sup> The evolution of this model marked an important shift away from dualism and essentialism in constructing theologies of the human person that focused on immateriality, abilities and capacities.

### FUNCTIONALIST MODEL

Both of the previous understandings of the human person and her imaging relationship to the Divine emerge from the tradition of systematic theology. The *functionalist* model of the human person, on the other hand, has evolved not from theology, but from the field of biblical studies, influenced by research of the ancient Near Eastern religious milieu within which the biblical writings emerged. The primary thrust of the *functional* model speaks to the ways in which the language of Genesis 1 assumes humans *enact* their status, as mediators between God and the rest of creation. Thus, while humans are embedded within creation, the cosmology of the Genesis 1 creation account also pictures humans inhabiting a unique location over/above creation. This model is not exegeted exclusively from the divine-image language, but in conjunction with the *dominion over* creation granted by God to humans. Rather than humans being designed with particularly divine capacities by their maker, theologian and biblical scholar J.R. Middleton suggests that “the human vocation is modeled on the nature and actions of the

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<sup>41</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*, Library of Christian Stewardship (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 106-107.

<sup>42</sup> I am selecting to avoid anachronism in imposing a trinitarian formula upon the Jewish text.

<sup>43</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 60.

God ported in Genesis 1.”<sup>43</sup> The divine image is exemplified in human action modeled after God’s monarchical status.

This begs the question of how should one primarily read/understand the God of the Genesis creation story. The *functionalist* model prefers a reading of Yahweh as a king/ruler. As such, Yahweh is also able to establish other rulers within his domain (the entire created world). Humans, granted *dominion* are thus read as rulers over the earth and its non-human inhabitants. This particular reading rests upon ancient Near Eastern parallels to *image of God* language based on the semantic range of צֶלֶם (image, likeness), which includes in its scope cultic images that were commonly used to establish a “localized, visible, corporeal representation of the divine.”<sup>44</sup> For example, a cultic statue in a territory outside the imperial center serves to remind the inhabitants of that territory who their allegiance is to; it is a proxy to the divine. Middleton contends that such a reading finds “firmer ground with the wealth of comparative studies of Israel and the ancient Near East ... in which kings (and sometimes priests) were designated the image and likeness of a particular god ... a designation that served to describe their function (analogous to that of a cult image) of representing the deity in question and of mediating divine blessing to the earthly realm.”<sup>45</sup> It is through this analogy that we are to then read the language of Genesis 1:26-28 and the establishing of humans as extending dominion—or mediating blessing—to their environment on behalf of Yahweh.

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<sup>44</sup> Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 25. See also Lawrence Troster, “Created in the Image of God: Humanity and Divinity in an Age of Environmentalism,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

This particular model finds congruency with the concept of *environmental stewardship* that finds popularity in particular ecological/environmental circles both secular and religious, and thus lends itself toward an earth-inclusive theological anthropology. The functionalist model corresponds to stewardship in the sense that humans—as those who have assumed the dominant role on the planet—are to enact their power with caution and care, with a nod toward *tending* the earth. Laurel Kearns observes that Christians who subscribe to a stewardship position toward the earth, “interpret the key ‘dominion’ passage in terms of the sense of dominion given an Israelite king such as David.”<sup>46</sup> This lends important biblical grounding to caring for the earth. Philosophically softer than unapologetic dominion language, stewardship is still imbued with anthropocentrism and a hierarchical program in the relationship between humans and our habitats that our current ecological realities requires us to move away from.<sup>47</sup> Kearns also notes, however, that “Christian stewardship is an important voice countering a widespread strain of conservative Christianity that is anti-science with ‘creationist’ overtones,” and propounds the incompatibility between environmentalism and Christianity.<sup>48</sup>

While this model does move away from the metaphysical assumptions made by the substantialist model and takes into account language use and wider Near Eastern parallels, theologically, it privileges a monarchical image of God which then extends to humans in a hierarchical chain. Furthermore, a canonical picture does not warrant such a privileging of this

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<sup>46</sup> Laurel Kearns, “The Context of Eco-theology,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 477.

<sup>47</sup> Such an anthropology is already existent within Eastern Orthodox theologies of humanity and creation. See John D. Zizioulas, “Priest of Creation,” in *Environmental Stewardship*, ed. R.J. Berry (New York: T&T Clark, 2006); Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God’s Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Kearns, “The Context of Eco-theology,” 477.

singular metaphor for God, the God-human relationship and the God-world relationship. To image God, and subsequently, to be human, is to exercise dominion and relate to the created world as a ruler. However, a wider, canonical view fails to see this dimension of the creation narrative as a substantial component in understanding the role and identity of humans within the grander scheme of creation and Israelite identity. These critiques find support from both Claus Westermann and Terence Fretheim. Westermann's objections, to the royal-functionalist reading, in part, concern the community-of-Yahweh orientation of the wider text, and the overarching emphasis on holiness evident in the Priestly corpus. "What can be meant by saying," he asks, "that 'man' represents, takes the place of, God on earth? This could only make sense if 'man' (i.e., humankind) were to represent God before the rest of creation."<sup>49</sup> The extrapolation of the 'image and likeness' from the garden-dwelling protohumans and people of Yahweh to *all* humanity is asking too much of a text written by and for a particular community in a particular place and at during a particular time in history. Brueggemann has also noted the failure in universalizing an understanding of *humanness* based on Genesis 1.<sup>50</sup> The interplay between human identity and ethics for the Israelites is consistently an Israelite enterprise, restricted to the people of Yahweh.<sup>51</sup> Along similar lines, Westermann contends that the Priestly Writer is preoccupied with "God's holiness and his revelation of himself only at the holy place," such that

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<sup>49</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Publishing House, 1984), 153.

<sup>50</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), 450. Besides Brueggemann, both Terence Fretheim (*God and the World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005] and submit critiques of the royalist theology of Genesis 1 that imbues the functionalist model of the divine image from within the field of biblical scholarship.

<sup>51</sup> See Gen. 12:2

“it is inconceivable that P could have meant ‘wherever a human being appears, there God appears,’ when he is conceded with presenting a manifestation of the unique holiness of God.”<sup>52</sup>

## THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

As just observed, there exists a sharp distinction—as well as consequences—between theological interpretations of the Genesis 1 text and interpretations arising from careful study of the Hebrew language and the socio-political and linguistic nuances of ancient Mesopotamia. The hermeneutical friction between these two fields creates a tension that demands attention. Nathan MacDonald makes the claim that, “there is widespread agreement that the traditional understanding of the *imago* as an intellectual, spiritual or moral faculty has to be abandoned and that its significance must be established on exegetical grounds rather than an a posteriori comparison with the animal kingdom.”<sup>53</sup> MacDonald’s statements are quite reasonable. Over the course of the past century, biblical scholarship has significantly challenged traditional interpretations of texts and ways that the text is engaged and understood. While science has long objected to the traditional Christian interpretation of the creation myth in Genesis 1, textual criticism, comparative analysis and discourse analysis within biblical studies has demythologized the literary block that is Genesis 1-11, as ‘prehistory’ deeply embedded in etiology and myth, and influenced by the myths and stories from surrounding ancient cultures. A careful examination of Genesis 1 recognizes the literary and mythological natures of the text, as well as the ways it functions as polemic toward existing political-religious structures. It also highlights the tension

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<sup>52</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 153. Westermann also refutes the parallels between the Hebrew *tselem* and non-Israelite cultic representations of the divine (154).

<sup>53</sup> Nathan MacDonald, “The Imago Dei and Election: Reading Genesis 1:26-28 and Old Testament Scholarship with Karl Barth,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10:3 (July 2008): 303-4.

between theological interpretations and the biblical studies interpretations as suggested by MacDonald. The creation story is not read as a literal recounting of historical events, but demonstrates its importance as foundational text for understanding the relationship between God and humans, humans and the earth, and the centrality of Sabbath to the created world in the rest of the biblical text.

Critiques concerning the theological implications of the functionalist reading are lobbed from a hermeneutical site, thus highlighting the problem cited above by MacDonald: the text-critical position offers the preferred reading of Genesis 1, but leaves much to be desired by way of theological explication when working with the lens provided by biblical scholars. It is overtly monarchical and patriarchal, designations that do not serve to promote egalitarian ethics and justice for our *oikos*. The tension is further reinforced by the cultural controversy surrounding this passage and the direct relationships it mediates between persons of faith, the earth and its inhabitants, and the North American debates surrounding the causes of climate change.

Working from within the text, however, a legitimate critique of the *functionalist* reading arises in its halting at the creation of male and female on the sixth day though the narrative continues on into the seventh day, the pinnacle of the seven-day creation cycle. Larry Rasmussen comments that rabbinical tradition stresses, “Sabbath and not dominion” as the symbol of “proper relationship of humans to the rest of nature and of all creation together to the creator.”<sup>54</sup> It is the Sabbath, Rasmussen continues, that marks the “crown and climax of the creation story.”<sup>55</sup> Such a reorientation might give our anthropocentric proclivities pause and reconsider

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<sup>54</sup> Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 232.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



the vitality of rest and the importance of honoring the earth's natural behaviors and patterns for life. Additionally, this re-centers the conversation about humanity and our relationship to God from day six to day seven, from *imaging* and *dominion* to *rest* and *shalom*, providing both a theological and text-critical framework for reading Genesis 1.

In conclusion, a thoughtful, contemporary—that includes an ecological awareness and sensitivity—Christianity must engage and be shaped by scholarship, and marked by a willingness to reject interpretations regardless of their historical legacy and tradition (a hermeneutic of suspicion), but also competently engage the symbolic world of the text and establish relevant points of access for twenty-first century readers and hearers of the text. The role that the text of Genesis 1 has played (and continues to play) in shaping Western history through theologies of humanity and nature cannot be underestimated, but our current global climate crises prioritizes the necessity of Christian engagement with the text in a *second naïveté* that neither accepts it uncritically nor rejects it outright. Theologies surrounding the *imago Dei* must be subjected to critical examinations of the text that risk undermining hopeful hermeneutics.

Having explored the primary ways in which Christianity has historically interpreted the human person, we shall move toward explicating ecological movements and the philosophical anthropologies they have submitted, and examine these in light of an ecologically aware and sensitive Christianity. Our efforts will begin with a glimpse into the deep ecology movement and its sharp criticism of anthropocentric attitudes toward nature.

### CHAPTER 3

#### DEEP ECOLOGY AND THE ECOLOGICAL SELF

The *deep ecology* movement is foundational to the discussion of an ecological-philosophical (*ecophilosophical*) anthropology given its historical influence upon contemporary environmental movements, environmental ethics and ecophilosophies. Deep ecology represents the first critical ecological movement and philosophy to gain traction in the academy, and has maintained influential among ‘green’ activist and resistance movements. The term emerged from the work of Norwegian philosopher and ecologist Arne Naess, who first published on the subject in 1973.<sup>56</sup> The philosophical system initiated by Naess, sometimes referred to as *ecosophy*, is primarily an ethical one, and undergirded by a cosmology and anthropology that challenges the anthropocentrism that has steered Western thought and practice. Subsequently, it also presents a critique of the ethics born of Christianity’s own cosmology and anthropology.

The academic program of deep ecology leans on two fundamental pillars: “an axiology (the study of the criteria of value systems in ethics) of ‘biocentric egalitarianism’ and an ontology ... of metaphysical holism which asserts that the biosphere does not consist of discrete entities but rather internally related individuals that make up an ontologically unbroken whole.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary,” *Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (1973): 95–100.

<sup>57</sup> David R. Keller, “Deep Ecology,” in *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, CT, 2008), 207.

Everything is integrally related in such ways that everything influences the existence of everything else. The deep ecology typology infers its distinction from its opposite, what Naess regards as *shallow ecology*. According to Naess, ‘shallow ecology’ refers to the environmental-ecological aims that grant precedence to “fighting pollution and resource depletion,” which, in his assessment, are largely concerned with the “health and affluence of peoples in developed countries.”<sup>58</sup> Conversely, deep ecology and its proponents are concerned with issues of “diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness.”<sup>59</sup> Some of these more radical components of Naess’ early typology—autonomy, decentralization and classlessness—would eventually become inconspicuous as the more accessible and widely agreed upon concepts of ‘diversity,’ ‘complexity,’ ‘symbiosis,’ and ‘egalitarianism’ would become prominent vocabulary in mainstream ecology movements and ecophilosophical thought.<sup>60</sup> Naess and colleague George Sessions would later collaborate on an eight-point platform that attempted to establish common presuppositions and assumptions for ecological movements. Naess’ ecophilosophical writing tended to avoid prescriptive and limiting language so as not to be rigid and legalistic, as he wished for his work to be an invitation for people to apply his basic concepts and ideas, or ‘norms,’ within their own contexts. In addition to Sessions, other prominent deep ecologists David Rothenberg, Bill Devall, and Warwick Fox have

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<sup>58</sup> Keller, “Deep Ecology,” 95.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Naess’ understanding of ‘biospherical egalitarianism’ necessarily led to deep ecology’s anti-class posture. These radical concepts will re-appear in the heavily Marxist social ecology movement and the work of Murray Bookchin, which will be explored below.

interacted with Naess' work and have offered helpful insights and contributions to ecophilosophical thought.

### **INTERCONNECTION IN ECOSOPHY**

Fundamental to deep ecology is a rejection of anthropocentrism in the myriad ways it manifests itself intrapersonally, relationally, economically and politically. The intrapersonal and relational forms of anthropocentrism are most germane to this discussion and will act as our primary avenues into Naess' ecological thought, and toward understanding the ecological self through the lens of deep ecology.

Gestalt thinking permeates deep ecology. Indeed, the rejection of anthropocentrism is a rejection of what Naess calls the "human-in-environment image" in favor of a "total-field image: organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations."<sup>61</sup> The interconnectedness of all life is the foundational presupposition of deep ecology; the interconnections assume ontological functions. Naess states, "An intrinsic relation between two things *A* and *B* is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of *A* and *B*, so that without the relation, *A* and *B* are no longer the same things."<sup>62</sup> The mutual influence that two entities have on each other within their relation becomes intimately connected to their being in the world. In the same way, a human person and her environment are simultaneously acting upon and influencing the other, so that the influences become realities embedded in the identity of both this human person and her immediate environment. However, the ways in which we have developed psychologically in the modern-industrialized world have disabled our

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<sup>61</sup> Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep," 95.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

abilities to see these interconnections naturally. Rather, we see difference, individuality, and independence, and approach our environment and ourselves mechanically. Naess claims, “We may be said to be in, of, and for Nature from our very beginning. Society and human relations are important, but our self is richer in its constitutive relations.”<sup>63</sup> These relations do not simply stop with the human interactions that shape our day, or cease to exist beyond our own tribe.

The separation and isolation of the individual apart from the environment is a result of the pervasive culture/nature dualism that renders nature virtually invisible. One of the results of this dualism is an impotence in connecting to nature in meaningful ways that enable one to *identify* with it. Human society and culture, then, is the primary psychological and developmental influence upon human persons. “Traditionally,” Naess argues, “the *maturity of self* has been considered to develop through three stages from ego, to social self, comprising the ego, and from there to the metaphysical self, comprising the social self. But Nature is then largely left out in the conception of this process.”<sup>64</sup>

#### **THE EIGHT-POINT PLATFORM AND THE ECOLOGICAL SELF**

The primary legacy of deep ecology is the eight-point platform co-created by Naess and Sessions. Naess’ priority was to invite the widest possible audience into the deep ecology conversation, and the eight-point platform serves this desire by outlining the general assumptions of deep ecology that could be broadly agreed upon by people with concern for the ways in which human activity has significantly harmed earth’s balance. The eight points are:

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<sup>63</sup> Arne Naess, “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World,” in *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1995), 14.

<sup>64</sup> Arne Naess, “Self-Realization,” 14.

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms are values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
5. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
6. Significant change of life conditions for the better requires change in policies. These affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of intrinsic value) rather than adhering to a high standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.<sup>65</sup>

According to Naess, this platform is not necessarily a philosophical or ethical rulebook for ecological or environmental activity, but simply articulations of concepts and beliefs around which ecologically-minded persons and groups could organize, and refer to as a guide and find consensus. Rothenberg imagines these eight points as a tree and “its conceptual roots deriving nourishment from various religious, aesthetic, and speculative soils and its branches reaching out into the world, enjoining various types of political action.”<sup>66</sup> Building upon this metaphor, David Keller submits, “Deep Ecology is less a finished product than a continuing, impassioned plea for the development of ecosophies (roots and branches) that merge shared non-anthropocentric core principles (the trunk).”<sup>67</sup> The recurring theme weaved throughout these eight points is that a

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<sup>65</sup> Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle: An Outline of Ecosophy*, trans. David Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 29.

<sup>66</sup> David Rothenberg, “A Platform of Deep Ecology,” *The Environmentalist* vol. 7, no. 3 (1987): 185-190.

<sup>67</sup> David R. Keller, “Deep Ecology,” 210.

significant adjustment in human activity is required to even begin to repair the damage already inflicted upon the planet.

### **IDENTIFICATION WITH NATURE**

Confronting anthropocentrism necessarily involves considering one's place in our earthly home and the ways our relations and differences are both defined and navigated. If traditional models for understanding human beings in the world and human relations to other-than-human nature are predicated upon and orbit around the differences between *human* and *not human*, the ethos of deep ecology's non-anthropocentrism is rooted in 'identification with' as the primary way of understanding the self in creation. For Naess, 'self-realization' is delicately connected to identification. Within Naess' framework, "To distance oneself from nature and the 'natural' is to distance oneself from a part of that which the 'I' is built up of."<sup>68</sup> The human self is constituted by the myriad and constant relationships it finds itself connected to, consciously or unconsciously. This is a significant departure from the atomistic realm in which parts are isolable and easily moved or removed from environs and studied to be *known* as their own separate and unique entities. Devall adds that modern societies are accustomed to drawing lines between 'me' and 'the other.' Within this system, "When the other is a bioregion, a forest or a redwood tree, then it is a 'thing,' an object which can be manipulated by and for humans for narrow purposes. But deep ecology understands the 'I' in relation to the 'other.'"<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 164.

<sup>69</sup> Bill Devall, "The Ecological Self," in *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, eds. Alan R. Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1995), 101; echoes of Martin Buber's I/Thou relations surface frequently in regard to deep ecology's framing of the self.

Such invitations toward identification are fundamentally rooted in reorienting around a sense of place, and learning to relate to a watershed, a wetlands, a unique piece of land and its inhabitants as *subjects* in a way that enlarges your sense of self to incorporate and include those subjects within your own self. Thus, the ability open oneself up to identification with earth others (and the earth itself) creates the dynamics for solidarity, justice, and species flourishing valued within deep ecology. In Naess' words, "A lack of identification leads to indifference."<sup>70</sup>

Expanding upon the necessity for identification as it relates to the ecological self and the ecological society, Naess contends, "The greater our comprehension of our togetherness with other beings ... the greater care we will take. The road is also opened thereby for delight in the well-being of others and sorrow when harm befalls them. We seek what is best for ourselves, but through the *extension of the self* [emphasis added], our 'own' best is also that of others."<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, Devall adds an ethical dimension to identification:

If a person can sincerely say after careful self-evaluation and prayer that 'this Earth is part of my body,' then that person would naturally work for global disarmament and preservation of the atmosphere of the Earth. If a person can sincerely say, 'If this place is destroyed then something in me is destroyed,' then that person has an intense feeling of belonging to the place.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, the greater capacity one has for identifying with other-than-human subjects, the greater his or her capacity for compassion and care for an earth-other's well-being; the well-being of others becomes inextricably linked to our human well-being and yields an ecocentric altruism that informs our human identity. The expansion of our identification widens and deepens our own

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<sup>70</sup> Devall, "The Ecological Self," 174.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 108.



self, situating our identity within nature rather than indifferent and opposed to it, challenging the human/nature dualism that has long reigned supreme in Western philosophy. “This insight discloses that there is in reality only one big Self, the lifeworld,” a concept articulated by Alan Watts in the 1960s.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, Devall and Sessions make the claim, “If we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves. There are no boundaries and everything is interrelated.”<sup>74</sup>

### INTERSECTIONS WITH CHRISTIANITY

While the cosmology presumed by deep ecology presents challenges to the traditional Christian frameworks for understanding creation in distinct and separate categories, its antagonistic philosophical shift away from anthropocentrism creates space for Christian readings of the natural world and our human selves within it. Where dominion-oriented readings generally attempt to differentiate between human and other-than-human creation along the lines of the *imago Dei* and God’s declaration of humans as distinctively ‘very good,’ both humans and other-than-humans share designation as ‘created beings.’ That is, all created beings *belong to* and *exist for* their Creator.

Deep ecology offers a critique of the human-nature relationship and a way of re-imagining the self (from metaphysical to ecological) so as to reconstruct an ecocentric ethic of care. Within its constructs are multiple points of intersection with Christianity that offer some possibilities for new ways of conceiving of human persons within the world. The first of these intersections is found in deep ecology’s sense of connectedness. Within the deep ecology

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<sup>73</sup> See Alan Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* (New York: Random House, 1989).

<sup>74</sup> Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith, 1985), 68, quoted in David R. Keller, “Deep Ecology,” in *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, CT, 2008), 207.

expansion of self to include earth others is an echo of the relational model of the *imago Dei* as explored in the previous chapter, which posits that human identity and the self are intimately connected with being in relation to others. This affirms our communal-social embeddedness as mystically constitutive of who we are. If we rightfully dissolve the culture/nature dualism that buttresses anthropocentric attitudes toward nature, the earth and its inhabitants are incorporated into the social-relational sphere that comprises our identity and God-likeness.

Naess was quoted above, “We may be said to be in, of, and for Nature from our very beginning.”<sup>75</sup> Similarly, while preaching to the thoughtfully religious Athenians in the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-32 NRSV), the Apostle Paul takes to engaging Greek metaphysical poetry: “For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring’” (17:28). The similarities between the two invite us to reimagine the poetic claim to read, ‘For in Nature we live and move and have our being; for we too are Nature’s offspring.’ This re-reading subverts a spiritual/material dualism that separates and distinguishes the divine as outside and apart from nature, and suggests instead the Divine permeating all bodies and all life. Such a reading will be resisted by some on the grounds that it collapses God into nature in a dissolution from theism to pantheism, though panentheism presents the more appropriate framework.

A second point of intersection between deep ecology and Christianity exists within incarnational theology. As consistently shown, a central component of deep ecology is identification with the earth and earth others as a way of enlarging one’s own self to the extent that one can feel the pain experienced by other-than-human members of our bio-community.

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<sup>75</sup> Naess, “Self-Realization,” 14.

By entering creation in the form of a human person in Palestine, God obfuscated the boundaries between human and divine. Gregory of Nazianzus (4<sup>th</sup> century CE) wrote of the incarnation, “For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.”<sup>76</sup> For the early church fathers, the divine ingression into humanity through Jesus made redemption of humanity possible through *identification* with humanity; through the process of becoming human, God enlarges the Divine Self to include the human experience, so that the human experience can share in that Divine Self (2 Pet. 1:3-4 NRSV). Yet, to constrain the participation with God to the human species exclusively is to continue to operate within the spiritual/material dualism that God’s incarnation so dissolved; in becoming human God did not assume—to use Gregory’s language—humanity, but all that is embodied, physical, which is to say, *all* matter.

The tradition of identifying with others so that they may enter into and participate in fullness of life is deeply embedded within Christianity, and deep ecology models a way to extend an incarnational praxis toward our neighbors by understanding ourselves as extensions of all earth others, human and other-than-human neighbors alike. It is then Christian praxis to identify with creation so as to partner with Christ and creation in redemption.

### **SOME CRITIQUES OF DEEP ECOLOGY**

Despite its avenues of potential connection with Christianity, deep ecology is not without its shortcomings, both ethically and ecologically. Within the myriad conditions that have led to the current ecological crises, the fifth point in the eight-point platform developed by Naess and

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<sup>76</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, “To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius,”; Similar sentiments regarding *theosis* have also been expressed by Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Athanasius, and other early fathers.

Sessions presents ground for sharp critique of deep ecology's reading of both the planetary situation and forms of oppression in regards to its vision for species flourishing and shared responsibility for the earth.<sup>77</sup>

Population control, the thrust of the fifth point, maintains a troublingly significant place within deep ecology and environmental movements influenced by it. Humanity, according to Naess, is a uniquely gifted and situated species with the potential to purposefully limit and reduce its numbers, a move that could precipitate greater livelihood for all earth beings.<sup>78</sup> He contends that a significant factor in the “exponentially increasing, and partially or totally irreversible environmental deterioration or devastation” of the planet and its ecosystems is located in “a lack of adequate politics regarding human population increase.”<sup>79</sup> Naess’ statement implies that every human bears equal responsibility for global climate change, species extinction, deforestation, pollution, and other ecologically damaging realities that our world faces.

While deep ecology rightly critiques and condemns the highly consumerist and wasteful lifestyles of Western developed nations, this example exhibits a failure to consistently apply such critiques. Andrea Smith contends that such a view implies “that all people, not just those with wealth and institutional power are equally responsible for massive environmental destruction.”<sup>80</sup> Social ecologist Murray Bookchin strongly criticized deep ecology for “reducing humans from

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<sup>77</sup> Point five of the eight-point platform reads: *The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.*

<sup>78</sup> Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle: An Outline of Ecosophy*, trans. David Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>80</sup> Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 63.

complex social beings to simple species, a scourge that is ‘overpopulating’ the planet and ‘devouring’ its resources.<sup>81</sup> Bookchin concluded that the collapsing of any and all distinctions between human and other-than-human advocated by deep ecology impedes the perception of the “cultural causes of environmental problems.” Such cultural problems would be related, one would imagine, to the ‘deep’ forms of questions that deep ecology assumes itself to be asking—economic and political questions that attempt to expose the anthropocentrism lurking behind our social institutions and personal lives. This critique reveals a lack of analysis surrounding the connections between the abuse of the earth and its resources and other forms of oppression stemming from the same psychological and cultural propensities toward domination that deep ecology positions itself to counteract.

This inconsistency is the product of deep ecology’s deconstruction of dualisms by the razing of species distinctions and the flattening of creaturely beings onto a single, non-hierarchical and leveled ethical spectrum; the means by which deep ecology attempts to unseat the hierarchical dualisms that order our relational and philosophical frameworks emerge in the terms *integration*, *indistinguishability*, and *expanded self*, which include all earth-others within purview of socio-economic, relational, justice, and ethical paradigms. Maturing from earlier positions held, George Sessions aptly summarizes the ecofeminist critique regarding this expansive self: the movement toward self-realization through an expanded self and integration “remain trapped within the dualistic mode of thinking they reject—in seeking unity nature becomes an abstract and glorified ‘other’ with which one becomes unified in some kind of self-

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<sup>81</sup> Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto: Cheshire, 1982), 18.

transcending love.”<sup>82</sup> Val Plumwood acknowledges important advancements made by deep ecology toward deconstructing the harmful, dominant separations between humans and nature vis-à-vis ecological destruction, yet contends that deep ecology has inappropriately inverted the product of the dualism (separation) and merely created a *different kind* of distorted relationship by emphasizing incorporation between human and other-than-human.<sup>83</sup>

Deep ecology offers a strikingly different reading of nature, humanity, and other-than-human life that attempts to dissolve anthropocentrism, species inequality, and the domination of nature by blurring the differences between life on earth in all its varied wonders. It supplies an ecophilosophy with an expansive concept of the self that has significant implications for both environmental ethics and theological anthropology, presuming that the ‘Other’ is actually our self. As we will see later, there are also resonances between deep ecology and Native American traditions. Deep ecology has generated significant dialogue around ecology and Christianity, which will be tailored and nuanced through the lens of ecofeminism in the following chapter.

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<sup>82</sup> George Sessions, “Deep Ecology Versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Differences or Incompatible Philosophies?”, *Hypatia* vol. 6, no.1 (1991): 102.

<sup>83</sup> Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 173.

## CHAPTER 4

### ECOFEMINISM, THEOLOGY, AND THE ECOLOGICAL SELF

In addition to the social sciences, feminist analysis has made important contributions in ecology and science, as well as biblical studies and theology. The multifaceted nature of ecofeminist critiques make referring to *ecofeminism* or *the* ecofeminist critique imprecise, as the thinkers mentioned below each articulate their own visions for a more just, equal, and sustainable *oikos* through the values and aims of feminism.

The title *ecofeminism* refers to the theory and activism dually shaped by ecology and feminism.<sup>84</sup> The intersection between the two widens the lens through which feminist critiques have traditionally looked, and assumes a fundamental connection between patriarchy, the oppression (of women in particular), and the oppression and mistreatment of the earth. The interconnection between feminism and ecology assumes that ecological issues are feminist issues and feminist issues are also ecological issues. Thus, struggles surrounding water and groundwater, air pollution, genetically modified foods, pesticide use on crops, land use and land rights, the locations of planned landfills and other sites of industrial waste disposal, and other environmental concerns reveal the complex, interlocking nature of the oppressions surrounding race, class, gender, and the environment. Broadly stated, ecofeminist critiques and political

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<sup>84</sup> The term was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974). Her connections between the ecological and women's movements were further developed by Ynestra King, Karen Warren, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Susan Griffin, Mary Daly, Carolyn Merchant, Vandana Shiva, and Val Plumwood among others.

activism attempt to subvert and dismantle the gendered hierarchical structures and systems that perpetuate injustice, poverty, inequality, all of which threaten the sustainability and flourishing of all bodies.

This chapter will attempt to articulate the core of ecofeminism and explore through the theological ecofeminism of Sallie McFague vis-à-vis the ecological self. McFague's model of the earth as God's body is strongly influenced by ecofeminism and offers a radically different conception of God that demands a radically different conception of self, and presents a framework for beginning to articulate an ecologically sensitive theological anthropology and understanding of the self within the world.

## **OUTLINING ECOFEMINISM**

Carol J. Adams provides a strong description of the space that ecofeminisms inhabit, explaining that ecofeminism “identifies the twin dominations of women and nature. To the issues of sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism ... ecofeminism adds naturism—the oppression of the rest of nature. Ecofeminism argues that the connections between the oppression of women and nature must be recognized to understand adequately both oppressions.”<sup>85</sup> Nearly forty years ago, Rosemary Radford Ruether contended:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this society.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Carol J. Adams, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 1.

<sup>86</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 204.



While Ruether's analysis regarding both women and the earth was and continues to be accurate, ecofeminism is not simply about women and the earth experiencing liberation, but about all lives and all relationships experiencing liberation through a societal reorientation away from patriarchy and domination. Additionally, ecofeminism can be characterized by: non-hierarchy, non-competition, participatory/democratic organization, a commitment to relations based on intrinsic value rather than instrumentalism, and a commitment to working from the perspective of humans as part of nature and participant in ecosystem processes.<sup>87</sup> Further, the integration of dualisms and the obscuring of the valued differences between mind/body, male/female, culture/nature, human/animal, etc., are also significant components of ecofeminist thought and practice.

As seen in the previous chapter, deep ecology locates its primary critique of an anti-ecological society in anthropocentrism. Both ecofeminism and deep ecology acknowledge anthropocentrism as a locus of deeply embedded inequalities and forms of domination, yet ecofeminism differs by way of expanding anthropocentrism to include a feminist analysis of *androcentrism*, highlighting the establishment of the male experience as both normative and constitutive of a dominant narrative through which all others are oriented. Sessions notes, "Ecofeminism not only comprehends the problem of anthropocentrism, but adds the crucial dimension of history—the actual ways in which the logic of domination has been used against

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<sup>87</sup> See Nancy R. Howell, "Ecofeminism: What One Needs to Know," *Zygon*, 32 no. 2 (1997): 233-235.

<sup>88</sup> George Sessions, "Deep Ecology versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Differences or Incompatible Philosophies?", *Hypatia* vol. 5 no.1 (1991): 100.

particular beings and systems.”<sup>88</sup> Plumwood adds that ecofeminism does not seek to “sacrifice the critique of anthropocentrism, but to deepen and enrich it.”<sup>89</sup>

Exposing the dualistic frameworks that we have existed, and continue to exist in, differs from a careful analysis of how those dualistic frameworks have been at the roots of systemic oppressions of the earth, women, people of color, and all others who have been deemed lesser. This is the ‘crucial dimension of history’ that links forms of oppression together, and what Sessions describes as the “common logic and values of sexism and naturism.”<sup>90</sup> In identifying androcentrism and its products, ecofeminism illuminates the space where deep ecology has left a patriarchal ideology in the shadows. Ecofeminism begins from a recognition and historical analysis of patriarchy and sexism, positioning itself to critically address dualisms in a manner that refuses to invert the dualism and simply elevate that which has been demeaned, but rather, honors, cherishes, and values difference as necessary in restoring ecological (in the most broad sense) balance. Were sexism not an historically embedded reality operating upon our relationships (to earth, to each other), ideologies, and societal structures, deep ecology may have presented a more sustainable and keen program for planetary and spiritual wholeness and a just society.<sup>91</sup>

Ecofeminism holds that the necessary societal shifts are only attainable through a thorough reorientation of our ways of knowing, ways of relating, and our understandings of

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<sup>89</sup> Val Plumwood, “Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism,” *Hypatia* vol. 6, no.1 (1991): 22.

<sup>90</sup> Sessions, “Deep Ecology vs Ecofeminism,” 99.

<sup>91</sup> For further debate between deep ecology and ecofeminism see Ariel Salleh, “Class, Race, and Gender Discourse in the Ecofeminism/Deep Ecology Debate,” *Environmental Ethics* vol. 15 (1993), 225-244.

ourselves and others in the world, which begins with unraveling dominant logics reliant upon “formulaic dualism and hierarchy.”<sup>92</sup> The necessity of these shifts is echoed by spiritual ecofeminist Carol Christ, who submits that “the crisis that threatens the destruction of the Earth is not only social, political, economic, and technological, but is at root spiritual,” and suggests that recovery is found in a “rethinking of the relation of both humanity and divinity in nature.”<sup>93</sup>

#### ECOFEMINIST THEOLOGIES AND THE ECOLOGICAL SELF

While both deep ecology and ecofeminism affirm that the ecological self is indeed a highly relational and communally-oriented self, deep ecology’s predilection for an expanded self with increased identification with the other-than-human fails to acknowledge critical *differences* between earth creatures and other forms of life with which we share our habitats and the planet. Ecofeminist theologian Sallie McFague suggests that the denial of difference between species in favor of a flattened biocentric egalitarianism amounts to speciesism, and contends that “the refusal to appreciate them [other species] *in their difference*, their differences from us and from each other that require, for instance, special and particular habitats, food, privacy, and whatever else each species needs to flourish.”<sup>94</sup> This denial of difference stems from the androcentrism that feminists accuse deep ecology of harboring. In a reality in which women have historically been marginalized and denied agency and individuated personhood, a denial of difference does nothing to undercut and dismantle sexist constructs. At the heart of this concern about difference is *embodiment*, a primary presupposition for ecofeminist theologies that grants

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<sup>92</sup> Howell, “Ecofeminism,” 234.

<sup>93</sup> Carol Christ, “Rethinking Theology and Nature,” in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), 58.

<sup>94</sup> Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 121. [hereafter cited as *Body of God*]

intrinsic value to particularity, and which affirms particularity as unique sites for constructing theologies.

Explorations of the self—which often overlook one’s environment—are uniquely theological, as they assume a particular cosmology and understanding of the world. As feminism and religion/spiritualities have been long time dialogue partners, ecofeminism also engages religion/spirituality, exploring the social, ethical, and philosophical associations and critiques found within religious systems such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity among others.

While there have been a number of theologians within Christianity who have dedicated their work to seriously considering the religious remedies to ecological distress, few have been as accessible and constructive as Sallie McFague. Over the past three decades her corpus has consistently engaged in feminist critique of Christianity while attempting to offer viable alternatives within the tradition in hopes of constructing truly contemporary and livable theologies for earthly liberation.

### **McFAGUE’S CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY WITHIN ECOLOGICAL REALITIES**

A significant theological contribution from McFague has been her exegesis of metaphor as the primary way that we express and understand God in relation to ourselves, and the inadequacy of traditional God-language. Language is both powerful and severely limited. McFague suggests, “What we call something, how we name it, is to a great extent what it is to us. We are the preeminent creatures of language, and though language does not exhaust human reality, it qualifies it in profound ways.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, the language used to describe the God-world

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<sup>95</sup> Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 3. [hereafter cited as *Models*]

relationship, one of the fundamental components of theological thought, has significant influence on the religious-ethical imagination; the relationship between cosmology and anthropology is such that what we believe about the universe and our planet determines what we believe about ourselves and how we integrate our identities into the story of our planet. Further, what theology has to say about the character and identity of God undergirds religious self-understanding and participation within the world.

When patriarchal metaphors for God enjoy a sacred hegemony, concentric circles of theological categories around God-language become infused with similar ideologies. Ultimately, “The [traditional] model views power as control, is anthropocentric to the neglect of the rest of creation, understands relationships externally, and removes responsibility from human beings. God’s love *is* transcendent—as is a king’s or absent father’s—but it is not immanent: we do not live and move and have our being in this God.”<sup>96</sup> According to Rosemary Radford Ruether:

The idea of the male monotheistic God, and the relation of this God to the cosmos as its Creator, have reinforced symbolically the relations of domination of men over women, masters over slaves, and (male ruling-class) humans over animals and over the earth. Domination of women has provided a key link, both socially and symbolically, to the domination of earth.<sup>97</sup>

## **THE WORLD AS GOD’S BODY AND THE ECOLOGICAL SELF**

The attention of this project is focused upon framing the need for a revitalized sense of self in Christian thought that is firmly ecological. This sense of self stems from the foundational religious concepts of cosmology and the God-world relationship. As the traditional Christian cosmology and subsequent anthropology are rooted within a male-centered metaphor, our

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<sup>96</sup> Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 139.

<sup>97</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology*, 3.

contemporary context of global climate change requires that such metaphors must either be demythologized and rejected, or redrawn and remythologized.<sup>98</sup> McFague's alternative to traditional Christian cosmology suggests that we reorient both cosmology and anthropology around an understanding of *the world as God's body*.<sup>99</sup>

In this metaphorical model, the world as the body of God implies that, "God would not be transcendent over the universe in the sense of external to or apart from, but would be the source, power, and goal—the spirit—that enlivens (and loves) the entire process and its material forms."<sup>100</sup> The embodiment of God in the materiality of the world—in every *body*, contaminated river, lush landscape, roadside, strip-mined mountain and leopard slug—demands a drastic shift in our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. While God intimately pulses through all life, this model does not mean "granting consciousness to amoebas, let alone to rocks, but it is to relativize the differences that have in the past been viewed as absolutes."<sup>101</sup> Such differences are those that emerge from a hierarchically ordered image of creation influenced by the Neoplatonic great chain of being, ordering all life forms from the most spiritual (God) to the most bodily and unspiritual (minerals). As discussed above, neither does this flatten humans, other-than-humans and God onto one plane. Rather, it reorients the relationships and

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<sup>98</sup> *Models*, xi.

<sup>99</sup> One of the primary sources for the developed idea of the world as God's body comes from Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1964); McFague employs this *model* alongside a cache of other models. These models (God as *Mother*, God as *Lover*, and God as *Friend*) seek to decenter the monarchical model, offering relational images that resist the power, distance, civic authority, and explicit masculinity that has dictated traditional God-language. She contends that employing these personal models alongside the body model resists pantheism. McFague does not substitute feminine images and metaphors for the established masculine God-language, but allows them to sit side-by-side and challenge the anthropomorphic act of gendering the Divine, which locates the experience of God within our finite range of human experience, language, and relations.

<sup>100</sup> *Body of God*, 20.

<sup>101</sup> *Models*, 11.

responsibilities of humans away from hierarchy and domination—based on a mechanistic and individualistic view of the nature—toward mutuality and interdependence in which all bodies matter for planetary well-being; both the pain and the well-being of bodies and the planet is absorbed by God, by all bodies.

This model for engaging the Divine and our world lays the groundwork for the beginnings of an ecotheological anthropology. With a renewed vision toward all life and all creation humans are no longer simply “*individuals in relation to God*, either properly or improperly related.”<sup>102</sup> This dissolution of anthropocentrism means that we no longer measure the value and worth of other creatures (or people, based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation) because we understand our relatedness to them and our shared role as co-inhabitant responsible for our habitats. “It is this combination of responsibility and interdependence that is the key to contemporary, scientific anthropology.”<sup>103</sup> She suggests that our context of global climate change may be the strongest indicator for the need to reorient, internalize, and live within a new anthropology, as climate change is a “quintessential example of interrelationship and interdependence.”<sup>104</sup> Global climate change implicates the highly consumptive patterns of living emerging from the individualistic and capitalist West, historically shaped by the Protestant-colonialist tradition. Theological reflection on anthropogenic climate change brings to the forefront issues of privilege, power, inequality, as well as sustainability, responsibility for life, and prophetic prose around economics and politics.

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<sup>102</sup> Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 45.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 48.

Against fierce individualism, the ecological self is fundamentally social. In a similar fashion to the model presented by deep ecology, here the self is also constituted by relationship, with the assumption that relationships are intrinsic rather than an extrinsic action one consciously engages in. The ecological self is enlarged, but not to the expansive, obfuscating extent as suggested deep ecology. This enlarged self is essential to an ecological identity, as it measures its health and well-being in correlation to the health and well-being of others (human and other) it shares an ecosystem (or planet) with, and “pushes back the boundaries, enlarging the sense of who and what one cares for.”<sup>105</sup> The ecofeminist theological vision for the ecological self differs from deep ecology in its affirmation of individuality-particularity as opposed to sameness and mutual incorporation. This affirmation “is not a generalized, sentimental love for all beings, but the realization that one’s own self and all other subjects are connected by networks that support both flourishing and diminishment”<sup>106</sup> This is the understanding of self and the world that comprises an ecotheological anthropology and inhabits the biblical command to love God; if our world is the space that is suffused with God’s being, to love creatures and the earth is to tend to God.

#### **RECONSTRUCTING COSMOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY FOR AN ECOLOGICAL AGE**

As explored in the first chapter, traditional cosmology within Christianity has followed the great creation story that begins the Hebrew Pentateuch. The story is predicated upon a transcendent Creator God, distinct from the world that he is creating. The Creator God molded all life into being, creating plants and sea creatures, flying creatures, land animals, earth habitats,

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<sup>105</sup> Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How Christians Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1997), 163.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.



and finally, humans. It follows that those created would honor and worship the one responsible for inventing life and a world to inhabit. But how does the world as God's body change transform Christianity's cosmology? The turn away from anthropocentrism necessitated by global climate change creates space for a *cosmocentrism*, an orientation toward the earth and our relations within the great web of creation.

This shift is an invitation to do theology from the context of the earth, rather than the limited context of humans. Keeping in mind our body metaphor, McFague writes, "If the entire universe, all that is and has been, is God's body, then God acts in and through the incredibly complex physical and historical-cultural evolutionary process that began eons ago."<sup>107</sup> This represents a momentous shift from a political or sin-redemption paradigm as the context for traditional theology, as well as an invitation for modern science to play a significant role in contextualizing theology.

It is here that we turn toward the 'common creation story.' The biblical stories of creation and the cosmology developed from the biblical world fail to adequately provide an ethic of inhabitation that meets the needs of our contemporary context, and certainly do not align with our contemporary scientific understandings of the universe and our planetary *oikos*.<sup>108</sup> The theological model of the world as God's body does not envision a God outside and above existence, creating the universe *ex nihilo*, but unfolding and self-revealing with and within it. Ecofeminist theologies suggest that the scientific story of life's emergence can no longer be treated as a threat to Christian theology or belief in God, but must be welcomed as a story that

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<sup>107</sup> *Models*, 73.

<sup>108</sup> McFague, along with many other ecotheologians, does not pretend to speak as one trained in cosmology or science, but primarily as a theologian who yields to science outside the fundamental expressions of *belief* in God.

reveals our common origins, shared carbon, and a cosmic genealogy that precedes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. While some theologians and biblical scholars have sought to reform the interpretive traditions (“greening Christianity”) of biblical creation to be more accommodating to environmental concern and ecological critiques, these efforts continue to be insufficient in as much as they lack adequate critiques of the God-world relationship. As the scientific story of life emergence presents a non-theistic, non-religious account of universe origins and human origins, it can become a source of unity rather than division and religious competition. The infusion of scientific cosmology into the world’s religions as a legitimate and authoritative source, it is argued, will heighten awareness of our world’s ecological crises and motivate people of faith to mobilize together for remedial change and earth healing. Holmes Rolston suggests that “the long evolutionary history ... commands respect, as biologists recognize, even reverence, as theologians claim. When one celebrates the biodiversity and wonders whether there is a systemic tendency to produce it, biology and theology become natural allies.”<sup>109</sup> This wonder and amazement at creation—whether one believes there is a Creator or not—is what McFague and other theologians believe has the power to unite both science and religion to tend to a damaged earth.

### **CRITICISM OF MCFAGUE’S PROJECT**

McFague offers significant contributions to theology, addressing the metaphorical and cosmological dimensions of Christianity that so profoundly effect theological anthropology. But is hers a theology that is explicitly Christian, and does it have the mobility to move from theory

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<sup>109</sup> Holmes Rolston, "Science and Religion in the Face of the Environmental Crisis," in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://0-www.oxfordhandbooks.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178722.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195178722-e-18>.

to the mainstream? McFague's Christology raises questions about orthodoxy, as does her commitment to panentheism, but I wish to focus on a separate, important critique regarding her vision for an engaged cosmological perspective.<sup>110</sup>

I wish to disagree with McFague's proposal for adopting a common creation story as a remedy for anthropocentric ethics rooted in religious creation myths. She suggests that "if we are to turn away from anthropocentrism ... we need a *functional* creation story ... that will help all of us live justly and sustainably in our home, planet earth."<sup>111</sup> This is not a unique suggestion among ecologically sensitive theologians, many of whom suggest that a common story of origins powerfully evokes a necessary 'cosmocentrism' rather than an emphasis on human mastery over the earth.<sup>112</sup> If this alternative story, rooted in the scientific picture of the emergence of life, were to "become a permanent and deep aspect of our sensibility," McFague writes, "it would be the beginning of an evolutionary, ecological, theological anthropology that could have immense significance in transforming how we think about ourselves as well as our relations and responsibilities toward other human beings, other species," and the planet upon which we live.<sup>113</sup> Her assertion is that the adherence to such a story suggests that our "primary loyalty should not be to nation or religion, but to the earth and its creator (albeit we would understand that creator

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<sup>110</sup> See McFague, "An Ecological Christology: Does Christianity Have It?" in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, eds. Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990); Kwok Pui-Lan, "Response to Sallie McFague," in *Christianity and Ecology* (2000).

<sup>111</sup> McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*, 49.

<sup>112</sup> See Paul F. Knitter, "A Common Creation Story? Interreligious Dialogue and Ecology," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol.37, nos. 3-4 (2000): 285-300. Knitter, wary of the universalizing language that a common creation story can impose, suggests that rather than beginning with religious foundations, a common, or *functional* creation story ought to be guided by an ethic of care for the earth. See also Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

<sup>113</sup> *Body of God*, 106.

in different ways).”<sup>114</sup> However, this problematically subsumes the myriad etiologies existent around the globe into one scientifically oriented story of emergence that delegitimizes and devalues religious and Indigenous traditions, many of which promote the kind of ecological holism and care she advocates for. Though deeply critical of the role Christianity has played in the ecological crisis, Lynn White’s vital essay maintains, “Since the roots of our ecological troubles are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious.”<sup>115</sup> Erasing the religious cosmologies that infuse cultures and religious traditions is a colonialist tradition that must be resisted. Regarding Christianity, rather than dismissing biblical creation accounts entirely, Judeo-Christian cosmologies can benefit from being remythologized and removed from the throne of literalism to minimize the friction between science and faith.

In conclusion, the ecofeminist theological vision offers substantial corrective measures to both Christian theology and deep ecology. It provides an entirely different framework for theological reflection and understanding ourselves in relation to both God and to the world and all its creatures. It is distinctly ecological, body-oriented, cosmocentric, and yields a oriented anthropology that includes earth-others within its moral scope and understands the self-revelation of God to be profoundly embedded in all of earth’s organic processes. Similar themes, particularly that of a relational-social anthropology, will emerge again as we next explore the ecophilosophy of social ecology in search for its understanding of an ecological self.

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<sup>114</sup> *Body of God*, 107.

<sup>115</sup> Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* vol. 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1207.

## CHAPTER 5

### SOCIAL ECOLOGY

The previous two chapters have examined the contours of deep ecology and ecofeminism in an attempt to understand their interpretations of the human person embedded within the earth-*oikos* and their comprehensions of the ecological self. Similarities have surfaced, but emphases on difference, particularity, and embodiment drawn from feminist philosophy set ecofeminism apart from deep ecology. Social ecology, a radical green movement that emerged with the theorist Murray Bookchin from within the milieu of deep ecology and ecofeminism in the 1960s and 70s, finds itself nearer to ecofeminism than deep ecology, but quite different from both in its social analyses and ecological presuppositions rooted in Marxist communitarianism and anarchism.

#### LOCATING SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Social ecology grounds its sociopolitical analysis and critique upon the notion that the ecological crises that have emerged in the modern world are all deeply rooted in social problems that must be addressed anticipatorily and alongside ecological problems.<sup>116</sup> Partially intersecting with ecofeminist analyses, Bookchin contends: “Economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts,

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<sup>116</sup> Murray Bookchin, “What is Social Ecology?” in *Social Ecology and Communalism*, ed. Eirik Eiglad (Oakland: AK Press, 2007), 19.

among many others, lie at the core of the most serious ecological dislocations we face today.”<sup>117</sup>

This comprises the ‘social’ nature of social ecology, and Bookchin deduces that human-human relationships based on hierarchy and class are so destructively pervasive and enduring that they have expanded beyond human persons and led to the human domination of nature.<sup>118</sup> Further intersecting with ecofeminist hopes for an egalitarian and ecological society, social ecology carries a unfeigned optimism regarding humanity’s potential to experience equality, autonomy, freedom from domination, a rejuvenated and fecund earth, and recognizes the connections between these aims. Where ecofeminism primarily lodges its critique toward institutionalized androcentrism, patriarchy, and the logics of domination, social ecology—while not denying such critiques—situates itself as a radical eco-political movement concerned with the dissolution of the State and capitalism as the avenue toward an ecological, non-hierarchical and egalitarian society.<sup>119</sup> Bookchin frames the contributing factors of our contemporary ecological crises as *pathology*:

Unless we realize that the present market society, structured around the brutally competitive imperative of “grow or die,” is a thoroughly impersonal, self-operating mechanism, we will falsely tend to blame other phenomena—such as technology or population growth—for growing environmental dislocations. We will ignore

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<sup>117</sup> Bookchin, “What is Social Ecology?”, 19.

<sup>118</sup> For Bookchin, the ‘emergence of hierarchy’ is a deeply historical, anthropological event that collided with human interactions with the earth and other-than-human to normalize a pattern of anthropocentrism and domination over other humans and the natural world. Others contend that the progenitorial relationships of domination between humans and the earth emerged within the past few centuries with the onset of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. See Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980).

<sup>119</sup> Bookchin highlights the underdeveloped nature and sensibilities of social ecologies political aspirations and emphasizes the “persistent need to confront the psychic problems of hierarchy as well as social problems of domination,” in which he is influenced by “radical forms of feminism that encompass the psychological dimensions of male domination, indeed, domination itself” [*Ecology of Freedom* (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982), 340-341].

their *root* causes, such as trade for profit, industrial expansion for its own sake, and the identification of progress with corporate self-interest. In short, we will tend to focus on the *symptoms* of a grim social pathology rather than on the pathology itself.<sup>120</sup>

## ON NATURE

Bookchin's attempts to avoid the culture/nature dualism by theorizing the natural world and the human phenomenon categorically into *first nature* and *second nature*. First nature refers to the biotic and biological factors that are the propellers of evolutionary life, whereas second nature refers to the social factors that have emerged from within the biotic sphere of first nature; in this schema, humanity and the natural world are interwoven by evolution into *one nature*.<sup>121</sup> Social ecology claims to conceive of nature as a developmental process, rather than a fixed and static image. This processual picture of nature locates humanity within organic evolution, thus firmly embedded within nature, and demands a processual posture toward both nature (first and second) for a flourishing earth community:

... the social development by which [humans] grade out of their biological development often becomes more problematical for themselves and nonhuman life. How these problems emerge, the ideologies they produce, the extent to which they contribute to biota evolution or abort it, and the damage they inflict on the planet as a whole lie at the very heart of the modern ecological crisis. Second nature as it exists today, far from marking the fulfillment of human potentialities, is riddled by contradictions, antagonisms, and conflicting interests that have distorted humanity's unique capacities for development.<sup>122</sup>

While humans are deeply embedded within nature and exist as examples of highly developed evolutionary beings (first nature), it is the social development and social evolution

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<sup>120</sup> Bookchin, "What is Social Ecology?", 20.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 31.

(second nature) that has impeded the potential for an egalitarian and ecological society. Rather than incriminating momentous anthropological shifts such as the scientific revolution, industrialization, or even capitalism, social ecology locates the genesis of the domination of nature and the culture/nature split squarely within institutionalized hierarchical relationships that first emerged from the domination of humans over other humans.

### **TOWARD AN ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

Bookchin's ecological thought bears strong influences from Marx and Engels' writing on the division between 'town and country.'<sup>123</sup> This separation produced significant changes in the organizational and communal life; with the leap toward centralization and technological labor people become less bound by "family, tribe, the land itself, etc.," in ways that promote local community and a sense of responsibility toward the land and toward each other.<sup>124</sup> This led Bookchin to explore the roots of the separation between town and country, the larger ramifications of this split between culture and nature, and possibilities for reintegration.

For Marx and Engels, the separation between town and country generated a two-class division (division of labor/instruments of production) and persists only within "the framework of private property" in which "power *over* individuals" is fundamental, and *community* and *association* become dwarfed by labor and capital.<sup>125</sup> Rather, it is exclusively within the context of meaningful community that the "individual has the means of cultivating his gifts in all

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<sup>123</sup> "The greatest division of material and mental labour is the separation of town and country. The antagonism between town and country begins with the transition from barbarism to civilisation, from tribe to State, from locality to nation, and runs through the whole history of civilisation to present day" [Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (S.I.: International Publishers, 1970), 68-69].

<sup>124</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 68.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 69, 83.



directions,” and within which “personal freedom” becomes possible, a reality primarily reserved for those in the ruling class.<sup>126</sup> While Bookchin inherits a great deal from Marx, with special regard toward freedom and his conception of the ecological society, the nature of humans and the relationship between humanity and nature is an area in which Bookchin breaks from Marx.

The antagonistic stance toward nature expressed by the social theorists that shaped our current world (which Marx also assumed) presents nature as “‘stingy,’ an unforgiving and deceptive ‘mother’” that has forced humanity to wrestle and struggle against the natural world in order to acquire even a meagre subsistence.<sup>127</sup> Bookchin writes, “Humanity's emergence from the constrictive world of natural scarcity has thus been perceived as a largely technical problem of placing the un giving forces of nature under social command, creating and increasing surpluses, dividing labor (notably, separating crafts from agriculture), and sustaining intellectually productive urban elites.”<sup>128</sup> Where such an assessment of the human-nature relationship becomes problematic for Bookchin is in Marx’s “emphasis on human domination as an unavoidable feature of humanity’s domination of the natural world.”<sup>129</sup> In this schema, “the negative side of [humanity’s] development” emerges as technology and industry combat “the problem of natural scarcity” and humanity becomes reduced “to a technical force” in which “people become instruments of production, just like the tools and machines they create.”<sup>130</sup> As such, according to

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<sup>126</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 83.

<sup>127</sup> Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, 64.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

Bookchin, human persons are thus “subject to the same forms of coordination, rationalization, and control that society tries to impose on nature and inanimate technical instruments.”<sup>131</sup>

Janet Biehl observes that from his earliest writings, Bookchin exhibits concern for reconciling humans and nature “in a particular kind of society, in which ‘rounded’ human communities would be sensitively embedded in nonhuman nature.”<sup>132</sup> Despite his indebtedness to Marx, Bookchin’s ecological society is not distinctly Marxist, but anarchist. This anarchist impulse within social ecology argues that “the development of egalitarian, small-scale communities, bolstered by participative and cooperative decision-making processes” presents a workable alternative to present structures and a path to address the ecological-social crises facing the earth and its inhabitants.<sup>133</sup> As an anarchist aspiration, the dissolution of the state is central to social ecology because of the state’s complicity in these social-ecological crises due to institutionalized domination that has ruptured the relations between human and non-human life alike.<sup>134</sup> The way that hierarchy shapes the human psyche and psychological conditions (an aspect of second nature) persuades humans to “extend principles and practices of hierarchy and domination to all aspects of social life, including their relationship with the natural world.”<sup>135</sup> Bookchin makes the claim that hierarchy “is not merely a social condition; it is also a state of

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<sup>131</sup> Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, 65.

<sup>132</sup> Murray Bookchin, *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, ed. Janet Biehl (Washington: Cassell, 1997), 14.

<sup>133</sup> Giorel Currant, “Murray Bookchin and the Domination of Nature,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, no.2 (1999): 60.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Currant, “Murray Bookchin and the Domination of Nature,” 62. Marx and Engels observe that “the identity of nature and man appears in such a way that the restricted relation of men to nature determines their restricted relation to one another, and their restricted relation to one another determines men’s restricted relation to nature” (*The German Ideology*, 51).

consciousness, a sensibility toward phenomena at every level of personal and social experience.”<sup>136</sup> This totalizing affect of hierarchy on human relationships and its consequences upon second nature are responsible for ecological-social crises, and thus nothing short of sweeping reorganization around non-hierarchy and non-domination will begin to build a sustainable, ecological society.

The decentralized eco-communities that comprise Bookchin’s ecological vision are “artistically molded to the ecosystems in which they are located,” and, rather than arbitrary state-oriented boundaries, land becomes a patchwork quilt of ecologically defined bioregions. The reorganization around bioregional boundaries is accompanied by a “radical transformation of values that replaces economistic values, consumer culture, and the egocentric self with ecological, communitarian, libertarian values and a compassionate, non-dominating, social self.”<sup>137</sup> Vital to this vision for a renewed earth community is the dismantling of the atomistic, isolated, and highly individualized self in favor of a communally-oriented self bent toward mutuality rather than competition.

Dreaming of this ecological society with Murray Bookchin often seems quite fantastical given the constraints of capitalism upon the political imagination. To connect Bookchin's vision with this larger ecotheological project I would like to intersect the ecological society of social

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<sup>136</sup> Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, 4.

<sup>137</sup> John Clark, “The Matter of Freedom: Ecofeminist Lesson for Social Ecology,” in *Capitalism Nature Socialism* vol.11, no. 3 (2000): 64-65.

ecology with the eschatological vision of a renewed earth in Christian theology and the Second Testament concept of Christian freedom expressed by the Apostle Paul.<sup>138</sup>

### **ANARCHISM, THE ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY, AND CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY**

Anarchy, at its most basic level, is society without government. Anarchism includes within its scope both negative and positive assessments: “disorder and chaos” negatively speaking, and positively speaking, the “sense of a free society in which rule is no longer necessary.”<sup>139</sup> At its core lie four key components: “a particular view of human nature, a critique of the existing order, a vision of a free society, and a way to achieve it.”<sup>140</sup> The ultimate aim of anarchism as a political philosophy is the establishment of a “free society which allows all human beings to realize their full potential.”<sup>141</sup> Rather than an entirely chaotic society sans order and reason, such a free society must be profoundly democratic and entirely supported by the community of citizens, each person granted an equal weight in the direction of their community.<sup>142</sup> This directly relates to the key component of a particular view of human nature, and begins to paint a picture of the *ecological self* within social ecology; this optimistic view of humanity emphasizes *citizenship* and *community*, and egalitarianism rather than professionalization. The ecological self, then, is a person-in-community, fully engaged in the

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<sup>138</sup> Though metaphorically problematic, the familiar language of “the kingdom of God” finds significant points of intersection with the ecological society imagined by social ecology and its roots in anarchist visions for society.

<sup>139</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> For Bookchin, nowhere was this more actualized than in the ancient Athenian *polis*, and exemplified by the Greek concept of “*autarkia*, of individual self-sufficiency graced by an all-roundedness of selfhood,” the foundation for Athenian democracy (*Ecology of Freedom*, 131).

political life of the city, responsible for both individual and collective, and symbolized by the ancient Athenian.<sup>143</sup>

Like deep ecology and ecofeminism, social ecology acknowledges the interconnectedness of life, but interconnectedness is not the primary aim of human persons. Instead, social ecology posits that humanity is fundamentally oriented toward freedom in the same sense that the natural world is arced toward fecundity and freedom. However, the forms of domination experienced between humans are exported to human domination of the earth. This pervasive reality interrupts and prohibits freedom and the realization of the full potential of human experience. Dismantling systems of domination that hinder interconnection and ecological community lies at the heart of the anarchist impulse permeating social ecology. Thus, the ecological self is a free self, resisting the temptation to dominate others (both human and other-than-human), and instead practicing equality and mutuality in the various spheres of social life.

Non-domination, inherent to anarchism, is a key component of social ecology's vision for freedom; it has been popularly expressed through the anarchist dictum, '*No gods, no masters.*' While this indeed pits anarchism against Christianity (and all religions), I wish to make a case for the intersection of anarchism and Christianity around the concept of freedom through an understanding of human persons congruent with social ecology and the teleological thrust of Christianity exemplified in the eschatological visions of Revelation 21-22.

The anarchist impulse behind social ecology aspires to transform society toward expansive notions of individual and social freedom. As implied by Bookchin, the ecological

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<sup>143</sup> Consequently, such an ecological self does not exist outside of the ultimately democratic ecological society, yet citizens can (and do) create non-dominating and egalitarian communities within the shell of the authoritarian political society as a means of resistance and in hope for possible futures.

society “is a thoroughgoing critique aimed at a thoroughgoing remaking and restructuring of society. It views this as essential if everyone is to be free, and if humanity is to harmonize itself with the nonhuman world.”<sup>144</sup> A primary assumption within anarchism, and in Bookchin’s assessment of the emergence of domination in social relations, is that hierarchy and domination are *interruptions* of freedom. The vision of social ecology entails a movement toward recapturing this freedom through the decentralized ecological society, comprised of self-governing confederations designated by ecological zones and bioregions that function sustainably within the carrying capacities of such regions, reuniting agriculture and industry (in opposition to the town/country polarity), and releasing human persons to “realize their potentialities as members of the human community and the natural world.”<sup>145</sup>

Bookchin’s decrying of injustice, inequality, and ecological disruption emerges from the assumptions that domination and hierarchy are the source of these great evils. “The history of ‘civilization’ has”, according to Bookchin, “been a steady process of estrangement from nature that has increasingly developed into outright antagonism.”<sup>146</sup> Bookchin draws on the biblical creation narrative in imagining his ecological vision: “That humanity was expelled from the Garden of Eden does not mean that we must turn an antagonistic face toward nature; rather, it is a metaphor for a new, eminently ecological function: the need to create more fecund gardens than Eden itself.”<sup>147</sup> The wildly utopian vision imagined by Bookchin, that of a renewed earth

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<sup>144</sup> Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and its Aspirations* (Washington, D.C: AK Press, 2010), 32.

<sup>145</sup> Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986), 104.

<sup>146</sup> Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, 315.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

community living in harmony with each other and with the natural world, finds resonance in the eschatological vision of Revelation 21-22.

The unveiling of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:3-5) offers a vision of radical renewal, peace, restoration, a re-integration of nature and culture, and of freedom: freedom from death and freedom from domination. As the visions persist, an angel reveals to John the magnificent trees of life presiding over the river of the water of life flowing through the glorified city (Rev. 22:1-2; Ezek 47:12). The fantastic disclosure recorded by John paints a utopian portrait of the telos of creation that inspires hope in the face of adversity. Recalling the four key components of anarchism listed above (particular view of human nature, critique of society, vision for a new society, and a plan for moving from the old to the new), the Revelation to John contains an apocalyptic critique of the current order of society and a vision for the renewed society. Missing from the quartet of the anarchist paradigm in Revelation is a particular view of human nature and a coherent path from the current order to the renewed world, nor is the latter something to be found among biblical literature given the certain and imminent *parousia* attested to in the Second Testament canon; for the biblical authors, the arrival of the end was not an event prompted by humans, but only by the will of God. However, the anarchist aspirations toward human freedom do find resonance and points of intersect within the Second Testament.

### **CALLED TO FREEDOM**

The Epistle to the Galatians, Paul's upbraiding missive to the Christians in Galatia employs the concept of *freedom* as a means to resolving controversy facing the Christian community in Galatia. Paul recounts an event involving 'false brothers' who, according to Paul, infiltrated the ranks of believers in Jerusalem to spy on the freedom they enjoyed in order to

enslave them (Gal. 2:4). Paul asserts that it is “for freedom Christ has set us free” (5:1). In Paul’s statements to the Galatians, it is not through obedience to Jewish law that Gentiles were connected to the Christ, but by “faith working through love” (5:6). As the letter crescendos (5:13-15) The burden of living underneath an authoritative body such as the law was incongruent with what Paul saw as the nucleus of the Christian faith.

Despite his own conflicted relationship to freedom and power, Martin Luther’s reading of Paul captures the dual nature of freedom and resonates with the anarchist understanding of freedom. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther establishes two theses on freedom:

1. A Christian is lord of all, completely free of everything.
2. A Christian is a servant, completely attentive to the needs of all.<sup>148</sup>

Peter Marshall notes that while anarchists tend to “expand human freedom in the negative sense of being free from restraint,” freedom is largely seen in a positive “sense of being free to do what one likes and to realize one’s full potential.”<sup>149</sup> Freedom is not simply freedom *from* something, but it is also freedom *to* be able to do something. For Paul and for Luther, the Christian life transcends law and authority in that it love of others compels persons to act rightly (lawfully) toward one another, and is thus in no need of a governing body or legal code. In a different sense, such freedom invokes a particular responsibility toward others. “We ought to use this liberty,” Luther continues, “to empty ourselves, take on the form of servants, take on human

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<sup>148</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, trans. Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 50.

<sup>149</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 36.



form, and become human in order to serve and help our neighbors in every possible way.”<sup>150</sup> To live in freedom is to become fully human.

According to Luther, we do not exist within our bodies to focus merely on ourselves, but “live with all other people on earth,” and the reason for our freedom is to serve our neighbors and to invite them to freedom as well.<sup>151</sup> Freedom is communally oriented and has as its aim balance between the individual and the other.<sup>152</sup> Luther's theses on freedom and community need not be restricted to human persons. Indeed, his translator notes that his Latin *nulli subiectus* encompasses a wide range of life experiences in his essay, “including inanimate things like money, property, and diet,” and must also extend to our engagement and relationship with the earth and its inhabitants.

## EVALUATING SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Bookchin's social ecology provides an important perspective for theological reflection when placed within an eschatological framework. His highly utopian, communitarian vision for a flourishing and egalitarian, ecologically oriented humanism is unavoidably redemptive, with the free, ecological anarchism acting as savior. The decentralized and bioregionally organized vision for earth healing is ripe with hope for earth communities to undergo a profound *metanoia*, and a chance to participate in ecological redemption. Both social ecology and Christianity exist with a

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<sup>150</sup> Luther, *Freedom*, 82.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>152</sup> Community and freedom are also significant themes in the interrelationship between the persons of the Godhead in social trinitarianism, which also has intersections with anarchist thought. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005); Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (Chicago: HarperOne, 1993).

profound hope that another world is possible, both seek to build such a world within the shell of the old one, and both understand freedom to play a significant role in the process as an anarchist impulse beats through both.<sup>153</sup> Drawing connections between anarchism and Christianity can employ radical hermeneutics toward ecologically sensitive theologies.

The free human person in Bookchin's vision is never an isolated individual, but always a person in community. Autonomy is counterbalanced by ecological citizenship, and participation in direct democracy becomes an essential component for persons-in-community. The atomistic and reductionist vision of human persons that dominates in capitalist environments is opposed, and affirmed in its place is a commitment to *unity in diversity*; the human person experiences wholeness within a diverse web of relations marked by freedom from domination.

However, as Ulrike Heider notes, precisely how Bookchin's "anarchist ecosystem is supposed to function politically and economically remains clouded in the fog of utopian promise."<sup>154</sup> Still deeply clouded, the redemptive 'ecological society' indeed requires a full, thoroughgoing remaking of global communities beyond statism. Curran reminds us that "when large-scale change is sought ... the structures and processes that render small-scale organizations viable do not always emerge as the best processes for effecting large-scale transformation."<sup>155</sup> Bookchin is additionally criticized for the ideology underlying his egalitarian vision, wherein hierarchy and domination are inextricably linked, each interminably implying the other, and "the

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<sup>153</sup> This is not to say that Christianity and anarchism are easily woven together. The dictum 'no gods, no masters,' still stands resolutely between the two traditions.

<sup>154</sup> Ulrike Heider, *Anarchism: Left, Right and Green*, trans. Danny Lewis and Ulrike Bode (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1994), 71.

<sup>155</sup> Curran, "Murray Bookchin and the Domination of Nature," 87.

domination of nature is tightly linked to any and all manifestations of hierarchy.”<sup>156</sup> Such critiques highlight the imaginative and inspirational essence of Bookchin’s work, as well the seeming impossibility of practically remaking society through the hierarchy-dissolving framework of social ecology. Ultimately, according to Damian White, Bookchin’s major critiques of ecologically devastating capitalism must face the nuances of contemporary economics yielding to increased environmental concern, which include “‘coercive conservation’ and ‘carbon trading’, serious industry-sponsored research into industrial ecology, and debt for nature swaps,” found in emerging green capitalisms.<sup>157</sup>

Similar to the ways in which Bookchin has memorialized the Athenians for their execution of democracy and citizenship, ecological oriented literature has memorialized Indigenous peoples of North America for the ways that they modeled ecological holism and profoundly sensitive relationships with nature. The following chapter will examine aspects of Native North American religious life in an attempt to amplify Indigenous perspectives within the spectrum of ecophilosophical thought.

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<sup>156</sup> Joel Kovel, “Negating Bookchin,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* vol. 8 no. 1 (1997): 21.

<sup>157</sup> Damian F. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 150.

## CHAPTER 6

### NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

As we have seen thus far, ideas of what it means to be a human being in an ideally ecological society are ripe with ethical, psychic, political and deeply relational ways of inhabiting our earth-*oikos*. The present chapter will shift our attention away from distinctly Western, mid- to late-twentieth-century ecophilosophical systems, turning toward Native North American understandings of the balance between nature and the ecological self, and their uniqueness in the Christian west.<sup>158</sup> Native American spiritualities are imbued with deeply religious cosmologies that inform Indigenous understandings and interpretations of the earth, bioregions, and the relationships between lands and persons (human and non-human) living together.

The three previous chapters have dealt with ecophilosophies that have been oriented around non-religious, scientific cosmologies that inform particular understandings and interpretations of the earth, its ecosystems, and the interrelations between the earth and its inhabitants. The religious cosmologies and resultant ecological ethics of Native Americans will

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<sup>158</sup> The existence of many tribes and Native communities throughout North America precludes essentialist interpretations of *the* Native American perspective. Each tribe exhibits unique experiences that are dishonored by generalized statements about a singular Indigenous belief or perspective. Additionally, harmonization and integration between Christian theology and Native religion is assumed. Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker observe, a result of settler-colonialism in the form of Christian domination over North American Indigenous peoples has been the infusion of Christian theological concepts within Indian communities in such ways that Native spirituality is thus imbued with a Christian flair [*A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 2].

be contrasted to those of Christianity. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. I will attempt to explore Native American human-nature relationships through cosmology and theological anthropology as it relates to the ecological self, and secondly, I will amplify a Native critique Western epistemology and an inherited Christian concept of history that precludes a Western ecological orientation.

### **A FUNCTIONAL COSMOLOGY**

Jerry Gill argues that the attitudes of Native Americans toward the environment are marked by the “belief that the natural order is only one facet of the cosmic spiritual reality which encompasses and pervades both the heavens and the earth.”<sup>159</sup> In the religious traditions of Native American peoples, a common thread between the various experiences is the enchantment of nature, in which all of creation is alive. This stands in stark contrast to traditional Western views of nature that have rendered it as a lifeless object to be manipulated or exploited for human gain. Such enchanted views of nature can only be sustained by cosmologies that support the sacrality of creation. Further, the existence of multiple cosmologies challenges the notion of a single cosmological story exclusively functional for sustaining an ecologically conscious way of life, and maintains the connection between land, myth, and ecological ethos. John A. Grim argues, “The value placed on sacred relationships with one’s homeland among Indigenous North American peoples is not simply a nationalistic exploitation,” nor are the connections that Native peoples have established with their bioregions merely an “ideological position to be cloned by dominant America.”<sup>160</sup> While there is no singular cosmological framework that encompasses the

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<sup>159</sup> Jerry H. Gill, *Native American Worldviews: An Introduction* (Amherst, NY: Humanities Books, 2002), 177.

<sup>160</sup> John A. Grim, “Native North American Worldviews and Ecology,” in *Worldviews and Ecology* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1993), 42.

entirety of Native American spirituality, there are features that find commonality from people to people and region to region, one of which is the interpretation of the divine.<sup>161</sup> Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker contend that the “American Indian experiences of ‘god’ included almost invariably a bi-gender, reciprocal duality of male and female: e.g., Earth and Sky, Grandmother and Grandfather, Above and Below, Day and Night.”<sup>162</sup> The duality presented here reflects observable pairings in fecund nature and assumes particular divinity to pairs of opposites, differs significantly from the hierarchical dualism of Western thought, and crafts dualistic pairs to represent “a necessary reciprocity.”<sup>163</sup>

This duality immediately sets Indigenous perspectives apart from Western Christianity in terms of conceptualizing deity. This observation confronts the Western Christian way of approaching theological anthropology, which typically seeks to answer questions regarding the nature of humanity by answering questions about the nature of the Divine, in whose image humans are purported to be created. A significant premise of this work is that conceptualizations of the divine influence unique views of self within nature/creation that contribute to the extent to which human persons are understood as part of or apart from and above nature. Randy Woodley notes that this may hold true in Western thinking, but he challenges the notion that a similar relationship between belief and action exists within Native American communities. He argues that for Euro-Americans, beliefs comprise the overwhelming majority of ‘religious reality,’ while ‘practices,’ ‘values,’ and ‘worldview,’ serve together as a subset of the overall picture of religious

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<sup>161</sup> A fuller treatment of stories and cosmologies among Native Americans is outside the scope of this work. The various stories of emergence, creation, and the sacredness of place are presumed to inspire spiritual praxis that orients Native persons to the divine *through* particular knowledge of their bioregional communities.

<sup>162</sup> Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, *A Native American Theology*, 17.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 46.

reality. However, among Indigenous peoples, he submits that the inverse is true, and that beliefs matter far less than ‘practices,’ ‘values,’ and ‘worldview.’<sup>164</sup> To help Western minds categorize this inversion, he contrasts the Indigenous and Western models as “Epistemological Orthopraxis” and “Epistemological Orthodoxy” respectively.<sup>165</sup> Stated another way, “Truth is intimately related to experience” (Indigenous) and “Truth may be unrelated to experience” (Euro-American).<sup>166</sup> This connection between experience and belief finds resonance in the writing of John Mohawk, who argues that it is impossible “for a person to find spiritual life through written or spoken words. To discover one’s relationship to wind, one must experience wind, and to know the spirit of the sun, one must experience the sun. To discover a spiritual life, one must experience spirit, and that means one must live a spiritual way, both personally and in the human community.”<sup>167</sup> Woodley states, “Naturally, most Native Americans would not talk much about their theological ‘belief system’ because we don’t view our beliefs as separate from simply living out our lives.”<sup>168</sup> Abstract reflections on God are disconnected from the earth and from one’s neighbors.

The Indigenous model presents a significantly different way of understanding and experiencing the Divine than Western religious traditions. Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker point to the work of Francis LaFlesche, a Native American and anthropologist who worked with the Osage people in addition to his own Omaha tribe, and translated information regarding the Osage

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<sup>164</sup> Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 108.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 108-9.

<sup>166</sup> Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 108-9.

<sup>167</sup> John Mohawk, *Thinking in Indian: A John Mohawk Reader*, 5.

<sup>168</sup> Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 104.

experience of deity: “Wako<sup>n</sup>da is the name applied by the Osage to the mysterious, invisible, creative power which brings into existence all living things of whatever kind. They believe that this great power resides in the air, the blue sky, the clouds, the stars, the sun, the moon, and the earth, and keeps them in motion.”<sup>169</sup> From LaFlesche’s *Dictionary of the Osage Language*: “Sometimes the Osage speak of a tree, a rock, or a prominent hill as Wako<sup>n</sup>da, but when asked if his people had great numbers of Wako<sup>n</sup>das he would reply, ‘Not so; there is but one God and His presence is in all things and everywhere. We say a tree is Wako<sup>n</sup>da because in it also Wako<sup>n</sup>da resides.’”<sup>170</sup> This nuanced concept of Wako<sup>n</sup>da being present in all things and everywhere while simultaneously remaining distinct corresponds philosophically to panentheism. In this, the *everywhereness* of the Great Spirit—or Creator—represented in the Osage concept of Wako<sup>n</sup>da resists the anthropomorphic concept of God found in Christian doctrine. Indeed, Vine Deloria Jr. notes, “The overwhelming majority of American Indian tribal religions refused to represent deity anthropomorphically. ... While there was an acknowledgement that the Great Spirit has some resemblance to the role of a grandfather in the tribal society, there was no great demand to have a ‘personal relationship’ with the Great Spirit.”<sup>171</sup> Rather than personal relationship with an unseen deity in a world beyond, the relational aspect of Native American religions is oriented around the permeating presence of the Great Spirit within all beings, realized through kin and community.

## **KINSHIP AND HARMONY**

Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker note, “American Indian Indigenous cultures are communitarian/communitist by nature,” and are contoured by the “social structures of kinship

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<sup>169</sup> Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, *A Native American Theology*, 57.

<sup>170</sup> Francis LaFlesche, *Dictionary of the Osage People*, 193. Quoted in Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, 58-59.

<sup>171</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994), 79.



rather than by the importance of the individual. Who one's family is defines one's sense of self."<sup>172</sup> The community of place provides the space in which the Great Spirit is revealed through reciprocity amongst the land, animals, and persons. This translates to a profound sense of relatedness to both the human and the other-than-human, and relates back to our concept of the ecological self. Among Native American worldviews, part of what it means to be human is to be in proper relationship to the other beings around you. Whereas Western thinking may agree with such a notion on the surface, the relational dimension transcends human-human relationships by way of its extension of 'personhood' to non-human life. The relating to other-than-human lifeforms as 'subjects' rather than 'objects' is a critical component of an ecological identity, and in this particular framework, is the result of a cosmology that infuses creation with the presence of the Creator.<sup>173</sup> Within this relatedness and interconnectedness, Woodley acknowledges the resonances between deep ecology and Indigenous views. These include the reciprocity and interconnection of all life, the symbiotic relationship humans have with the created world, the biocentricity of life "in that each part has a role to play in the natural relationship of harmony," and the ability to maintain quality of life without incessant technological progress.<sup>174</sup> However, the two are not without their differences, which are primarily oriented around theistic assumptions not present in deep ecology. Some differences noted by Woodley include the existence of creation *because of* [emphasis added] "a Creator or Sacred Force (the Great Mystery)," the sacredness of life gifted by the Creator, and most significantly, the mitigation of

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<sup>172</sup> Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker. *A Native American Theology*, 15.

<sup>173</sup> Sallie McFague addresses subject-object and subject-subject relationships extensively in *Super Natural, Christians* (2000).

<sup>174</sup> Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 63.

biocentrism to make room for a slight anthropocentrism.<sup>175</sup> Woodley contends that “The role of human beings is unique, and humans relate to the rest of creation uniquely,” which includes “restoring harmony through gratitude, reciprocity, and ceremony between the Creator, humans, and all other parts of creation.”<sup>176</sup> The ecological self is embedded within the creation and imbued with responsibility to maintain harmony and balance in order to sustain creation.

Indeed, the notion of inter-species reciprocity has significant ecological implications. Jordan Paper writes, “Whenever a spirit—animal, plant, stone, or water—is needed, especially for sacred tasks, it is asked to offer itself. One speaks to it and offers a token gift, usually tobacco. One asks that it give itself for one to use in seeking life for one’s family and community.”<sup>177</sup> The spirit of reciprocity operates out of the acknowledgement that “anything and everything that humans do has an effect on the rest of the world around us,” and as a result, reciprocation makes attempts to restore balance and to make amends for taking life.<sup>178</sup> This kind of reciprocity honors the existence of creation in an Indigenous cost-benefit analysis that invokes both the sacred and the material in an attempt to re-establish harmony and balance. The presence of the Great Spirit within all created beings demands empathy, compassion, and unique knowledge of bioregional life-systems to wisely use natural resources in a sustainable manner that maintains flourishing.

This unique reciprocity stems from a fundamental kinship-orientation extending beyond familial ties and human relations, and reflects a larger vision of community that includes all of

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<sup>175</sup> Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 64.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Jordan Paper, *Native North American Religious Traditions: Dancing for Life* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 9-10.

<sup>178</sup> Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker. *A Native American Theology*, 41.

life. Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker illustrate this inclusive kinship with the Sioux phrase *mitayuke oyasin*, commonly translated to, “For all my relations.”<sup>179</sup> They alternatively render the common lexical translation to read: “‘For all the above me and below me and around me things’ .... It is this inter-relatedness that best captures what might symbolize for Indian peoples what Amer-Europeans would call creation.”<sup>180</sup> This inter-relatedness and the maintenance of proper balance and harmony within and amongst these relations, antithetical to Western individualism, is fundamental to Indigenous lifeways. However, these concepts do not preclude autonomy and agency for Indigenous peoples in favor of group identification, as Gill contends that the “community and the individual coexist in a symbiotic relationship.”<sup>181</sup> The striving for balance and harmony among all relations is a significant feature of the ‘ecological self’ within the Native American paradigm. Gill notes, “Striving to maintain one’s balance on the path of life is akin to achieving a fundamental harmony within oneself and in relation to all surrounding forces, both natural and social,” and is “an essential condition of health and wholeness.”<sup>182</sup>

Conversely, a disenchanting view of nature undergirded by competition, domination, individualism and capital yields no such partnership with the created world. Deloria posits that these two distinct ways of seeing and engaging the world are determined by the primary preferences for either time or space. These two categories, the *temporal* and the *spatial* provide abundant fodder for reflection on Western and Indigenous interpretations of reality and ecological commitments.

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<sup>179</sup> Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker, 50.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>181</sup> Jerry H. Gill, *Native American Worldviews: An Introduction* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002), 180.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

## SPACE, TIME, AND REVELATION

The philosophies (to force Western categorization) and ways of being in the world practiced by Native Americans have been lauded as paragons for human-nature relationships, and have had positive—if nebulous—influences upon ecophilosophical schools and green movements. Workineh Kelbessa observes that the “earth-based spirituality of Native American peoples has inspired some environmental ethicists who favor responsible attitudes toward the environment,” and “Native American religions generally have world views that support nature-friendly grand narratives” that have contributed to “genuine respect for the welfare of other life-forms.”<sup>183</sup> Gill contends that the “ecological awareness” displayed by Native Americans “pivots on the distinction between *adapting* to the environment and *altering*” it, with most Indigenous worldviews opting for “the adaptive mode,” seeking to “fit in with nature rather than alter it.”<sup>184</sup> Kelbessa admits, however, that “some critics argue that Indigenous traditions had no awareness of the kinds of ecological crises we face today” and that it is inappropriate to “project contemporary environmental sensibilities” back upon Indigenous peoples.<sup>185</sup> While this is correct, the attitudes toward nature and the narratives practiced by Indigenous peoples are diametrically opposed to those of dominant Western society that have produced unrivaled ecological disruption, and thus demand attention.

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<sup>183</sup> Workineh Kelbessa, “Indigenous Environmental Philosophy,” in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://0-www.oxfordhandbooks.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195328998.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195328998-e-49>.

<sup>184</sup> Gill, *Native American Worldviews*, 175.

<sup>185</sup> Workineh Kelbessa, “Indigenous Environmental Philosophy,” in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://0-www.oxfordhandbooks.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195328998.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195328998-e-49>.

Deconstructing particular dualisms has been essential for navigating the ecophilosophies explored thus far, and the same will prove true here. Vine Deloria Jr. keenly observes that the primary and driving difference that divides Western thought and Native American thought is oriented around time and space. These orientations around the temporal and the spatial correspond to the history/nature dualism discussed previously, and highlight significant philosophical divergences at nearly every level. Deloria introduces the differences thusly:

American Indians hold their lands—places—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind. Immigrants view the movement of their ancestors across the continent as a steady progression of basically good events and experiences, thereby placing history—time—in the best possible light. When one group is concerned with the philosophical problem of space and the other with the philosophical problem of time, then the statements of either group do not make much sense when transferred from one context of the other without the proper consideration of what is taking place.<sup>186</sup>

Deloria's analysis provides an astute critique of this philosophical divide, and points to a significant factor related to North American concerns for ecological renewal and environmental sustainability in the industrial-capitalist West; 'place' remains in a position of subordination to 'time.' In this state of subjugation, place—land, soil, organisms, insects, animals, habitats—are expendable and exist to serve the greater purpose of progress, the undetermined *telos* of existence. This highlights the fracture between history (culture) and nature, which has as its result, the earth and its non-human inhabitants serving as a backdrop for human flourishing (for some) at the expense of ecological stability and planetary well-being.

For those of us deeply embedded within the temporally-minded Western tradition, prioritizing space can feel foreign and antithetical to our progress-oriented narratives. Our ways of thinking, knowing, constructing moral systems, and particularly, our ways of constructing

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<sup>186</sup> Deloria, *God is Red*, 62-63.

religious systems are highly influenced by a singular historical narrative and its universal principles; Deloria suggests that our very identities as Western peoples are influenced by the “assumption that time proceeds in a linear fashion,” and is “peculiarly related to the destiny of the people of Western Europe.”<sup>187</sup> The historical development and dominance of Christianity throughout Western Europe has sketched the contours of our current world, but it was white settlers of the North American territories who carried these assumptions about time—and consequently, domination—into a new place inhabited by people who valued where they were far more than where they were going. The intimate connections with the lands upon which the Native Americans lived shaped their identities, lifeways, and religious life. Deloria contends that, “spatial thinking,” the orientation toward and situatedness within a place, “requires that ethical systems be related directly to the physical world and real human situations, not abstract principles, are believed to be valid at all times and under all circumstances”; a veritable ocean of difference separated the Natives and the settlers.<sup>188</sup> From this, we can argue that spatial thinking embeds the ecological self in a particular place in such a way that one’s bioregion determines the contours of what it means to be human *in that place*.

The concept of revelation—the content and the medium by which Creator as God self-reveals—factors heavily into this distinction between the spatial and the temporal as it pertains to ecologically oriented religion. The entirety of Christianity revolves around the centrality of the Bible and its, to varying degrees, reliability as an historical document. Christianity—as an outgrowth of Judaism in first and second centuries CE—is oriented around a sacred text that is

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<sup>187</sup> Deloria, *God is Red*, 63.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

affirmed as authoritative on account of its historical accuracy regarding the presence, activity, and divine will of Yahweh. Through the acts of storytelling and later, recorded transmission, stories of divine presence and Yahweh's self-revelation among the Israelite people were preserved in written form, effectively legitimizing the religion and making Yahweh available to future generations and those who had moved outside of the traditionally geo-religious bounds of Yahweh-worship. Thus, it is a 'text-based' religion. The ceremonial lives of Yahweh-worshipping communities remained significant, but were sustained by the Torah, the historically embedded and authoritative sacred text.

In the spatially-based systems of the tribal peoples of North America, textual traditions supporting the spiritual and ethical dimensions did not exist, but Native peoples were religiously sustained in other ways. The existence and validity of other kinds of 'sacred texts,' and the ways in which they orient communities and individuals either toward or away from the earth, become essential topics of conversation for ecologically conscious religious practice in the twenty-first century.<sup>189</sup> In the present context of approaching Native American spirituality through a Christian lens, our definitions of 'sacred text' must be "expanded to include ... non-literary works."<sup>190</sup> By the same means the ancient Hebrew people first transmitted their experiences of Yahweh, Native peoples have deeply valued orality, and the corpus of oral traditions regarding the Creator or Great Spirit comprise valid, non-literary sacred canons among different peoples and within different ecological regions. Additionally, the sustenance and nurture provided by the fecund

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<sup>189</sup> Deloria, *God Is Red*, 2.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

earth, interpreted as a gift from the Creator to Native people, also establishes the land as a non-literary sacred text through which the love and presence of the Creator is experienced.

Even centuries after contact with Western settlers' intellectual and religious traditions, Native spiritualities have maintained a highly enchanted view of nature that informs an environmental ethic. Grim argues, "Indigenous environmental ethics flow from specific world views and respond to specific peoples' dispositions to act in relationship to a living sacred world. The oral narratives, or mythologies, which describe these relationships also evoke the spiritual relationship itself."<sup>191</sup> The relationship between myth, the spiritual, and care for environmental balance and harmony are intricately related, and undergirding this triad of myth, the spiritual, and the environment is the persistent belief that the earth and everything in it is good. The absence of a sin/fall motif within Native American traditions disrupts the Western Christian notions of enmity and competition between humans and the earth. Rather, the earth and all created beings are good, are co-inhabitants, and partners in sustaining balance in creation. Deloria expresses his doubt concerning the ability of the Christian West to transform its understanding of nature without also transforming the whole of its theology, given that it is so firmly planted in the "escape from a fallen nature."<sup>192</sup>

#### **NEW WINE, COLONIALIST WINESKIN**

As noted above, the ways of Indigenous people cannot simply be imitated or co-opted by the dominant culture to remedy the generations of ecological disruption resulting from colonialist expansion, militarism, consumptive industrial capitalism, and individualistic anthropocentrism.

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<sup>191</sup> Grim, "Native North American Worldviews and Ecology," 50.

<sup>192</sup> Deloria, *God is Red*, 91.



Deloria has made the argument that philosophical differences between Native and Western engagement with the world and development of an ecological orientation and understanding of the self revolve around the dispositions toward spatial and the temporal thinking, thus making the mere adoption of Indigenous ideas or values an unsustainable friction.<sup>193</sup> Dominant culture cannot merely become more ecologically conscious and sensitive by adopting Native views or practices without total renovation of the driving narratives and linear-historical orientation that has produced such damaging realities. To undo a millennia of temporal thinking is simply inconceivable.

Equally inconceivable however, is a sustainable, ecologically oriented North American Christianity that has not made significant adaptations to dominant theological constructs. I'd like to suggest two considerations influenced by Native American theologies that can support Christianity in an ecological shift. The first is concerned with the tension between a temporally bound Christ and the cosmic Christ exemplified in Colossians 1 poem. Traditional Christian doctrine regarding the "fullness of God" as located within the person of Jesus constricts the ubiquity of the divine into an anthropomorphized historical person and reinforces the sharp distinctions between humanity and nature; the fullness of God being revealed through an historical individual rather than through the life-giving, sustaining and renewing processes of creation. This is unmistakably related to the centrality of the sin/fall motif responsible for the corruption of creation. A Christology beyond flesh, one which expands the fullness of God to all of creation and locates God's presence in the living and breathing earth is a necessary step

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<sup>193</sup> See George Tinker, "American Indian Religious Traditions, Colonialism, Resistance, and Liberation," in *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance*, eds. Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

toward a spatially based theology, as it sacralizes the earth and infuses it with divine presence. In this, we participate with the earth and with God in a radically new way that challenges our dualistic structures and our domination of an earth that is no longer cursed, but blessed. In this, we relate to God through *all our relations*.

While our highly industrialized and technologically-convenienced lifestyles in the First World limit our conscious dependence on nature, the permeating presence of God in all bodies/beings grounds our spirituality in a placedness rather than in another world beyond where we are. The profoundly earth-relational ethos of Native American spiritualities orients and connects these Indigenous religious traditions to the unique bioregions in which they emerged, as oral tradition and the natural rhythms of the land itself serve as sacred texts by which God is revealed. When the divine permeates the very ground upon which one lives and moves and exists in community with all other life, one walks differently. The ecological self is highly aware of the permeating presence of God, and moves about life with this heightened awareness of God within all things.

## CONCLUSIONS

At the outset of this project I attempted to draw connections between anthropogenic climate change and theological assumptions regarding human situatedness in relation to the earth, the other-than-human and the Divine. After an overview of the primary ways in which Christianity has interpreted what it means to be human vis-à-vis Genesis 1:27, I turned toward twentieth-century critical ecological theories—with varying degrees of influence in North American academics, environmental activism, and environmental philosophy—to uncover their non-theistic conceptualizations of what it means to be human, which included their understandings of the ‘ecological self’ and human relationship to creation. With each particular theory, I employed an ecological hermeneutic to draw connections to Christianity and show the viability of earth-inclusive readings for orienting theology toward creation and reframing human relationship to the earth and the other-than-human.

Deep ecology's historical preeminence in North American ecological thought has cemented its importance in conversations about human-nature relationships and the ecological self. Its expansive anthropology of identification flattens the moral-ethical distinctions between species and argues for a biospheric egalitarianism. In such a world, the human person has no unique standing or privilege amongst the natural world, and humanity must yield to the demands

of nature and the carrying capacity of the earth regardless of what that means for human progress and human population.

While adopting much of deep ecology's critique of human exceptionalism and human/nature dualism, ecofeminism expands to include an underlying framework of sexism that supports the domination of nature (linking it to both racism and classism) to provide a thoroughgoing critique of patriarchy's sustained influence on our relationships and institutions. Importantly, ecofeminism challenged deep ecology's expansive understanding of the self to make room for honoring difference and maintaining bodily autonomy, a nuance that challenges both androcentrism and Eurocentrism. Sallie McFague's ecofeminist theology performs a demolition of the patriarchal metaphors that rest at the foundation of systematic theological constructs; with particularly damaging images and understandings of God deconstructed, being created in the image of God takes on new meanings, and bearing God's image in the world carries new responsibilities for care, harmony, and justice.

Social ecology, helmed by the anarchist-utopian visionary Murray Bookchin, centers its critique on hierarchy and the inevitable dominations of human over earth, male over female and old over young that determine the contours of our relationships, economics and politics within an unsustainable consumer-capitalism. What emerges in social ecology's vision for earth-flourishing is a confederation of decentralized and bioregionally defined ecological cities that undo the human self-alienation from the land, effectively dissolving the town/country dichotomy observed by Marx. Social ecology imagines an ecological self in democratic community, free from the domination of authority, and free to unlearn the damaging patterns of hierarchy as a means to reconnect with each other and with the earth.

All three of the aforementioned ecophilosophies assume and critique fracturing dualisms that draw valued distinctions between humans and the other-than-human, between humans and the earth, and between God's immateriality and the physical world. The outlier included among these contemporary ecophilosophies is the terse exploration of some of the religio-ethical worldviews among Native American traditions, which have been able to combine religious cosmology with an ecologically conscious worldview that obfuscates the culture/nature dualism critiqued by each of the previous ecophilosophies. Differentiating themselves from the dominant Euro-centric religious traditions of the West, Indigenous North American religions emerge from experience and sustained relationships of mutuality with particular lands. This is a significant departure from the text-based and temporally-oriented Western religious traditions that have suffered from sharp dualistic separations between the spiritual and the material, as well as culture and nature. With Vine Deloria we saw that the driving force that supported the earth-oriented Indigenous lifeways is a religious commitment to the profoundly immanent and permeating presence of the Divine within creation that translates to a deep sense of placedness and honor for the geographical spaces inhabited by Native peoples.

As stated throughout this project, the purpose of exploring these various ecophilosophical worldviews was to arrive at a broader understanding of being human that is ecologically oriented and compatible with Christianity, so as to provide the theological rudder by which the ship of the Christian tradition can steer itself toward healing creation rather than dominating it. As we have put Christianity into conversation with a sampling of ecophilosophies that challenge historically Christian interpretations of creation, we have seen broader and more earth-inclusive, environmentally conscious understandings of human persons that find compatibility with

Christianity. However, it is Vine Deloria's analysis of the temporal and the spatial, in particular, that highlight the paramount problem that has obstructed Christianity from embracing the goodness of the earth and embedding its theological constructs firmly within planetary bounds.

While Sallie McFague has been deconstructing the model of a distant and transcendent God in whose image we cast our humanity over and above creation, the universalizing nature of theological interpretation has been left unscathed. This universalized theology is a component of temporal thinking that transcends both space and time. A theme of contextualization that weaves its way throughout McFague's work traces back to the foundational idea in *Models of God* that doing theology is an exercise in reading and responding to the era, a refusal of which is "to settle for a theology appropriate to some time other than one's own."<sup>194</sup> The epochal truth of particular theological claims notwithstanding, the proper question, she contends, is "are they right *for our time*?"<sup>195</sup> This temporally-oriented contextualization ignores the fuller picture of contextualizing theologies that honors the differences of particular bioregions and particular places, the spatial dimension that so tangibly and powerfully influences our social, spiritual and physical realities, and shapes the ways in which we experience and interpret God's presence and activity in conjunction with scriptural revelation. A spatially-oriented contextualization both de-centers the Bible as the premier source of Divine revelation and expands the notions of 'revelation' and 'sacred text' to validate the non-literary revelations and experiences of God. As a result, theological construction follows the contours of local knowledge, bioregional sustainability and health, and justice for and among all created beings, as God is revealed in the flourishing of

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<sup>194</sup> *Models of God*, 30.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

creation and restored partnership between humans and nature. This both creates space for a plurality of cosmologies, and resists the push toward collapsing creation narratives in favor of a ‘common creation story’ that privileges the scientific reading of the universe while diminishing the ‘micro-universes’ of particular ecosystems and bioregions, and the ways in which religious perspectives can sustain positive and balanced human-nature relationships.

The reorientation away from the universalizing of theology makes it possible to speak of North American ecotheological anthropologies, or African and Asian ecotheological anthropologies, and regionally specific theologies. Thus, what it means to be human is, as one living in the Pacific Northwest region of North America and is afforded the privileges of the First World and subject to the unique characteristics of living in a temperate rainforest, is significantly different from what it means to be human and created in the image of God for one living in coastal Papua New Guinea. Interpretation of what it means to be created in the image of God must be dislodged from its static designation of *neither God, nor angel or animal* to also include the various environmental factors that influence our experience, our imagination, our perception, and our identities—all of which shape the ways in which we understand, experience, and relate to God and our neighbors. The multivalency of theological anthropology vis-à-vis the *imago Dei* certainly establishes the goodness and democratizing worth of all human bodies that can never be diminished or distinguished, but the earth, infused with the Divine, demands that we ground our identity and ethics in that which surrounds us and supports all life.

Christianity has primarily understood human persons as derivative of the Divine (as mediated through sacred text), and secondarily, in relation to other human persons and different than other species. A spatially contextualized ecotheological anthropology, on the other hand,

interprets what it means to be human, an ecological self, in terms of embeddedness within creation, and understands the interrelationship—both life-giving and life-taking—amongst creation, without humanity transcending the wider category of *created*. Such an earth-embedded human identity draws from some of the principles of the ecophilosophies throughout this essay and rejects the anthropocentric models taking up residence in traditional theological frameworks. Most significantly, developing an ecotheological anthropology demands a *resacralization* of creation, dissolving the metaphysical walls between God and creation; Seyyed Hossen Nasr insists that “nature needs to be resacralized not by man who has no power to bestow the quality of sacredness upon anything, but through the remembrance of what nature is as theater of Divine Creativity and Presence. Nature has been already sacralized by the Sacred Itself, and its resacralization means more than anything else a transformation within man.”<sup>196</sup> This reintroduction of the Divine into the dust of the earth is more of a religio-cosmological paradigm shift than a metaphysical invitation.

This essential shift alters our perspective on where God is and the spaces God inhabits beyond the spiritual, as well as transforms our concepts of conformity to the image of God so that—to borrow from deep ecology—our *identification with* nature is a holy experience in the embrace of God. Without erasing species distinction and difference, our identification with God *in* the world inspires care and empathy for healing and for justice. Historically, God has been removed from creation and transcended above it in conjunction with the Genesis 3 curse and subsequent ‘fall of nature.’ With Murray Bookchin we can affirm the goodness of nature and condemn instead the fracturing results of human domination.

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<sup>196</sup> Seyyed Hossen Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (City: Publisher, Year), 270-271.



When approaching the question of what it means to be human, we have historically been asking a question that assumes a universal answer that holds the same truth for all *homo sapiens*. In the act of discarding universalized theologies (that often emerge from Eurocentric traditions), what lies beneath are anti-systematic theologies, which privilege theologies emerging in their spatial contexts rather than temporally-oriented theologies disconnected from a place or extrapolated to dissimilar contexts.<sup>197</sup> In this light, we might nuance Lynn White's thesis to implicate Christianity's propensity toward temporality as the culprit in propagating the domination of earth.

I am convinced that resistance to accepting anthropogenic climate change and environmental advocacy among the dominant Christian traditions in North America can be traced back to this temporal/spatial dualism that supports the driving narrative of our Western culture, including religious engagement with the natural world. As long as 'place' remains in a state of subjugation to 'time,' Western-Capitalist economic and theological constructs alike will continue to disregard the groaning of creation: the needs of bioregions, the balance of ecosystems, clean drinking water, desertification and deforestation, unsustainable levels of CO<sub>2</sub> present in our earth's atmosphere, and the myriad environmental threats to the livelihood of millions in poverty around the globe. Indeed, while temporal concerns are given primacy over spatial realities and needs, the allure of both technological and spiritual salvations will draw attention away from the fracture between humanity and nature.

As creatures that bear the image of God, living within the good creation sculpted and sustained by God, our inhabitation of and engagement with the earth are fundamentally

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<sup>197</sup> This is the same tension that drew critique to deep ecology's political statements surrounding population control and universal human responsibility for ecological crises as discussed earlier in Chapter 3.

theological. To exclude creation from our theological and moral scope is to ignore God's body. Yet there is healing and hope if the Word made flesh—the act of God crossing boundaries to inhabit a body—becomes the grander reality through which we experience God in the dark oceans, the dust, the mountaintops and everywhere in-between.

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