

**Seeing the World as Creation:
Christian Sources for an Environmentalist Age**



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Abstract

Twentieth century environmentalist literature tends to blame Christian religious tradition, especially its influence upon Western culture, for introducing ways of “seeing” (*theoria*) the world of nature (non-human creation) that produce anti-environmental practices. But does Christianity – in its biblical, and ancient/early medieval sources that explain the notions of creation, human uniqueness, and purpose – really promote a vision of nature-culture dualism, despotic anthropocentrism, and thus natural disenchantment? By analyzing the *hexameron* material of church fathers, both East and West, we discover that Genesis must not be read in the anti-natural way that modern environmental critics have argued, but as a proto-environmentalist text which, properly interpreted, underwrites responses to modern environmental needs. Maximus the Confessor joins the conversation with dogmatic assistance about environmentalism *via* the doctrine of creation. Maximus’ work carries the ancient vision of creation into the medieval period, entirely supportive of environmentalist concerns; indeed, his Christological interpretation of creation is perhaps the “greenest” theology of all, for its evaluation of creation’s source and end is wrapped up in divine destiny. Also, Maximus’ Eucharistic theology expresses the idea that the church is ultimately the “community of creation,” implying a dual task of “seeing” creation sacramentally and an *ethos* for earth care. When Maximus’ creation dogma is synthesized with the “leisure” practice of Josef Pieper, we find a helpful tool for Christian environmental care that affirms the goodness of the world’s being. In conclusion, both the theological foundation in the church fathers and the praxis of Pieper combine to reveal that the broad tradition of Christianity and its mode of “seeing” the world are environmentally sound.

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Introduction

Our planet today faces various crises which threaten its health and survival. We can observe that the human response to these concerns – indignation, ignorance, ambivalence – also fluctuate through the centuries of written history. Most recently, beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, the many environmental woes brought forth by war, capitalism, and consumerism, especially as they were bolstered with concerns for injustices like poverty, the third world, and a general sense of earth care, were met with a significant rise in literature meant to illicit environmental awareness, explain the problem, and even to subvert mainline society in favor of new and better paths forward. Important to this movement is to identify and indict agents of blame. In many such cases, the named culprit is a hegemony of Christian civilization and Western attitudes that appear to detract from human-nature sustainability.

This project seeks to understand both the current tendency toward elevation of the non-human environment, or “greening,” as a response to environmental disaster, as well as its general claims for culpability and its development of an alternative worldview that promises a more sustainable future. Many narratives cited Christianity as the ideological scapegoat for Western, destructive, environmental practices, because Christianity’s early texts espouse human uniqueness within creation. In addition, certain authors (introduced below) of environmentalist literature concluded that Christianity permits human patterns of dominion and

subduing (Genesis 1:28) which had become abusive by design. This argument suggests that Christianity initiated a dualistic (*nomos-physis*, culture-nature) way of seeing the world, and an accompanying anthropocentric ethos. This supposedly Christian worldview, consequently, disenchant the world and renders creation inert, neutral, and value-less without human actors in the picture.

But did Christianity actually promote such a vision of the world, either in its biblical narrative or in its early understanding? I intend to argue this is exactly the opposite position of Christian teaching considering both the material of Genesis and its early reception. Further, I will argue that there is a rich tradition of Christian commendation and appreciation for the material world by its source (creation), current reception (ethics, and human practices), and end (purpose, *telos*, theosis). To achieve this, I examine the primary sources that introduced this idea that Christianity is anti-nature, and I ask if such arguments reflect the witness of Christian tradition. I will then explore ancient interpretations of Genesis by the ecclesial fathers to demonstrate that the church's reception of scripture, how it "sees" creation, is quite off the mark in modern environmentalist criticism. In fact, the *theoria physike* (the way one contemplates and then evaluates the world) as invoked by the various ideologies involved will figure prominently in this analysis. A Christian *theoria physike*, when properly understood, actually leads to the flourishing of non-humanity.

To revive a proper praxis of Christian *theoria physike* I engage St. Maximus the Confessor, whose world-affirming theology understands creation from the incarnation backward. By this view, the affirmation of human life by the incarnation is also the affirmation of all creation—Christ is the meaning of all creation. This Maximian vision of creation is deeply enchanted, not seeing non-human life as inert (as many environmentalist critics suggest) but as sacramental. I then follow Maximus’ dogmatic program into a synthesis with Josef Piper’s *Leisure as the Basis of Culture* in part to merge the Eastern and Western expressions of Christian thought and to uphold a laudable practice or vehicle for “seeing” the world as Maximus’ outlines; when taken together, practitioners will have both content for proper Christian *theoria physike* and a philosophical/spiritual practice in which to cultivate it. An incredibly fruitful, traditionally Christian, and environmentally flourishing vision will emerge.

Chapter 1 – Environmentalism: the Greening of Society and Religion

*Whoa, ah, mercy mercy me
Oh things ain't what they used to be, no no
Where did all the blue skies go?
Poison is the wind that blows from the north and south and east
Whoa mercy, mercy me,
Oh things ain't what they used to be, no no
Oil wasted on the oceans and upon our seas, fish full of mercury
Ah, oh mercy, mercy me
Ah things ain't what they used to be, no no
Radiation underground and in the sky
Animals and birds who live nearby are dying
Oh mercy, mercy me
Oh things ain't what they used to be
What about this overcrowded land
How much more abuse from man can she stand?*

-Marvin Gaye, *Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)*, Album: *What's Goin On*, 1971

Environmental literature perpetually evokes and evaluates ethical behavior in human relationship to nature, while frequently asserting that many ecological crises are anthropogenic. Most environmentalists or ecocritics agree, and even many uneducated on such subjects may well admit, that human population growth, technological advancement, and social use of non-human realities do much to harm Earth, and something else must be done. As for any human work that has resulted in negative environmental impact, human actions almost assuredly arise from a prior mental practice, the way people “see” the world, from whence surfaces our contemplation, our *theoria physike*,¹ and our behaviors and social

¹ This order of seeing or *theoria* prior to *ethos* and *askesis*, I owe to Norman Wirzba’s recent essay concerning Maximus the Confessor and the environment; Norman Wirzba, “Christian *Theoria Physike*: On Learning to See Creation,” *Modern Theology* 32:2, April 2016, 211-230.

imagination. Although such reflection is not novel and can be traced at least as far back as prominent philosophical thinkers Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, we can pinpoint a period around the 1960s when this reflection sharpened its focus on anthropogenic causes, and the decade ushered environmentalism into the mainstream. One reason for this is that the Western world had reached a point of natural consumption that made it plain for citizens to see their negative environmental impact. New modes of “seeing” the world (*theoria physike*) roused a new awareness of reality causing many inquiries into accepted social behavior.

After reviewing some of the more ancient sources of the environmental conversation, this chapter will investigate the social climate of the 1960s and a prominently cited and interesting essay in the canon of 20th century environmentalist thinking, “The Historical Roots of our Environmental Crisis,” by Lynn White Jr. White’s influential article in the journal *Science*, as well as the predominant narrative that followed in the article’s interpretation, argues that Christian religious ways of “seeing” and evaluating the world enabled anti-environmental social practices that became systematized in the West. However, many later writers in the genre have overblown White’s criticism of Christianity for White, a churchman himself, did not denounce all of Christianity and in other writings offered many other reasons for current ecological woes. Nevertheless, what emerged after his critique was a common misconception that Christian ways of seeing the world necessarily and dogmatically catalyzed despotic anthropocentrism and systematic over-use of nature. I will explore this popular

notion and its consequent movement that forged new ways of “seeing” the world, which adopted the popular moniker “greening.” In light of general environmental concerns there is a social clarion call to “green society,” that is, to make society more amenable to environmental sustainability. And in light of environmental criticism of Christian thought, there is a desire to “green” religion specifically *via* new religious expression, retrieving indigenous traditions and even re-interpreting Christianity (and its holy Scriptures) through various environmentalist filters.

The “Roots” of the Problem

Environmental considerations were present in the ancients like Aristotle² and Aquinas,³ both of which have been appraised differently in terms of anthropocentric thought depending on who represents them. Environmental critiques against Christian and wider Western views present Aristotle and subsequently Aquinas as firmly anthropocentric because in places they each point out that humanity is a certain justification or “end” for other creatures: *Politics*, Book 1, Chapter 8, and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, Part 2, respectively. George Sessions, eco-critic of Christianity, aims to demonstrate how the supposedly anthropocentric tradition of the Bible affected the great tradition of the Christian West *via* thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas (who, as Sessions

² See: Susanne E. Foster, “Aristotle and the Environment,” *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 24, Issue: 4, Winter 2002, 409-428.

³ Both Aristotle and Aquinas are considered anthropocentric by many environmentalist writers. For Aristotle in *Politics*, Bk. 1, Chapter 8 claimed that nature is ordered toward humanity, and Aquinas did so as well in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, Part 2, Ch. 112 according to “Environmental Ethics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, June 3, 2002. Online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/#EarDevEnvEth>, Accessed 7 April 2018.

maintains, tried to marry Aristotelian Naturalism with Christian “other-worldliness”). He writes:

Aristotle’s anthropocentric cosmology was quite compatible with Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism. In the Christian version of the great chain of being, the hierarchical ladder from a transcendent God, angels, men, women, and children, down to animals, plants and inanimate realm.⁴

In this social reading of the creation story, human life with its manifold *techne* received top billing within creation, so to speak. Yet when one reads Aquinas more closely, the evidence of this outright anthropocentrism becomes highly questionable. In part one of the *Summa*, Aquinas reflects on God’s providence and purpose for created beings:

I answer that, Divine providence imposes necessity upon some things; not upon all, as some formerly believed. For to providence it belongs to order things towards an end. Now after the divine goodness, which is an extrinsic end to all things, the principle good in things themselves is the perfection of the universe; which would not be, were not all grades of being found in things. Whence it pertains to divine providence to produce every grade of being. And thus it has prepared for some things necessary causes, so that they happen of necessity; for others contingent causes, that they may happen by contingency, according to their nature of their approximate causes.⁵

It can be interpreted here that created things are good as they are caused by a good God, and are causes of more goodness in creation. It seems that for Aquinas, the deepest end for any creature is its first source, God. This provides evidence against bare anthropocentrism in Aquinas.

⁴ George Sessions, “Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour,” *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, Ed. George Sessions, Boston: Shambala Publications, 1995, 159.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, 22, 4, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981, 124.

White published his interesting piece, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” in 1967, although his career as a historian focused primarily on medieval technological history and how small changes in human work-life changed both the social and natural world. “Ever since man became a numerous species he has affected his environment notably,”⁶ White’s essay begins. When human populations grow exponentially, the “energy circuit” of life cannot keep up with the progress in terms of balance. Another among the pantheon American environmental writers, Aldo Leopold, observed,

... evolution is a long series of self-induced changes, the net result of which has been to elaborate the flow mechanism and to lengthen the energy circuit. Evolutionary changes, however, are usually slow and local. Man’s invention of tools has enabled him to make changes of unprecedented violence, rapidity, and scope.⁷

But there is nothing malicious in humanity’s attempt to advance technologically, according to White, because, “quite *unintentionally*, changes in human ways often affect nonhuman nature.”⁸ For example, new forms of food procurement or ingenuity have an effect beyond human life, and mostly such advances were not done in order to cause natural harm, though unexpected harm did, in fact, follow.

According to White, “as we enter the last third of the 20th century, however, concern for the problem of ecologic backlash is mounting feverishly.”⁹ He argues, ecology was a new science of the late 19th century, and because of humanity’s advancement plus new biological discoveries like evolution, ecology galvanized

⁶ Lynn White Jr. Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science*, March 1967, Vol. 155, Number 2767, 1203.

⁷ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, New York: Balantine Books, 1986, 254.

⁸ White, “The Historical Roots,” 1203. Emphasis, mine.

⁹ Ibid.

to consider how beings and species impact one another, especially in the negative sense. For White and other writers in this field, human so-called advancements include but are not limited to fossil fuel use, “planless urbanism,”¹⁰ and sewage. In White’s era, much like the contemporary world, these problems could be seen with the naked eye. For White, “the simplest solution to any suspect change is, of course, to stop it, or better yet, to revert to a romanticized past: make those ugly gasoline stations look like Anne Hathaway’s cottage.”¹¹

Stemming or even slowing human progress has proven challenging. It appears that societies are addicted to technological novelties, about which the stories *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* and the film *Jurassic Park* intend to warn us. Yet in terms of environmentalism, such critiques have mostly reached a wider audience with the ideological belief that small consumer-based approaches can help, and thus humanity can “fix” the problem. Of this White is doubtful, as he states, “neither atavism nor prettification will cope with the ecologic crisis of our time.”¹² Why is this so? Because society’s ill effect upon nature is too widespread, and because it is systematized by the state with an economic *theoria* upheld in modern society. Such harmful practices are ingrained deeply into modern, Western society. There are other problems with “seeing” the world as filled with problems that humans can solve, and it is just as much ideological as it is religious.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1204.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

This point of view, for example, adheres ideologically to what the environmental philosophical school Deep Ecology calls “Shallow Ecology.”¹³ Shallow ecology is any attempt to ameliorate ecological issues with small, convenient lifestyle changes like recycling, energy efficient light bulbs, and zero-emission vehicles. And for philosopher Slavoj Žižek this is exactly the ideology behind free-market “pop-environmentalism.” According to Žižek the crisis so conceived is narrated by and resulting from human activity, because modern humanity is itself “becoming a geological agent.”¹⁴ He is obviously making use of Paul Crutzen’s *anthropocenic*¹⁵ language here, but Žižek’s main point is that this narrative comforts society, because if humans cause the problem, then “everything depends on us...we can save ourselves by changing our lives.”¹⁶ According to Žižek, this makes ecology the new *Opium des Volkes*. The connections with religion are obvious:

No wonder, then, that the by far predominant version of ecology is the ecology of fear, fear of a catastrophe - human-made or natural - that may deeply perturb, destroy even, the human civilization, fear that pushes us to plan measures that would protect our safety. This ecology of fear has all the chances of developing into the predominant form of ideology of global capitalism, a new opium for the masses replacing the declining religion: it takes over the old religion's fundamental function, that of putting on an unquestionable authority which can impose limits. The lesson this ecology is constantly hammering is our finitude: we are not

¹³ Arne Naess, “The Shallow And The Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary” in *Deep Ecoogy for the 21st Century*, Boston: Shambala Publications, 1995, 151-155.

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, “Joe Public v. The Volcano,” Online: New Statesman, April 29, 2010, <http://www.newstatesman.com/environment/2010/05/essay-nature-catastrophe> (Accessed 20 Jan. 2011).

¹⁵ Iain Wallace, “Space, Place, and the Gospel,” in *After Modernity? Secularity, Globalization, and the Re-Enchantment of the World*, Ed. James K. A. Smith, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008, 127.

¹⁶ Žižek, “Joe Public v. The Volcano.”

Cartesian subjects extracted from reality, we are finite beings embedded in a bio-sphere which vastly transgresses our horizon. In our exploitation of natural resources, we are borrowing from the future, so one should treat our Earth with respect, as something ultimately Sacred, something that should not be unveiled totally, that should and will forever remain a Mystery, a power we should trust, not dominate. While we cannot gain full mastery over our bio-sphere, it is unfortunately in our power to derail it, to disturb its balance so that it will run amok, swiping us away in the process. This is why, although ecologists are all the time demanding that we change radically our way of life, underlying this demand is its opposite, a deep distrust of change, of development, of progress: every radical change can have the unintended consequence of triggering a catastrophe.¹⁷

Žižek undermines the ideology of most modern environmental awareness/activism, which on the one hand has replaced God as governor in an ever-increasingly secular world, and on the other hand reveals the true deity in the Western world: the free market's invisible hand. Žižek, like other theorists,¹⁸ opts for a more radical view that not only denies the conception of the transcendent but also that alters human anthropology.

He does this in his portion of the documentary *Examined Life*.¹⁹ There, Žižek points out that another modern ideology—the one of waste removal, props up the ecological ideology of human intervention. That is why his interview takes place in a waste dump. Modern Westerners live under the delusion, at least in practice, that once their waste is removed from the curb or flushed down the toilet, it

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, "Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a new Opium for the Masses," Part 1, Online: Lacan.com: <http://www.lacan.com/zizecology1.htm>, (Accessed 8 Aug. 2013), Emphasis mine.

¹⁸ See: Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.

¹⁹ See: Žižek's portion of the documentary, *Examined Life*, DVD, Directed by Astra Taylor (2008; Canada: Sphinx Productions).

disappears. For him, the way to overcome this ideology, and thus to come to terms with the ecological crisis, is to embrace our trash; his prescription is a sort of psycho-analytic “toxic tour.”²⁰ People need to see and account for their waste. Only by resurrecting the ghosts of our garbage will we denounce shallow forms of ecology and be able to truly do something or, more shocking to the modern ear, discover that maybe nothing can be done to “save the planet.” After all, we humans are not distinct from nature, ergo everything that we do is already natural—even our waste dump centers.

Albeit raw and unique, Žižek’s deconstructive account has proven less popular than White’s argument in contemporary environmental thought. Of environmental action, White prescribes *contemplation*: “think about the fundamentals,”²¹ he says. Go back to a prior and proper way of “seeing” the world, and then discover the historic viewpoints that took humanity off the course of natural harmony. Historical retrieval accompanies much environmental thinking, combining seamlessly with a nostalgia for a bygone era of human-nature relations, which may bear *some* truth, but cannot be accepted in full, as Jared Diamond in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* convincingly demonstrates.²² According to Diamond, many historic civilizations collapsed because of an *ethos* that proved unfriendly to the Earth: over-tilling, excessive fishing, and other

²⁰ See: “Communities for a Better Environment,” Online: <http://www.cbecal.org/get-involved/toxic-tours/> (Accessed 22 Aug. 2014).

²¹ White, “Historical Roots,” 1204.

²² Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, New York: Penguin, 2011.

unsustainable practices. In such ways even many ancient peoples brought their own end because of inattention to land health.

But to argue his point further, White states that Western science is Occidental,²³ the progenitor of science initiated all around the world, and Western technology “far outstripped its elaborate, sophisticated, and esthetically magnificent sister cultures, Byzantium and Islam.”²⁴ The point is to show that the Latin West was not necessarily more advanced scientifically than the East or many other cultures, but technologically, especially by the medieval period, the Latin West had developed tools that enabled Europe to conquer, loot, and colonize.²⁵

When Western technological advancement blended with the cultural invention of democracy, the concoction rendered the West unique in its ability to instigate environmental damages. White writes, “our ecologic crisis is the product of an emerging, entirely novel, democratic culture. The issue is whether a democratized world can survive its own implications.”²⁶ For White, this democratic culture is a novel way of “seeing” life with wide, negative environmental implications. Here, a slight irony emerges. Because, most ecological critics who have followed White are so devoted to “seeing” the world democratically (i.e. creaturely egalitarianism), that its values are applied to the whole cosmos, the problem arises that is also spoken to in the literature is being that for a democracy, one needs a

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. See also: Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, 29-86.

²⁶ White, “Historical Roots,” 1204.

voice to speak (thus the ethical motivation for ecocentric valuations of the cosmos). Thus, these writers promote new modes of “seeing” the world that enable creatures to have a voice *via* “rights theory,” pan-psychism, nature mysticism,²⁷ etc. But their views are ultimately misanthropic; humans are understood as the ontological problem for these same egalitarian dreams.

Humanity is a cultured animal that has evolved and grown to its current status of imposition upon the non-human world *via* the same intelligence that could lend a voice to the oppressed. Of this contradiction, Rowan Williams quotes Fulla, from Byatt’s *The Biographer’s Tale*, “we are an animal that needs to use its intelligence to mitigate the effects of its intelligence on the other creatures.”²⁸ Humans are seen as a nearly non-natural problem to deal with. Yet White is more concerned about systematized democratic principles amongst human peoples than those who follow him; his worries concern the proliferation of technologies for the masses—his is a worry of democratization for human communities, for it enables wide changes to happen to the natural order.

²⁷ See, for example, nature mysticism in an agnostic tone in Donald A. Crosby, *A Religion of Nature*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002; a quasi process version of universal unfolding in Thomas Berry, “The World of Wonder,” *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, 15-25; and Mary Evelyn Tucker and Brian Thomas Swimme, “The Next Transition: The Evolution of Humanity’s Role in the Universe,” *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, 49-60, Point Reyes: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013; and Willis’ Jenkins introduction to ecological spirituality in *Ecology’s of Grace*, 93-114.

²⁸ Rowan Williams, “Renewing the Face of the Earth: Human Responsibility and the Environment,” 3/25/2009, Online: Archbishop of Canterbury, <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/816/renewing-the-face-of-the-earth-human-responsibility-and-the-environment> (Accessed 1 Jan. 2011). Williams is quoting Fulla, a Swedish Entomologist from A.S. Byatt *The Biographer’s Tale*.

White notes that this particularly Western situation got its start in the Medieval period; therefore, it is important to understand the Medieval West's "view of man and nature,"²⁹ to see how the new technological democratic revolution was allowed to work amidst the natural world. To present an example, White has written much concerning an ancient agricultural tool called the "scratch plow"³⁰ which was drawn by two oxen that did not turn the sod over, but merely "scratched it."³¹ This technology worked well with light Mediterranean soils, typically causing these fields to be square. But White notes that the scratch plow was ineffective with the thicker, wetter soils of northern Europe. So with technological advancement a new plow was introduced, one that dug much deeper into the earth. White describes it thusly:

The friction of this plow with the soil was so great that it normally required not two but eight oxen. It attacked the land with such *violence* that cross-plowing was not needed, and fields tended to be shaped into long strips.³²

In the days of the scratch-plow, fields were mostly distributed in units capable of supporting a single family for subsistence. But no peasant owned eight oxen: to use the new and more efficient plow, peasants pooled their oxen to form large plow-teams, and the strips of land fell to each in proportion to the contribution. Thus, distribution of the land was based no longer on the needs of a family but on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth.³³ Simple technological advances

²⁹ White, "Historical Roots," 1205.

³⁰ Lynn White Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 39-78.

³¹ White, "Historical Roots," 1205.

³² *Ibid.*, emphasis, mine.

³³ *Ibid.*

like this changed economics, the landscape, and the social lives of field workers, as White demonstrates. In such ways, mankind's relationship changed from "part of nature"³⁴ to "exploiter of nature,"³⁵ with each seemingly small technological advance, introducing the dualism between culture and nature, an ontology universally rejected by those concerned with environmental thought.

According to French philosopher of science³⁶ Bruno Latour, the strident dualism present in the world accompanies the desire for a *modern age*, not a specifically ancient or medieval Christian one. Latour explains that two sets of practices (hybrid set and purified set) help define modernity, each containing dualisms of nature and culture and, in his terms, purification and translation. The networks created by his hybrid set demonstrate a world brimming with human/non-human relationships: the atmosphere, rain cycles, government legislation. On the other hand, the purified set observes a world of distinct zones, with nature removed and analyzed separately from human influence. It narrows the focus, attempting to isolate and segregate the two realms of nature and culture for the purpose of categorization and classification. Looking at the biotic community of rivers or the atmosphere from a distance, removed from human communities, is goal of the second set. For Latour, modernity is the ability to investigate these two sets separately from one another, hence the dualism.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See: Simon Oliver, *Creation a Guide for the Perplexed*, London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 140; and Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, 2009.

³⁷ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, 10.

Complicating matters, much of today's common language about nature reduces the whole matter to the field of the purified set. The rather base, unsophisticated way that the populace speaks concerning "man and nature" prevails, with humans on one side and nature on the other. But Conor Cunningham warns:

There is a perennial temptation that haunts all thought, a temptation that is dangerous for most discourse, but terminal for theology, namely, to parse existence in terms of dualisms: transcendence/ immanence; natural/supernatural; sacred/profane; philosophy/ theology, and so on.³⁸

Dualisms tempt us because they simplify thought, but they barely touch the nuance of reality. And such renderings of the world also fail to represent how most studies proceed in practice, since most modern universities now purport to account for various intricacies and influences for their subjects. Yet even if we reject dualism out of hand as an absurd reduction and consider Latour's more sophisticated reading of modern dualism, we will still discover that modern dualism does not account for much of the modern narrative, because:

so long as we consider these two practices of translation and purification separately, we are truly modern – that is, we willingly subscribe to the critical project, even though that project is developed only through the proliferation of hybrids down below. As soon as we direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization, we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change.³⁹

If modernity exists where human subjects view natural objects as things to be studied at a distance, ignoring the necessity of mediating objects and the hybrid realities that result from both human living and study, that modernity cannot

³⁸ Conor Cunningham, "*Natura Pura*, The Invention of the Anti-Christ: A Week With No Sabbath," in *Communio* 37, 2010, 244.

³⁹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 11.

persist. The impasse exposes a certain irony. According to Latour, when the set of networks, or hybrids of subjects and objects appears *a posteriori*, as they invariably do, the modern desire to separate the two modes of investigation is futile, and must come to an end. The project does little more than to elevate the human sphere asymmetrically,⁴⁰ thus ironically giving “birth to non-humanity.”⁴¹ Yet again, for Latour, this thinking only occurred in theory, never in practice, because the modern constitution’s task of segregation for the purpose of study has in itself created a myriad of scorned⁴² hybrid realities; “underneath the opposition between objects and subjects, there is a whirlwind of mediators”⁴³ like laboratories, microscopes, and test tubes. He goes further, if “we consider these two guarantees separately,” that is the segregate discovery of non-human created “nature”⁴⁴ by “discovering its secrets”⁴⁵ and subsequently the discovery that humans are the sole creators of human culture, then

they remain incomprehensible. If Nature is not by or for human beings, then it remains foreign, forever remote and hostile. Nature’s very transcendence overwhelms us, or renders it inaccessible. Symmetrically, if society is made only by and for humans, the Leviathan, an artificial creature of which we are at once the form and matter, cannot stand up. Its very immanence destroys it at once in the war of every man against every man.⁴⁶

In fact, Latour asserts that the modern ideas of nature (*physis*) and culture (*nomos*) arose together under the unified, and modern-liberal governance (ontology) of

⁴⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 45.

⁴³ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 30-31.

nature *and* culture, therefore, “they reinforce each other.”⁴⁷ Modern attempts at ontological dualism are in this manner confused, for its intellection perpetually transgresses the boundary upon deeper reflection, revealing the deeper, relational, reciprocal ontology of hybrids, networks, and collectives. But in the hands of pragmatic politicians and the populace, with mottos and sound bites, reality becomes exposed to this reduction: the world of things (nature-fact) and the world of people (culture-value). This is more than a recipe for natural exploitation; it promotes a fundamental misunderstanding of humanity as it, too, comprises the so-called “nature.”

White’s work reflecting upon the technological advancement of horse stirrups, which permitted soldiers to wear heavier battle armor,⁴⁸ illustrates Latour’s insistence that the realm of nature is hybridized with cultural realities. With the development of the stirrup, armies transformed from infantries to cavalries, for it proved a more sufficient mode of conquest. This led to another consequence for nature: the advancements of stirrups combined with massive body armor led to the breeding of larger horses. Medieval, imperialist warfare, which is just as worthy of environmentalist indictments as is the Christian religion according to White, changed humanity’s relationship with non-human animals and projected the sense of human mastery and control over them. These realities changed nature, for good or for ill, in accordance with human ingenuity and political gain.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 31

⁴⁸ White, *Medieval Technology*, 1-38.

These changes in social attitudes toward the natural world, whether animals or patches of land or even time itself,⁴⁹ reveal modes of perception, the way things are “seen.” “These novelties seem to be in harmony with larger intellectual patterns. How people behave ecologically depends on how they have contemplated about themselves in relation to other creatures. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is by religion,”⁵⁰ argues White. Many others have followed his logic and promoted new religious devotion in order to quell humanity’s apparent proclivity toward natural decay, notably the Deep Ecologists such as Arne Naess, George Sessions, and Gary Snyder. Though a varied movement of thought and activism, Deep Ecology claims that the West’s primary religion, Christianity, is far too anthropocentric, and thus earth-threatening in disposition. As a result, these thinkers call for abandonment of Christian thought in favor of older, pagan, or indigenous religious expressions, which they claim are not anthropocentric but ecocentric. In part, this negative reading of Christianity derives from White’s famous article, and it is not difficult to understand why. White argues, and Deep Ecologists claim as well, that “the victory of Christianity over paganism was the greatest psychic revolution in the history of our culture.”⁵¹ The argument that emerges claims that Christianity with its teaching that humanity is made in the *imago dei* with the task

⁴⁹ See: Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 157. There, Taylor writes, “a purely secular time – understanding allows us to imagine society horizontally, unrelated to any ‘high points,’ where the ordinary sequence of events touches higher time, and therefore without recognizing any privileged persons or agencies, such as kings or priests, who stand and mediate at such alleged points.” This was the heritage of new, modern calendars that were spurned on by advances in technology, and thus social imaginaries.

⁵⁰ White, “Historical Roots,” 1205.

⁵¹ Ibid.

of “subduing” creation and given the task of “dominion” over it, from the Genesis mandate, inserted the notion of an earth threatening anthropocentrism as an animating principle within Western culture.

According to White’s article, in Genesis humanity was created as an “afterthought” to the rest of creation,⁵² but an afterthought that inserted the notion of human dominance into creation’s economy. Dominance came first by mankind’s ability to name the animals (as if this implied no ethical obligation or priestly duty) but the situation has been proven much darker than that, according to White. He argues, “God planned all of this,” that is all of creation—animals, plants, the natural world, “explicitly for man’s benefit and rule,”⁵³ without regard for an inherent worth in plants, animals, and the collective “land.” Following this notion, White declares what has become the dogma of much green religion and Deep Ecology: “especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.”⁵⁴ The consequences of this assertion are at least threefold: first, within Christianity, humanity has divine license to exploit nature, a special status that no doubt can and has led to human overuse and abuse of natural resources (the word “resources” itself a loaded, anti-nature term); second, and following from the first, non-human entities lack inherent value, other than that granted by human, social utility; which means thirdly, the world after Christianity is a disenchanting force at odds with past forms of pagan

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

enchantment. Under this construct, things are merely things, objects without divine value or sparks of transcendence.

Many Christian thinkers, of course, argue against this narrative. Consider what Stratford Caldecott says,

in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, God ‘saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good’ (1:31). Here is the earliest and best refutation of the philosophical heresy of recent times (that of David Hume and others) that separates facts from values.⁵⁵

Implied by this quote, creatures individually and collectively contain worth. However, there are other Christian voices that lend credence to the narrative of Christianity’s disenchantment of creation. For example, Harvey Cox reads the Christian revolution of Western culture as one that disenchant the world,⁵⁶ and lays the groundwork for later secularization, removing enchantment to the transcendent sphere through proselytizing. According to most contemporary analyses as Gili Pálsson has noted, “a recurring criticism is that the nature-society dichotomy hinders true ecological understanding.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Stratford Caldecott, *The Radiance of Being: Dimensions of Cosmic Being*, Tacoma: Angelico Press, 2015, 93.

⁵⁶ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 26-30.

⁵⁷ *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Gili Pálsson and Phillippe Descola, London: Routledge, 1996, 3. Here, Cox’ narrative fits well within the secularization and disenchantment thesis produced by the Deep Ecologists. While this notion is argued against in this thesis, it is important to note that monotheism did in fact have a missionary focus to bring and promote their religion to other regions, even those who practiced paganism which was otherwise non-proselytizing. See Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2006, 3-23.

Consider again the arguments of White: Christianity “not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.”⁵⁸ In ethical terms, *society*, a gathering of subjects of value, may utilize *nature*, a gathering of objects, to whatever end society deems important. This common theme within eco-religious thought locates the modern world’s sources of disenchantment with Christianity, while seeking religious renewal of worldly enchantment in alternative devotional groups. In White’s seminal article, he writes, “in antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own genius loci, its guardian spirit.”⁵⁹ These spirits, though “accessible to men,” were not like them, for they were “centaurs, fauns, and mermaids,”⁶⁰ etc. offering a “spiritual plenum,”⁶¹ a sort of “primitive panvitalism,”⁶² and the ethical implications of “seeing” the world in this way required human societies to placate the spirits of these niches in some manner. White adds to this a common trope of modern religious thought against Christianity that it in fact did its own part to disenchant the world: “by destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.”⁶³ This critique has become the most influential and enduring argument of White’s in the oeuvre for the many environmental despisers of Christianity.

⁵⁸ White, “Historical Roots,” 1205.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Albert Borgmann, “The Nature of Reality and The Reality of Nature,” *Reinventing Nature?*, 32.

⁶² Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001, 7-9.

⁶³ White, “Historical Roots,” 1205.

An Interesting Argument

The fact that this critique of Western Christianity has proven interesting within the *Zeitgeist* of the 20th century's cultural moment only served to further the cause of environmentalism. As noted, these critiques most palpably were pronounced during a period of mid-century, counter-culturalism, but at the time mainline society still persisted and the counter-culture was a slow-moving undercurrent. In its American context, Christianity was the mainline religion influencing the wider culture it persisted within. This is exactly why anti-Christian, environmentalist arguments appeared interesting to its audience. Consider Murray Davis' famous article "That's Interesting!: Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology," in which he claims that a "theorist is considered great, not because his theories are true, but because they are *interesting*."⁶⁴

What is "worth saying" for an audience's engagement is that which "denies the truth of some part of their routinely held assumption-ground."⁶⁵ When the newly promoted theory challenges or subverts the common activities of an audience, it holds attractive power. Davis identifies methods and categories by which social scientists have promoted newly subversive, and thus interesting theories: organization, composition, abstraction, generalization, stabilization, function, evaluation, co-relation, co-existence, co-variation, opposition, and causation.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Murray S. Davis, "That's Interesting!: Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology," *Philosophy of Social Science*, x, 1971, 309.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 313-326.

Utilizing Davis' categories, I would locate an environmentalist critique of Christianity like Lynn White Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" as an "interesting" argument under Davis' category of "evaluation." If a phenomenon is typically deemed good, it can be re-evaluated as an impoverished phenomenon, and vice versa;⁶⁷ this reversal of the expected evaluation is one way that Davis deems an argument to be "interesting," and therefore, due wide engagement. Davis explains the mechanics of a theorist producing such an argument:

depending on his audience's appraisal, he can select either the best or the worst particular aspects of the phenomenon to stand for the phenomenon as a whole. Should his audience customarily view the phenomenon in its best light, he can then view it in its worst, and vice versa...second, he can change the rating of a phenomenon by changing the moral measure to which it is being compared. Something is judged good or bad relative to some standard of good or bad. Change the standard of comparison and the evaluation of the phenomenon is also likely to change.⁶⁸

Applying Davis' theory of interesting arguments to the case of environmental criticism of Christianity, we can see that White's anti-Christian, environmental thesis was found to be interesting because it called into question and thus subverted the standard religion that shaped the Modern West in a time when the mainline society assumed that its presuppositions and practices were in keeping with Christianity.

To Davis' subsequent point about "evaluation/re-evaluation," White's thesis, in particular, changed the "moral measure" of evaluating human-environmental

⁶⁷ Ibid., 321.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

relations. By the mid-twentieth century, there was a great deal of interest in Christianity's humanistic (theistic-humanism rather than atheistic humanism) tendencies, such as with its support of civil rights and anti-war demonstrations, for example. But White, and other environmental critics who followed him changed the moral measure by denouncing humanism; indeed, they relabeled it—anthropocentrism. What was at one time in history seen as a force for human dignity, rights, and personhood – emerging in biblical terms from the *imago dei* – White labeled anthropocentric, i.e. an ontology of human supremacy over nature. From the time of his article onward, environmental writers would apply the label “anthropocentric” to thinkers and ideas in exactly the same manner that medieval Christians used the word heretic—any thinker or idea with even a hint of anthropocentrism, i.e. human uniqueness (which has become any idea that humans have any unique role in the cosmos or divine drama) was to be avoided and even persecuted against.

But the tides have turned since this environmentalist dogma took center stage. Indeed, it is an environmental audience's standard, taken-for-granted view that Western Christianity's anthropocentrism is culpable for Western practices and ideologies that have harmed creation. This thesis hopes to be “interesting” by questioning the assumptions of this general environmental thesis. Davis restates his point, “we have seen that an audience finds a proposition ‘interesting’ not because it tells them some truth they did not already know, but instead because it

tells them some truth they thought they already knew was wrong.”⁶⁹ The point of this thesis is to argue against the orthodoxy of environmental critique—Christianity does not disenchant the world nor was the Genesis mandate understood in the manner they suppose; rather Christianity is perhaps the greenest of all theologies.

The Greening of Religion

As noted above, the mid-twentieth century brought great interest in environmental thought, activism, and spirituality. But this is not to say that human civilization had never heretofore considered humanity’s relationship with the non-human world, or more narrowly, humanity’s cause for natural burdens. Humanity has long since been concerned with natural change. Clarence Glacken thoroughly demonstrates this in his magisterial *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*,⁷⁰ which surveys the history of culture’s interpretation of the natural order. Glacken writes, “among the works of writers whose interpretations of environmental change are part of a broader philosophy, those of Cicero, the Hermetic writers (who probably derive their ideas on this matter from the Stoics), Lucretius, Varro are most instructive.”⁷¹ This illustrious list of ancients is noteworthy because each presciently considered the veracity of environmental change, which is an oft-assumed modern concern. He quotes a poem by Lucretius as an example:

And day by day they would constrain the woods more and more to
retire up the mountains, and to give up the land beneath to tilth,
that on hills and plains they might have meadows, pools, streams,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 327.

⁷⁰ Clarence Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, Oakland: University of California Press, 1976.

⁷¹ Ibid., 138.

crops, and glad vineyards, and the grey belt of olives might run between with its clear line, spreading over hillocks and hollows and plains; even as now you see all the land clear marked with diverse beauties, where men make it bright by planting it here and there with sweet fruit-trees, and fence it by planting it all round with fruitful shrubs.⁷²

Glacken focuses on the ancient world up until the 18th century, proving that there is much historical reflection upon the “man and nature” question. But what makes the 1960s unique is a shifting social *zeitgeist* that drew new generations back to nature's writers like Thoreau, Muir, and the Romantics. James William Gibson also points out that the first photographs taken of planet earth by Apollo astronauts mid-century, startled the imagination. “These photos consecrated the Earth itself.”⁷³ These incredible visions of a fragile and beautiful planet from space, in no way fragmented, promoted a social consciousness crying out for eco-justice and increasing awareness of human abuse of nature.

The 1960s era of social awareness and sensitivity to the plight of Earth provides a distinct backdrop for White's famous article. And it provided clear diagnostic clues for what has gone wrong. Although White may have never intended a full subversion of Christianity, for it is more likely that White wished to critique particularities of Christian faith that required faithful revision, many ecological theorists who followed have utilized his and similar arguments in order to develop

⁷² Ibid., 140.

⁷³ James William Gibson, *A Reenchanted World: The Quest for a New Kinship With Nature*, New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009, 93.

completely new approaches to religion. This is what is often called “the greening of religion.”⁷⁴

For terminological clarity, we must differentiate this “greening of religion” from the general scientific concept of “ecology,” no matter that there do exist terms like “eco-spirituality,” “eco-theology,” and Deep Ecology, etc. within this sort of literature. To provide a cursory sorting of the related terms, ecology and environmentalism, Robert P. McIntosh claims,

ecology was, and is, a science which does not fit readily into the familiar mold of science erected on the model of classical physics, and it deals with phenomena which frequently touch very close to the quick of human sensibilities, including aesthetics, morality, ethics, and, even worse in some minds, economics.⁷⁵

Given that the West is increasingly secular, and that the transcendent sphere is receding from the popular modern imaginary, it is easy to see here why ecological concerns have arisen to something akin to religion, bringing the health of the earth as an “ultimate concern,”⁷⁶ which is Tillich’s phrase for the “religious.” Yet, the concept of ecology is not easily understood. McIntosh notes the antecedents to this science, “ecology progressed slowly from the coining of the word by the eminent German zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866,”⁷⁷ who Donald Worster claims was “the leading German disciple of Darwin.”⁷⁸ But, Haeckel’s notion of ecology

⁷⁴ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁵ Robert P. McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology: Concept and Theory*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 1.

⁷⁶ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, 12.

⁷⁷ McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology*, 2.

⁷⁸ Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 192.

“took a century...to become widely familiar outside professional circles in the 1960s.”⁷⁹ Ecology-proper is a sub-discipline of natural history, though like natural history it, too, fragmented “into separate disciplines to accommodate the deluge of new information about the kinds and properties of living organisms, their activities, and distribution.”⁸⁰ Basic ecology, according to McIntosh, is an “amalgam”⁸¹ of natural history and 20th century biology. Beyond this, the meaning of ecology is broadly contested. Is it synonymous with biology? Haeckel thought not, for ecology was a branch of physiology that was “inductive”⁸² because it studied organisms and their relations in the field as opposed to in the laboratory, searching for understanding about “the interrelations of plants and animals with their environments.”⁸³

Ultimately, according to McIntosh, the definition of ecology (including its goals) is contested even amongst its practitioners. For McIntosh, “ecology shares with biology, in addition to its 19th-century origin, difficulty of concise definition, although definitions are myriad.”⁸⁴ And strikingly McIntosh observes, “as ecology achieved high visibility and even notoriety in the mid-20th century, it was frequently confounded with any concern for, or ideology about, the environment.”⁸⁵ For example, McIntosh refers to Lynn White Jr.’s seminal article, “White, like many nonscientists discussing ecology, confounded it with general

⁷⁹ McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology*, 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

environmental impacts.”⁸⁶ Environmental concern, even as it applies to religion, is not necessarily proprietary to the science of ecology, but is rather an ecological sub-discipline called “conservation biology,” which concerns the sustainability of all ecological realities, patches, niches, creatures, etc. McIntosh asserts that some of the confusion about what ecology is and does, including its conflation with ideology, is due to the fact that its origins are contested. He reflects on Glacken’s work for instance, because Glacken traces human reflection on the natural world from the context of philosophical and religious history. The questions posed by Glacken, in fact, inundate much of Western religious thought, and not that of scientific ecologists. McIntosh notes that a search like Glacken’s one will no doubt notice the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, who said, “[I]t is better to have a multiplicity of species than a multiplicity of individuals of one species.”⁸⁷ This specially Thomist notion has led the ecologically minded theologian Willis Jenkins to claim that there is a “sanctifying of bio-diversity”⁸⁸ within Thomas’ thought, understanding the diminishment of biodiversity as not merely a moral loss, but a revelatory one as well—a loss in grace. Consider Thomas’ point more fully:

We must say that the distinction and multitude of things comes from God. For he brought things into being in order that His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided; and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness

⁸⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁷ McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology*, 13.

⁸⁸ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 115-132.

more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.⁸⁹

McIntosh' point is that, "such observations are not roots of ecology in the biological sense of that metaphor, for it is not clear that ecology grew from them in any direct way."⁹⁰ This, he argues, is the same conclusion that can be drawn when considering the Romantics, or later nature writers like Thoreau. They may have increased awareness for human responsibility for non-human creatures, but there is no causal link between these earlier writers and the science of ecology.

For the historian of ecological thought Donald Worster, the search for *protoecologists* and antecedent ecological ideas is paramount for understanding ecology as well as environmental action, and his investigations prove McIntosh's point that ecology is often conflated with conservation biology. Consider Worster's simple binary typology of environmental thought in *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*.⁹¹ The first being the "science of arcadia"⁹² and the other "the empire of reason."⁹³ Worster waxes poetic on the life and research of Gilbert White of Selborne who studied the ecology of his small patch of the world, with the idylls of rural life, the church, human communities, animals and scenery, all of which he observed in a state of harmony. Worster writes, that this "arcadian harmony"⁹⁴ of White's delight of nature was "a personal realization of

⁸⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Q. 47, Article. 2, Part. 1, 246.

⁹⁰ McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology*, 13.

⁹¹ Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 3-25.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 25-56.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

the ancient arcadian dream of reanimating man's loyalties to the earth and its vital energies."⁹⁵ The science of arcadia represents any thinker, or school of thought that walks gently in the world, appreciating non human life as a divine gift and working toward the benefit of all life, not simply human flourishing. Some arcadian ecological types are the Romantics, metaphysical poets, writers like Thoreau, and in the contemporary world Annie Dillard, Wendell Berry, and H.J. Massingham. In short, for Worster, the arcadian science is the morally superior one.

Contrary to the arcadian vision is the "empire of reason," which sounds domineering by design, but it begins merely with a sense of "Christian pastoralism" whereby mankind leads nature as a shepherd leads a flock.⁹⁶ This description is not yet sinister; similarly, biblical scholar Ellen F. Davis recasts the Genesis mandate to the benefit of the environment and to this pastoral vision. "The basic meaning of the verb" רָדָה (radah), "is not to rule; the word actually denotes the travelling around of the shepherd with his flock. Thus the language of Genesis 1 acknowledges the unique power of Homo sapiens, yet without separating us from the other creatures,"⁹⁷ she claims. For Davis, "conformity to the image of God is the single enabling condition for the exercise of 'mastery' among the creatures."⁹⁸ But Worster reads the subsequent human history like many environmental critics do when he claims,

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁷ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, Agriculture*, 55.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Emphasis, mine.

in contrast to the arcadian ideal, which grew out of pagan culture and carried along in its subsequent revivals the paraphernalia of satyrs, nymphs, and the goat-god Pan piping on his flute, the Christian version focused on the image of the Good Shepherd, as ideally expressed in the life of Jesus Christ.⁹⁹

Further, Worster thinks of Christ as a shepherd who defends the human flock against the terrible forces of nature, i.e. “wolves, lions, bears—and his profession is to lead his lambs out of this sorry world to greener pastures.”¹⁰⁰ In this way, Worster interprets the biblical tradition as being completely “anti-natural.”¹⁰¹ On the whole, Worster’s reading of Christianity is resonate with his self-styled “arcadian” perspective of proto-environmentalist and architect of the American National Park program, John Muir. In order to subvert the Genesis mandate, and its implications, Muir (son of a Christian cleric) sarcastically asks about the purposes of

man-eating animals – lions, tigers, alligators – which smack their lips over raw man? Or about those myriads of noxious insects that destroy labor and drink his blood? Doubtless man was intended for food or drink for all these? Oh no! Not at all! These are unresolvable difficulties connected with Eden’s apple and the Devil.¹⁰²

For Worster, the “empire of reason” approach to nature is one that separates man *apart from* and *over* nature, and nature then becomes a thing to investigate and control. This is the anthropocentric view of the world that enables modern research.

⁹⁹ Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, 26.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰² John Muir, “Man’s Place in the Universe” in *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, Online: www.yosemite.ca.us/john_muir_writings/mans_place_in_the_universe (Accessed 14 Apr. 2015).

Consider also Francis Bacon's approach to natural research. According to anthropologist and environmental writer Gili Pálsson, Bacon sought to investigate nature, to find its secrets, under a method of torture. Pálsson says "the Baconian imagery of sexual assault, of 'entering and penetrating...holes and corners,' is a recurrent one."¹⁰³ He argues further that "human-environmental interactions" happen "by means of an aggressive, sexual idiom; nature appears as a seductive but troublesome female."¹⁰⁴ For this reason, much reflection on nature-culture dualism locates the feminine with "nature"—"mother nature,"¹⁰⁵ and the masculine with "culture."¹⁰⁶ Essentially, these are the environmentally flavored workings of what literary critic Jonathan Bate calls the "Enlightenment dialectic," in which the "Enlightenment's instrumentalization of nature frees mankind from the tyranny of nature (disease, famine), but its disenchantment of nature licenses the destruction of nature and hence of mankind."¹⁰⁷ Again, for Worster, ecology-and-environmentalism – the two being conflated, as McIntosh observed—is a moral perspective.

No doubt driven ideologically by environmental concern, Worster's paradigm still draws many critics within related fields of study. "Worster's typology of ecology and ecologists is criticized adversely by some historians of science," McIntosh

¹⁰³ Gísli Pálsson, "Human—Environment Relations: Orientalism, Paternalism, and Communalism," 68. In this passage, Pálsson is citing Bacon through Bordo's work.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ For an analysis of the ways in which the "mother nature" metaphor is used see Catherine M. Roach, *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.

¹⁰⁶ See Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, HarperOne, 1994.

¹⁰⁷ Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 78.

names F.N. Egerton and R. Tobey, “although reviews by ecologists are more favorable,”¹⁰⁸ i.e. “Kormondy and Smith.”¹⁰⁹ According to McIntosh, Egerton “regarded Worster’s types as existing only in his mind and Worster’s point of view as making a good story but not conveying objective history of ecology.”¹¹⁰ Much debate persists over the claims that ecology as a science sprang from Romantics, nature writers, and theologians, but many may permit that the contemporary “arcadian” impulse for developing proper ways of human “seeing” (being in, with, and part of nature and possessing concern for the environment) did have many antecedents from the *ecopoetic*¹¹¹ tradition: the Romantics, poets, nature writers, philosophers, religious leaders, and theologians. Precisely this heredity of thought shaped a transition in the ways that people think about religion and led to a call for its “greening,” new and/or retrieved ways of conceiving religious belief colored by metaphysical, moral, and contemplative focus upon the interrelationships present within creation.

Religion’s greening is a spiritual, philosophical, and theological response to the ecological sub-discipline of conservation biology and its ideological arm, environmentalism, more so than it is a response to the science of ecology. A green religion asks religious questions about the human place within the natural order, human responsibility for nature, how to value differing creatures, and what activism can help quell the ecological crisis. Bron Taylor, scholar of

¹⁰⁸ McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology*, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ I owe this term to Timothy Morton. See his *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

environmental and religious activism notes that Lynn White Jr.'s critique of Christianity is a contemporary example of Rousseau, whose critiques "caused soul searching and reform movements within the criticized religions."¹¹² He makes repeated use of Lynn White Jr., pointing out the following ideas from White's article:

1. Christianity and not Asian religions "promoted a dualistic attitude"¹¹³ that ended in exploitation.
2. "[P]aganism and animism...were more environmentally friendly than Christianity," which is a "religion that made people *callous* toward nonhuman creatures."¹¹⁴

To prove this point, Taylor quotes a line from White's piece that I have already cited above: "by destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."¹¹⁵

Although it is true that this quote is featured in White's article, Taylor's assertion that Christianity "made people callous" toward non-humans is an exaggeration of White's point, given White's overall tone and argumentative flow. White's argument concerns causes and effects (without intentions being stated or assumed), but Taylor's reading of White projects intentionality to make people callous; actually, as we have discovered, White suggests that Christian ways of thinking mixed with other cultural realities contributed to a concoction which led to exploitation of nature. This may appear a minor critique, but Taylor's evaluation represents a strong trend in the way ecological critics overstate White's

¹¹² Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2010, 10.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 11, emphasis, mine.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

critiques against Christian thought for their own anti-Christian ideological purposes. Here are the final two observations that Taylor makes of White's seminal article:

3. As already stated in my description of White's article, "Christianity was 'the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen' and as a result helped precipitate the environmental crisis."¹¹⁶
4. Taylor correctly states "White thought that Western people, even those who were no longer religious, were deeply conditioned by Christianity's anthropocentrism and irreverence toward nature."¹¹⁷

Up to this point in Taylor's analysis of White's influence upon the greening of religion, he has yet to reflect on the other Christian expression that White finds helpful: Byzantine Christianity. In later chapters, I will reflect upon several Eastern Christian thinkers in order to show the beauty of this perspective for environmentalism. But for now, consider the way that the Western church responded to criticisms like Lynn White Jr.'s, at least according to Bron Taylor. He argues that there are typically four responses:

1. **Apologetic:** "arguing that properly understood their traditions were environmentally sensitive."¹¹⁸
2. **Confessional:** "acknowledging guilt (at least in part) and undertaking internal religious reform to make their religions environmentally responsible."¹¹⁹

Taylor argues that these two responses are part of the "greening of Christianity" that began in the 1960s. He, of course, is referring to the theological sub-discipline, eco-theology as well as a sort of environmental activism often called by Christians as "creation care," promoted by groups like *The Evangelical*

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 11-12.

Environmental Network.¹²⁰ Here are the other two responses of Christianity, according to Taylor:

3. **Indifference:** “indifference, viewing the criticisms and environmental concern as of minor or no importance to their religious faith.”¹²¹
4. **Hostility:** because it is felt that environmental thinking is “antithetical to Christianity.”¹²²

Somewhere between the third and fourth option is American media host Glenn Beck, who famously self-identifies as both a political conservative and a Christian. For Beck and like-minded pundits, a day like Earth Day is a political tool meant to take away personal, individual freedoms, so Beck celebrated one Earth Day by burning trees.¹²³ This point of view is rejected in this thesis as unfaithful to traditional Christian faith and practice, but nevertheless cannot be ignored.

According to Taylor, the “polyfocal” familial¹²⁴ types of environmentally influenced religion include “green religion” and “dark green.”¹²⁵ Green religion denotes a religious perspective that is inspired by ecological concerns, and in which the adjective “green” includes religious views that are concerned with earth care (the aforementioned *Evangelical Environmental Network*, for example).

What makes a religion “dark green” is a deeper commitment, that “nature is

¹²⁰ Evangelical Environmental Network, 2017. *Evangelical Environmental Network*, <http://www.creationcare.org/>, (Accessed 30 Aug. 2018).

¹²¹ Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 12.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Jimmy Orr, “Earth Day: Glenn Beck Celebrates by Cutting down Trees,” April, 22, 2009, *The Christian Science Monitor*, Online: <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/The-Vote/2009/0422/earth-day-glenn-beck-celebrates-by-cutting-down-trees> (Accessed 12 Jan. 2018).

¹²⁴ Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 2.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 10. These parallel deep ecology’s differences between shallow and deep ecology.

sacred, has intrinsic value, and therefore due reverent care,”¹²⁶ e.g. Wicca, Druidism, and Shintoism. Though a diverse field, other themes include a sense of kinship with other living things, eco or bio-centricism, critique of human hubris, and a metaphysics of interdependence or reciprocity.¹²⁷

From there the field only gets more nuanced. So Taylor provides a matrix in order to classify many groups into four general types. *Animism* is the first type:

Today it commonly refers to perceptions that natural entities, forces, and nonhuman life-forms have one or more of the following: a soul or vital life-force or spirit, personhood (an affective life and personal intentions), and consciousness, often but not always including special spiritual intelligences or powers.¹²⁸

At this point there is a further division within animism between naturalism and supernaturalism. According to Taylor, there exists both *Spiritual Animism* and *Naturalistic Animism*.¹²⁹ Simply put, for the former there is something supernatural at work in a life form, and that something cannot be discovered empirically because it is immaterial, or at least mental.

For an example of spiritual animism there is hardly a better example than Gary Snyder, beatnik poet turned Deep Ecologist. Finding much inspiration in Native American creation narratives i.e. *Turtle Island*¹³⁰ and Buddhism, Snyder argues that much of the Western tradition is wanting. He writes, “there is no name yet for

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹³⁰ Gary Snyder, “Rediscovery of Turtle Island,” *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, Boston, Shambhala Press, 1995, 454.

a humanistic scholarship that embraces the non-human. I suggest (in a spirit of pagan play) we call it ‘pan-humanism.’”¹³¹ Radical personalizing of all entities, or universal democratization, attracts Snyder to Native American spirituality.¹³² Spiritual Animism, insofar as it is a contemporary religious sentiment concerning the non-human world, represents much of ecologism’s attempt to retrieve an older, ecocentric vision.

Spiritual Animism is closely related, overlapping at times, with another aspect of Taylor’s matrix: *Gaian Spirituality*. Gaia, the Greek mythological mother of all is also earth personified; a widespread ecological notion introduced by scientist James Lovelock. For Gaian Spirituality, an adherent “understands the biosphere (universe or cosmos) to be alive or conscious, or at least by metaphor to resemble organisms with their many interdependent parts.”¹³³ An *ecopoetic* illustration from the cinema is James Cameron’s *Avatar*.¹³⁴ The film’s protagonist population is the Na’vi, the indigenous people of a planet called Pandora. Imperialistic humans in avatar bodies are on a mission to mine Pandora of a precious resource called (quite indiscreetly) “unobtainium” and encroach upon the harmonious world. In an effort to understand the Na’vi, the film’s hero Jake Sully, finds freedom in their nature-loving culture and “goes native” working against the human military-

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 459.

¹³³ Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 16.

¹³⁴ This film has been the recipient of much ecological critique. For example see: Slavoj Žižek’s critique “Avatar: Return of the Natives,” 3/4/2010, Online: New Statesman, <http://www.newstatesman.com/film/2010/03/avatar-reality-love-couple-sex> (Accessed 4 Mar. 2010), and Bruno Latour’s treatment in “Waiting for Gaia,” Online: Bruno Latour, http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/124-GAIA-LONDON-SPEAP_0.pdf (Accessed 4 Mar. 2010).

industrial ends in support of the Na'vi. The Na'vi worship *Eywa*, a mother goddess, who appears to permeate the whole planet and every living creature on it through a large sacramental tree (Gaia). This blatantly sermonic film criticizes the ongoing imperialism of America by convincing viewers that humans are part of something larger, much like other, prior indigenous filmic examples e.g. *Dances with Wolves* or Malick's Pacific Islander peoples in *The Thin Red Line*.¹³⁵

Adherents of *Naturalistic Animism* are mostly “agnostic or skeptical,”¹³⁶ when it comes to “life forces” or spirits and souls permeating all other non-human entities, says Taylor. What lends this brand of naturalism its animism is the ecologically important notion of *kinship*. “Kinship feelings are certainly common among those who endorse evolutionary theory's supposition of common ancestors,”¹³⁷ writes Taylor, adding that this is especially true among those who have historically worked with other animals such as primates, chiefly the primatologist Jane Goodall and her work with chimpanzees. Goodall viewed chimpanzees as people, and regularly cultivated relationship with them. In fact, Goodall reported how difficult it was to write of this experience in scientific publications, because her

¹³⁵ And then there is also Gaia's “dark” representation in film, M. Knight Shyamalan's *The Happening*. In *The Happening*, an unexplained neuro-toxin plagues a large population of humans—mostly in densely populated areas. The toxin neutralizes part of the reptilian brain, the location of instinctive self-protection. Human suicide takes place *en masse* of which the film's protagonists eventually conclude that trees are releasing the chemical in a sort of self-defense attack upon an overgrown, industrial human population. Though a horror film, the message is the same: Earth is a self-regulating, personal organism that will work towards homeostasis no matter the cost to persons or cultures. Both cases of popular cinema show in one way or another how intellectual notion has influenced the wider, popular imagination.

¹³⁶ Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 15.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

experience led her to write in ways that went against the predominant scientific dogma which viewed animals as things and not, as she found them, persons.¹³⁸

For Goodall, animism is not necessarily spiritual, but her career-side, first person experiences brought her to question old categories surrounding personhood and agency, and the ethics which emerge as a result.

The final category in Taylor's matrix is *Gaian Naturalism*. Like Naturalistic Animism, Gaian Naturalism too "is skeptical of supernaturalistic metaphysics"¹³⁹ but utilizes "mainstream" scientific language in order to promote a "holistic metaphysics,"¹⁴⁰ they also make use of sublime language to describe the beauty, fecundity, and interdependence of life. What makes it "gaian" is this sense of awe for the natural order arising from its apparent web of connectivity—holism over atomism, to be clear.

This taxonomy describes Taylor's sense of "Dark Green Religion," yet as the name implies, there are other shades as well. And beyond actual, metaphysical, and essentialist religions there are also ways in which contemporary

¹³⁸ Jane Goodall, "Essays on Science and Society: Learning from Chimpanzees: A Message Humans Can Understand," 12/18/1998 Online: *Science Mag*, <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/282/5397/2184.full> (Accessed 3 March 2013). There she writes, "The editorial comments on the first paper that I wrote for publication demanded that every 'he' or 'she' be replaced with 'it,' and every 'who' be replaced with 'which.' Incensed, I, in turn, crossed out the 'its' and 'whichs' and scrawled back the original pronouns. As I had no desire to carve out a niche for myself in the world of science but simply wanted to go on living among and learning about chimpanzees, the possible reaction of the editor of the learned journal did not trouble me. The paper, when finally published, did confer upon the chimpanzees the dignity of their appropriate genders and properly upgraded them from the status of mere 'things' to essential beingness."

¹³⁹ Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 16.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

environmental writing is expressed religiously, at least in function; Taylor terms this phenomenon “parareligion.”¹⁴¹ This can happen when environmentalism’s praxis patterns those of religious communities. Consider the mottos “reduce, reuse, and recycle,” or “it’s the only we earth we’ve got” for example. These mottos along with protest folk songs like Ani DiFranco’s *Animal* fill out a liturgy of environmentalist concern; they are affirmations practiced by a community to bolster the particular mode of “seeing” the world. Then there are the environmentalist holy days—Arbor Day, Earth Day, Zero Emissions Day—prescribing sets of devotional practices, a communal *ethos*. Environmentalism even has its prophets, extremists, communities, and other simulacra paralleling religious history (voices of *askesis*), respectively: Bill McKibben, *EarthFirst!*, and The Green Belt Movement. And as a negative parallel to Christian history, cap and trade¹⁴² policies display a contemporary form of Reformation era buying and selling of indulgences. Under this market-based control on emissions, companies are allowed their sins against the atmosphere, just as long as they have the money to spend.

Whatever shade of green the religion, or even when functioning “parareligiously,” there are a few characteristics that this eco-religious milieu¹⁴³ holds in common: first, they offer genealogies of thought that identify culpable agents for the current crisis (in most cases, Christianity being public enemy number one); second, new,

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 155.

¹⁴² “How Cap and Trade Works,” Online: Environmental Defense Fund, <http://www.edf.org/climate/how-cap-and-trade-works> (Accessed 24 Feb. 2015).

¹⁴³ Morton, *Dark Green Religion*, 114.

alternative ontologies are set over and against the perceived hegemonic ones; third, and emerging from the first two is an alternative view of humans and the role of society on the planet. Ergo, environmentalist influenced religion promotes both an anthropology as well as an ethic.

Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the previously mentioned school of thought called Deep Ecology. What makes Deep Ecology worth considering now, after reviewing at Bron Taylor's matrix, is that it tells a narrative of historic harmony between humanity and nature, disruption with the advent and spread of Christianity, and then offers new paths forward for culture, religious and non-religious alike. George Sessions' programmatic essay "Ecocentricism and the Anthropocentric Detour" reveals the story most plainly: DE is an association of thought claiming a rich genealogy comprised of Spinoza, Gandhi, "Perennial Philosophy," Thoreau, Eastern Philosophy, Malthus, Darwin,¹⁴⁴ as well as most indigenous people groups. This new and alternative metanarrative argues that the world has always been understood (specifically prior to Christianity's cultural revolution) ontologically ecocentric, meaning ancient ontologies were earth-focused, holistic, and de-centering humanity as the only agents of rights, morality, and value. As DE describes these premodern viewpoints, *Homo sapiens* were but supporting characters in the universal drama, and humanity did not and should not now adopt a position of superiority among all earthly creatures *a la* "the great chain of being." This ecocentric perspective was the overriding cosmological

¹⁴⁴ George Sessions, "Ecocentricism and the Anthropocentric Detour," in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism*, Boston: Shambala, 1995, 156-184.

understanding of most peoples throughout human history. As Clapp and Dauvergne have reflected on an ecological sub-discipline, bioenvironmentalism, “the human species...is seen to be the primary problem for the earth’s ecology,”¹⁴⁵ and with human culture, according to Sessions resulted in the “anthropocentric detour” where humans raised themselves to the pinnacle of being by Christianity’s overcoming of paganism in late antiquity i.e. Constantine’s rule, and early medieval Christendom. These historical epochs, according to Sessions, represent the inauguration of a human-centered, anthropocentric worldview and nature’s ensuing demise, or disenchantment.¹⁴⁶

DE’s self-concept is culturally *radical*, working to subvert modern liberalism and its supposed predecessor, Christianity. The adjective “radical” here, denotes a retrieval or reference to bygone, original, or fundamental worldview, and simultaneously connotes an apparent strangeness or extremism when practiced, given the context of modernity’s cultural milieu.¹⁴⁷ Put another way, DE offers a holistic way of life, wherein humans are no longer individuals set apart from one another and nature; they are re-imagined in superior ways, ecologically speaking, in deep community with other creatures.

Of interest to this thesis is not simply DE’s narrative of change with regards to human-nonhuman relations, but also how this consciousness became widespread

¹⁴⁵ Jennifer Clapp and Peter Dauvergne, *Paths to a Green World: The Political Economy of the Global World*, Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2011, 237.

¹⁴⁶ George Sessions, “Ecocentricism and the Anthropocentric Detour,” 156-184.

¹⁴⁷ In this way, Deep Ecology’s sense of “radical” shares much in common with the theological sensibility called Radical Orthodoxy.

from the 1960s onward. Like Bron Taylor's work, DE leverages Lynn White Jr.'s famous article as a sort of prophetic critique of and call away from a Christian worldview. Part of Sessions' narrative contends that premoderns were ecocentric before Christianity took the West down an anthropocentric and disastrous detour; then, he highlights the thinkers who have been pulling at anthropocentric threads along the way. In the post-war era for example, Sessions reflects on the achievements of the Sierra Club, and Rachel Carson's landmark environmental science text *Silent Spring*.¹⁴⁸ Marketed as a scientific polemic against the use of DDT, her spiritual leanings concerning non-humanity are a "Trojan-Horsed" throughout the book, as they were undergirded by Schweitzer's philosophy *Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*, the "reverence for life" principle. *Silent Spring* is dedicated to Schweitzer, with his stark ethical warning: "Man has lost the capacity to foresee and forestall. He will end by destroying the earth."¹⁴⁹ Next, Sessions offers praise to Stuart Udall's work *The Quiet Crisis*. As President John F. Kennedy's secretary of the interior, Sessions claims that Udall popularized the ideas of "Marsh, Thoreau, and Muir...calling for 'modern Muirs' to step forward and carry on the conservation fight."¹⁵⁰ Next in his historical sketch, Sessions turns his attention to Lynn White Jr.'s article. He praises him for bringing well-known arguments about anthropocentrism and ecocentrism to a wide audience,¹⁵¹ but what is important to grasp here is that White's arguments are characterized identically with Bron Taylor's work, as merely an environmentalist

¹⁴⁸ George Sessions, "Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour," 171.

¹⁴⁹ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002, copyright page.

¹⁵⁰ George Sessions, "Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour," 171.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

critique of Christian ways of “seeing” the world. And again the subtleties of White’s argument disappear.

Consider also the reference to White in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature vol. II: K-Z*, written by Elspeth Whitney, who writes that White’s article “extended the debate about the role of religion in creating and sustaining the West’s increasingly successful control of the natural world through technology.”¹⁵² This viewpoint is widely accepted. The encyclopedia article, edited by Bron Taylor no less, continues,

the explosiveness of the debate, which still reverberates was touched off by a confluence of factors: urgency in the late 1960s and 1970s over the newly discovered environmental crisis, White’s ability to reach an audience beyond that of professional historians, and the perception that White’s ideas constituted an ‘attack’ on Christianity which needed to be answered before additional damage was done to the value of conventional religious beliefs.¹⁵³

Whitney credits, just as Sessions acknowledges, White’s communication abilities as the key to his influence, but Whitney adds that the appearance of an attack on Christianity is yet a further reason. This is part of the reason why so many environmentalists use White and ecological critics of Christianity, for it emerged in a tumultuous cultural moment where traditional institutions like the Christian church were widely questioned and rejected, especially in America.

Eco-theology: Christian Attempts at Greening

¹⁵² Elspeth Whitney, “White, Lynn (1907-1987) – Thesis of,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature vol. II: K-Z*, Ed. Bron Taylor, London: Continuum, 2005, 1735.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Although much of the greening of religion phenomenon has been anti-Christian in one way or another, academic Christian theology underwent a concurrent, parallel trend, as well. Eco-theology, like the rest of religious greening, arose out of the environmental consciousness of the late 20th century, and is a constructive and contextual theology that seeks to either revise Christian thought for an ecological age¹⁵⁴ or to defend Christian thought against the aforementioned arguments popularized by White and many others. Celia Deane-Drummond has helpfully catalogued various eco-theological perspectives in her book *Eco-Theology*.¹⁵⁵ In some cases, she notes, eco-theology has taken shape as a subgenre of liberation theology, especially by the likes of Leonardo Boff in *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*,¹⁵⁶ and *Cry of the Earth: Cry of the Poor*.¹⁵⁷ In the former, Deane-Drummond claims that Boff argues for the “rights of other creatures and nature as a whole having a ‘cosmic right,’ alongside human and national rights”...which requires for Boff a sort of “mental ecology” that seeks to recharge affinity with nature, individuals and community.”¹⁵⁸ Much of Boff’s work is a form of eco-politics, which is strong in its critique of capitalism while seeking a purer Marxism than what was offered by a failed “Eastern European Communism.”¹⁵⁹ Boff’s specific brand of liberation eco-theology is similar to wider environmentalist critiques; they, too, argue that anthropocentrism is part of the

¹⁵⁴ See Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁵⁵ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, London: St. Mary’s Press, 2008.

¹⁵⁶ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, New York: Orbis Books, 1998.

¹⁵⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, New York: Orbis Books, 1997.

¹⁵⁸ Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, 47.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

problem. And his work is similar in that he widens the lens of community and rights beyond humanity, as he looks toward a planetary ecumenism. Thus, for Boff, any nature/culture dualism must be “outflanked.”¹⁶⁰

Other approaches in Deane-Drummonds analysis, like some North American and European examples, are more mystical in approach. Teilhard de Chardin, paleontologist and Jesuit priest, was notably “one of the first authors to seek to construct a synthesis between evolutionary and cosmological science and Christian faith in a cosmic, mystical vision.”¹⁶¹ Teilhard de Chardin was influential for many process theologians who also take up environmental concerns,¹⁶² while “many eco-theologians are wary of his work because he seemed to endorse scientific technology and its ideal of progress without taking any account of the potential social and environmental difficulties.”¹⁶³ She also points out that his famous concept of Christ as the “Omega Point” in his explication of the mystical/material/spiritual cosmic drama is arguably “somewhat

¹⁶⁰ This is John Milbank’s terminology for overcoming this dualism by the theological doctrine of creation (Lecture 8 of the 2011 Stanton Lectures, Cambridge, UK), Online: Centre of Theology and Philosophy, http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_StantonLecture8.pdf, (Accessed 23 July 2012). One example of the need to outflank this dualism is political. In his attempt to clinch the Republican nomination for the presidency in 2012, Rick Santorum accused President Obama of promoting a “phony theology” because of the Obama administration’s stance against drilling for oil. Santorum accused Obama of prioritizing the environment over human life. Dualism persists, at least, in American politics. This case is also interesting because Santorum is a committed Catholic, thus demonstrating the need for more theological and ecclesiological engagements with ecology.

¹⁶¹ Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, 37.

¹⁶² See: John B. Cobb, *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*, Denton: Environmental Ethics Books, 1995; and Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

anthropocentric in tone,”¹⁶⁴ which undoubtedly is seen as a drawback to environmentalist agenda, given its continuum. Even still, Teilhard de Chardin is receiving renewed attention, specifically because of his materialistic mysticism and holism, adjacent ideas to ecocentricism.¹⁶⁵ Deane-Drummond explains what specifically in Teilhard’s thought may prove helpful to environmental writers,

for Teilhard physical matter has psychic properties that eventually flower into complexity and consciousness. Teilhard also comes very close to ‘vitalism’, long resisted by biologists, though his notion of existence of the cosmic spirit in the natural world, though his clear sense of the transcendence of God effectively steers him away from any such conclusion.¹⁶⁶

Whatever the current environmentalist assessment of Teilhard, his work was supremely open to the notion of creation’s enchantment and mutual reciprocity amongst creatures. Take, for example, the following excerpt from a prayer offered by Teilhard:

the fact that your creatures are not merely so linked together in solidarity that none can exist unless all the rest surround it, but that all are so dependent on a single central reality that a true life, borne in common by them all, gives them ultimately their consistence and their unity.¹⁶⁷

It should be noted that his views caused some confusion and controversy within the Catholic Church. Some claimed he was an outright pantheist, thus a heretic, while others defended his scientifically and mystically laden theological terms as

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ For example Brian Swimme and Fr. Thomas Berry have been rethinking cosmic unity through their work: *The Universe Story*. Their work blends science and spirituality (inspired in part by the metaphysics of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin) in order to develop a new story of spiritual interconnectivity within the universe. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to The Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*, New York: HarperOne, 1994.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 38.

¹⁶⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, New York: Harper Colophon, 1965, 25.

in stride with Christian orthodoxy. While the debate continues, his work is currently being reappraised and revisited not only within the academy but within the church as well.¹⁶⁸

Another mystical expression is that of former Catholic priest, Matthew Fox:

Matthew Fox also writes from a starting point in the Roman Catholic tradition, but unlike Teilhard he chose to leave that Church rather than face restriction or denial by ecclesial authority. He is also more explicit in his aim to confront the global environmental issues, believing that humanity requires a new form of spirituality if it is to face the seriousness of contemporary problems.¹⁶⁹

In the spirit of many who have followed White's thesis, Fox falls into Bron Taylor's second response to the inconsistencies between Christian faith and environmentalism—*revision*. According to Deane-Drummond, Fox, "believes that Christian theology is culpable in its promotion of an Augustinian spirituality of original sin, leading to the Fall and redemption, that is thoroughly dualistic in tone, separating humanity from the earth and therefore denigrating it."¹⁷⁰ We see again the notion of dualism is noted as a faulty way of "seeing" and thus being in the world. For Fox, the revision required is to reject original sin, and speak more about the "original blessing" of being created; Fox dubs his own work as "creation theology." On first blush, this argument does not appear to upend Christian thought, for there is much in the tradition of Christianity that harmonizes with original blessing; John Milbank for instance, has made much of

¹⁶⁸ See: <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2015/challenging-rehabilitation-pierre-teilhard-de-chardin> (Accessed 1 Aug. 2017).

¹⁶⁹ Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, 39.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

creation's ontological "original peace"¹⁷¹ as opposed to an ontology of original violence. Fox, in fact, mines quotations from thinkers all throughout the Christian tradition, especially mystical thinkers in support of creation's origins in grace. But, Fox' work is also syncretistic in the same way that Deep Ecology's is—he looks for inspiration in all religious traditions. Deane-Drummond puts a fine point on the precise manner that Fox parts ways from traditional Christianity when she comments, "his explicit emphasis on blessings brings him much closer to pantheistic notions compared with Teilhard, and he is quite ready to use divine names, such as Goddess, which would have been foreign for Teilhard."¹⁷²

In less mystical formation, other contemporary Western Christian intellectuals, like Fox, argue that Christianity requires profound revisions to address the question of anthropogenic environmental disaster. Here, I will introduce two prominent eco-feminist theologians: Sallie McFague and Rosemary Radford Reuther. McFague's work seeks to revise the way people metaphorically "see" the world. McFague begins her investigations from the combination of feminist theological critiques of language and environmental concern. She, says Deane-Drummond,

argues for an embodied model of God that has implications for the way we think about the earth. Instead of viewing the earth through an arrogant eye, as if it were a machine that we then seek to control, she suggests that we need to pay attention to the earth, come in

¹⁷¹ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, 5. See also: David Burrell and Elena Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2007.

¹⁷² Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, 39-40.

tune with that earth and become conscious of its vibrant subjectivity.¹⁷³

For McFague, a theological metaphor of all of creation as “God’s body” aids in this new and necessary way of “seeing” the world.¹⁷⁴ The notion of *metaphor* is important here, McFague is no pantheist; she is, however, a self-described *panentheist*. McFague writes in *Life Abundant*, an eco-theological work that concerns “social and cultural issues of economics,”¹⁷⁵ about her view of God and creation, “the world as God’s body of the agential/organic model of God and the world is a form of panentheism...panentheism is an attempt to speak of God as both radically transcendent to *and* immanent in the world.”¹⁷⁶ According to McFague, “many, if not most contemporary doctrines of God are, to one degree or another, pantheistic.”¹⁷⁷

What does it mean to say “God *and* the world?”...It can only mean that our creation and fulfillment are included *within* God, that “God” is not an object, an explanation, or even a being, but the good news that reality is not indifferent or malevolent; rather reality is with us and for us—on our side. God is good news about reality: God is not something in addition to reality, but the claim that reality is good.¹⁷⁸

McFague sees a problem with traditional Christian transcendence language where it “is stressed at the price of divine immanence,”¹⁷⁹ and in her mind this leads to lessening of God’s relevance in the modern world. So McFague creates a new metaphor to solve her perceived problem: “The world as God’s body” renders

¹⁷³ Ibid., 151.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, 141.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 133.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 134.

God relevant to the world, which faces many anthropogenic disasters. Deane-Drummond explains that McFague intends this metaphor as a prompt that will make people care properly for non-human creatures. McFague combines “the agential and organic models through the panentheistic metaphor of the world as God’s body,” because of the intimacy and interest this brings between God and the world.¹⁸⁰ This is a revision of classical Christianity indeed. Metaphysical transcendence – while maintaining God’s non-identification with creation, i.e. God’s “wholly otherness” – also means that God can be closer to creatures than they can conceive, for God is of a different being altogether, not bound by our sense of time, space, and history. Nevertheless, McFague, like Fox, is motivated by contemporary environmental concerns to the point where Christian categories and language as they have been conceived of historically are bypassed in favor of updated or revised ones.

Deane-Drummond locates Rosemary Radford Ruether with McFague in her exploration of Eco-feminism.¹⁸¹ Yet refreshingly, and with subtlety, Ruether claims that the environmental crisis is so complex that, she does not suggest “either the West or Christian tradition is uniquely responsible for these evils.”¹⁸² She does not locate the origins of “flight from the earth” theologies that fail to promote earth care within later, especially Calvinist Christianity,¹⁸³ and she

¹⁸⁰ Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, 151.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 146-163.

¹⁸² Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992, 173.

¹⁸³ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, 106.

argues that “flight from the earth” ideas predate Christianity, although Christianity may have continued them,¹⁸⁴ from prior intellectual movements in Judaism and Hellenism. To the extent that Christianity perpetuated such notions of otherworldliness¹⁸⁵ be it through its ascetic practices, patriarchy, and apocalypticism, major revisions are required. Because, these traditions were *traditioned into* Christianity, and it could easily hand them over to modernity which resulted in Bacon’s anti-feminist coercion of feminine nature,¹⁸⁶ Descartes’ dualism,¹⁸⁷ and Newton’s mechanistic view of the cosmos,¹⁸⁸ all of which represent “patterns of domination”¹⁸⁹ that in innumerable ways did much to damage the world, therefore, to hold a proper and holy Christian faith in modernity, some preconceptions must be addressed and “reinterpreted.”¹⁹⁰

Ruether argues,

the Bible has been made to appear to Western Christians to be much more antinature than it is by a particular line of biblical interpretation, shaped in nineteenth-century western European Protestantism, that thought in terms of a sharp dualism between history and nature.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁴ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 184-199.

¹⁸⁵ See: Michael S. Northcott, “The Dominion Lie: How Millennial Theology Erodes Creation Care,” in *Diversity and Dominion: Dialogues in Ecology, Ethics, and Theology*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010, 95. Northcott, an avid commentator on politics, ethics, and ecology writes, “Premillennial pessimism” – one eschatological viewpoint that results in ecological destruction and the human soul’s escape to an otherworldly heaven – concerning “the end of the world is influential in evangelical disregard for the need to conserve nature. There is no point in working to conserve the earth when it is destined for destruction in the end times.”

¹⁸⁶ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 195.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

Ruether goes so far as to call this dualism a distortion of the Bible.¹⁹² For instance, Ruether understands “Jesus’ own understanding of the coming Kingdom,” to “reflect strong elements of the Jubilee vision of renewal,”¹⁹³ which applies to the plight of the poor just as much as it appeals to the health, rest, and flourishing of the land itself. Jubilee politics were meant to grant the land its own Sabbath (See: Leviticus 25). Rightly, for Ruether, the *imago dei* is not a license for human abuse of nature, rather it “assumes a more profoundly ethical meaning”¹⁹⁴ in the service of plants, animals, lands, and other non-human forms. Ruether sees much in the tradition of Christianity, in covenantal and sacramental modes, which can serve as salve for times of environmental trouble. But the need for help is so profound that she also opts for a total, eco-feminist revision to fully address the behavioral binary *theoria*, historically tied to gender. Maleness has been associated with dominance, conquest, culture, and empiricism. Femaleness is associated contrastly with nurture, nature, relationship, and peace. This is where the concept of Gaia, or mother Goddess, comes into play for Ruether:

Ecofeminist theology and spirituality has tended to assume that the “Goddess” we need for ecological well-being is the reverse of the God we have had in the Semitic monotheistic traditions; immanent rather than transcendent, female rather than male identified, relational and interactive rather than dominating, pluriform and multicentered rather than uniform and monocentered.¹⁹⁵

Just like Fox and McFague, Ruether does not fully agree with the environmentalist’s total rejection of Christianity. In fact, she finds much that is

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 214.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 222.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 247.

praiseworthy in Christianity's foundational texts, especially their earlier historical interpretations. The primary problem as Ruether is concerned is how the tradition is interpreted given its contextual culture which is made up with more than mere religion, for it also includes philosophy, politics, technology, social imaginaries, and fashion. But rather than simply retrieving the Bible's ancient interpretation, she decides it simply needs a revision or update in light of ecological concerns and changing attitudes concerning gender.

For those who self identify as eco-theologians, or who are catalogued as such by commentators, the term theology requires "eco" (for ecology, environmentalist, etc.) as an adjectival augmentation. Yet theology needs no modification in order to address these issues. As a presupposition, Stanley Hauerwas' theologically programmatic words are pertinent here:

I have always resisted modifying theology with descriptors that suggest theology is the possession of certain groups or perspectives. For me, nothing is more important than the fundamental task of theology to be of service to the church; it belongs to the church. I am well aware that time and place make a difference for how theology is done. But too often I fear when theology is made subservient to this or that qualifier, it has inadequate means with which to resist becoming a mere ideology.¹⁹⁶

It is my argument that Christianity needs no major revision in order to address an environmental age; rather it must delve into its sources with an eye for tools that will engage the very real environmental issues of today. This requires a return to scripture and its interpretation by ancient church Fathers and Doctors. There, I

¹⁹⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, "Can Democracy be Christian? Reflections on How (Not) to be a Political Theologian," Online: *ABC Religion and Ethics*. Online. (Website, Maintained by Scott Stephens), <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/06/24/4032239.htm>, (Accessed 24 June 2014).

will survey foundational biblical texts that are used against Christianity in the work that has co-opted White's thesis. I will also explore the way these creation texts were understood traditionally, prior to their reintroduction to contemporary audiences. In the third chapter, I will examine the incarnation as the "greenest" theology of all through the work of Maximus the Confessor. According to Wilkens and Blowers,

Maximus has been called a cosmic theologian, and rightly so. For Maximus the Confessor, the world—the natural world and the 'world' of scriptural revelations—is the broad and complex theater in which God's incarnational mission is playing itself out to full completion. Both the cosmos and the Bible tell the same glorious story as it were...¹⁹⁷

For Maximus, all of reality has a meaningful nature, which is directly connected to the reality of Christ. Rather than disparaging the fragmented and contingent nature of created reality, he sees in it elements that will contribute and be subsumed in eternal life. In this way, Maximus can be considered the most world-affirming of the Greek theologians. Guided by the positive evaluation of created reality in Chalcedon—for the human nature of the Christ is a created entity—Maximus affirms the goodness of contingent being.¹⁹⁸

But it is not only his affirmation of the world that makes him so compelling, it is also that he is uniquely located in history at the very end of the ancient period and at the beginning of the medieval period. Also, Maximus is venerated in both the Latin West and the Byzantine East. This biographical position makes Maximus interesting to study in light of White's critique of the Latin West and praise for the Byzantine East. The final reason I will explore Maximus is due to the fact that

¹⁹⁷ Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, "Introduction," from St. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003, 17.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

in recent eco-theological scholarship, his works have been gaining interest, as Maximus scholar Paul Blowers has recently reported.¹⁹⁹

Chapter four will continue examining Maximus' work in light of the church as a community of creation. Through his sacramental worldview and theology of sacramental practice we will discover that a proper, historic, Christian anthropology is one of priesthood, as in "priests of creation"²⁰⁰ coined by contemporary Orthodox eco-theologian John Zizioulas. Maximus invites his readers to "see" the world through the incarnation, and thus we can develop and *ethos* and *ascesis* to follow, which I will appropriate by synthesis of Maximus' dogmatic mode of seeing with the contemplation practices promoted by Josef Pieper.

¹⁹⁹ See: Paul Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 324-326. There Blowers notes "Retrievals of Maximus in Ecological Theology," and amongst the thinkers he mentions are: Mar Paulos Gregorios, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, John Chryssavgis, Bruce Foltz, Elizabeth Theokritoff, Celia Deane-Drummond, Willis Jenkins, etc.

²⁰⁰ John Zizioulas, "Proprietors or Priests of Creation," Online: Orthodoxy Today, <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles2/MetJohnCreation.php?articles2/MetJohnCreation.shtml> (Accessed 15 Oct. 2012).

Chapter 2 – Creation, Genesis, and Christian Teaching: A Response

And God is verbal (λογικός), therefore He made created things by the Word; and God is Spirit, so that He adorned all things by the Spirit.

-St. Irenaeus of Lyons
On The Apostolic Preaching, 43

Although Rowan Williams does not delve into a thorough analysis of *how* the doctrine of creation entered its complicated relationship with 20th century theological discussion, he notes that ever since Darwin's theory emerged as the hallmark protological understanding, creation was primarily stuck in discussions about origins.²⁰¹ Up to this crucial turning point, however, the church never believed that creation was merely about origins. For example, the Fathers and Doctors of the ancient and medieval church taught the doctrine of the Trinity through reflection upon creation. This is the case with Irenaeus specifically,²⁰² though many others followed such as Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose, and Augustine, for example. Also, for Irenaeus, creation is not simply protology and is linked to eschatology; before theological modernization, the doctrines like creation,

²⁰¹ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, 63-78.

²⁰² See: Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* Book 4, Chapter 20, Section 1, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 1994, 487; John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 26-28; John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 100-101; Dennis Minns, *Irenaeus*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994, 36-53; M.C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*, Boston: Brill, 2008, 34.

eschatology, and Christology were all interrelated, creating a sort of ecology all their own.

To explore this rich, multidisciplinary approach to Christian education, we will analyze some examples of ancient teaching about creation, specifically as it is understood through the first book of Genesis. From these first few sentences of the biblical text spring much of the objections by Lynn White Jr., Deep Ecology, and other environmentalist critics of the Bible, as noted in the preceding chapter. Specifically, we will explore the Hexamerons of St. Basil of Caesarea and St. Ambrose – hailing from the East and West, respectively – and then move on to some reflections on Genesis and creation made by the West’s most enduring theologian, St. Augustine of Hippo. Through this investigation we will discover that these ancient Fathers and Doctors of the church never understood the Genesis mandate in the same anthropocentric and earth-threatening way that Lynn White Jr. and others suppose. What will be discovered instead is that creation, as these Christian thinkers understood it, is a portrait of unity and diversity, radically gifted by God. And human uniqueness is actually presented not as prerogative for self-serving gain, but as a responsibility for supporting earth health and peace for all.

Ancient Hexameronic material consists of sermons reflecting on the six days of creation before divine rest. Therefore, it provides a sweeping and thorough hermeneutic of the chapter in Genesis that many environmental writers find

damning. Secondly, these are sermons; therefore they were meant for a wide, popular, lay audience. The ideas generated therein are not confined to the educated class, but were created specifically to inform and shape the social imaginary.

The Hexameron of St. Basil

Two of the most prominent Hexamérons of the ancient Christian church are from St. Basil and St. Ambrose, and we will explore them in that order. Both explore Genesis amongst the wider, philosophical backdrop of their own day to understand the uniqueness of God's creation and humanity's role within it: approaching the surrounding Hellenic culture and ideas, where some may have believed the universe as eternal or shaped by an intermediary craftsman, St. Basil maintains the Hebrew tradition of pre-critical biblical theory that Moses was the author of the creation story. And unlike Origen, Basil offers something closer to a literal reading of the Genesis text. He notes that there are allegorical interpretations within the tradition, but he preferred a literal or a common sense reading, which respects the sequential ordering of days in the creation account; thus, he introduces their content day by day. Yet his work is also metaphysically or anagogically interested in time and eternity, this is why he remarks on the 8th day:

If then the beginning of time is called "one day" rather than "the first day," it is because scripture wishes to establish its relationship with eternity. It was, in reality, fit and natural to call "one" the day whose character is to be one wholly separated and isolated from all the others. If scripture speaks to us of many ages, saying everywhere, "age of age, and ages of ages," we do not see it enumerate them as first, second, and third. It follows that we are

hereby shown not so much limits, ends and successions of ages, as distinctions between various states and modes of action.²⁰³

Basil treats the days of creation in succession, but time itself participates in eternity; time has a horizontal dimension as well as a vertical one. And the days of creation are connected to the notion of the eighth day, or the day of recreation, thus creation is not kept separate from doctrines such as redemption and eschatology.

We must not trivialize this vertical dimension in Basil's understanding of creation and its deep respect for divine transcendence. Many modern social imaginaries, and even green and nature-based religions tend to focus purely on a horizontal or immanent frame to contain the divine fully within the world. Basil confesses that he is "struck with admiration"²⁰⁴ over the teaching that creation hails from divine donation alone. His logic follows other Christian writers espousing the uniqueness of biblical creation over and against other Hellenic origins of matter: "If matter is uncreated, it has a claim to the same honours as God, since it must be of equal rank with Him."²⁰⁵ Basil's logic here keeps stride with ancient Christian writing against the dualisms of the Gnostics, Plato's preexistent matter called *khora*,²⁰⁶ and others. In Homily I, Basil notes that Genesis' proclamation that *in the beginning God* undermines Greek philosophy: "The philosophers of Greece have

²⁰³ Basil, Saint. *The Hexameron: With Extended Notes*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014, 44-45.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 3.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁰⁶ Luc Brisson and F. Walter Meyerstein, *Inventing the Universe: Plato's Timaeus, the Big Bang, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 22.

made much ado to explain nature, and not one of their systems remained firm and unshaken, each being overturned by its successor.”²⁰⁷ He claims their lack of knowledge of God is grievous and a “primary error.”²⁰⁸ Of course, according to Basil, the reason that the Greek philosophers are unable to reason the universe back to a transcendent source is due to their atheistic presuppositions,²⁰⁹ and that there are great benefits to understanding the world as given by a deity. That Christians follow Genesis into seeing that the world as divinely given leads to a confession that the world is profoundly enchanted because of the nature of its maker. Basil writes,

In the beginning God created’—It is He, beneficent in Nature, Goodness without measure, a worthy object of love for all beings endowed with reason, the beauty the most to be desired, the origin of all that exists, the source of life, intellectual light, impenetrable wisdom, it is He who ‘in the beginning created heaven and earth.’²¹⁰

If this is the God who created the world, then the world must be seen as handiwork that is enchanted by transcendence and good not only in its source, but also in its destiny. If it has such an excellent source, it follows it will have an excellent end. That end for Basil is not a truncation or stoppage, but rather a “renewing of the world,”²¹¹ which is why David Bentley Hart reflects on the tradition in more contemporary parlance, “protology and eschatology are a single science.”²¹² This way of seeing the world will allow one to discover “the great

²⁰⁷ Basil, *Hexameron*, 3.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 4.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

²¹¹ Ibid., 6.

²¹² David Bentley Hart, “God, Creation, and Evil: The Moral Meaning of *creatio ex nihilo*,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2015, 2.

advantage of all beings, since it is really the school where reasonable souls exercise themselves, the training ground where they learn to know God; since by the sight of visible and sensible things the mind is led, as by a hand, to the contemplation of invisible things.”²¹³ Here is Basil’s syllabus for humans: the proper viewing, the *theoria* of the world as given and good is also a benefit for all creatures, because they are not presented as objects to be dominated but as teachers and illuminators of the divine.

In the second Homily, Basil reflects that according to Genesis 1:2, “the earth was invisible and unfinished.” Basil compares the mysteries of this stage of creation with the mysteries of the Temple; similarly, Old Testament scholar Margaret Barker has made a career studying Temple Theology, and how the Temple of Israel and creation are mutually revealing. Barker claims,

the Genesis story of the six days of creation also described the ceremonial building of the temple, which was in two parts, divided by the great curtain. The outer area represented the visible material world [the Garden of Eden] and the inner part was the holy of holies, the invisible world of the Glory of God and the angels [heaven].²¹⁴

Thus, the meaning of creation and the temple are co-illuminative; the temple was the location of the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary housing the Ark of the Covenant, wherein God dwelt in the midst of His people. If the days of creation mirror the temple, the two may have the same meaning, and creation represents

²¹³ Basil, *Hexameron*, 11.

²¹⁴ Margaret Barker, “Environment Theology,” Online: Margaret Barker, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/EnvironmentTheologyInTheBible.pdf> (Accessed 2 Jan. 2012).

God's dwelling place, a created abode. "Temple Cosmology" espouses heaven to earth and thus enchants creation, being both gift and habitation of the divine life.

It may tempt some to think that the sacred creation exists only with God's immediate presence (as though God could be confined by created space), as with the Holy of Holies. Following this logic, a corresponding outer space should be labeled "profane." But this configuration represents a bald dualism, and according to the sociologist Bronislaw Szerszynski, "profane" originally meant a space in front of the temple (*pro-fanum*), and was only relatively less sacred, within an overarching sacral cosmos.²¹⁵ Every space in the cosmos then, is a space that forecasts a divine encounter.

Next in his rhythmic exposition of Genesis, Basil moves to reflect on how the *flourishing* of life is necessary for Earth's fulfillment.

The fertility of the earth is its perfect finishing; growth of all kinds of plants, the upspringing of tall trees, both productive and sterile, flowers' sweet scents and fair colours, and all that which, a little later, at the voice of God came forth from the earth to beautify her, their universal Mother.²¹⁶

Basil's language reveals his understanding of creation to be at its best when it flourishes in all its forms. He even uses the moniker "universal mother," possibly an ancient precursor to current expressions referring to "Mother Earth." Basil's portrait of the richness of creation to beautify the Mother provides evidence to the contrary of anti-Christian environmentalist literature, which largely indicts

²¹⁵ Bronislaw Szerszynski, *Nature, Technology and the Sacred*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 20-21.

²¹⁶ Basil, *Hexameron*, 23-24.

Christianity for perpetuating Western patriarchy's desire to control or harm the feminine.²¹⁷ As of yet there have been no hints of these sorts of ideas in Basil's account.

Basil pictures a God who determines the world in diverse harmony. "But God, before all those things which now attract our notice existed, after casting about in His mind and determining to bring into being time which had no being, imagined the world in such as it ought to be, and created matter in harmony with the form which He wished to give it."²¹⁸ Important to note here is that what existed in the mind of God, belonged fully to God. These were not ideas or forms that existed autonomous of God's mind. Creation's "diverse parts"²¹⁹ were created by God alone, and they were meant for "fellowship" and "harmony."²²⁰ Creation therefore, is a cosmic ecumenicity of divinely donated being, all of which are divinely prescribed to relationships of dependence and reciprocity. Creation then, was planned to share in the wealth of biodiversity. "Thus the earth was not only invisible; it was still incomplete,"²²¹ according to Basil's second homily. It required more creation. "For the proper and natural adornment of the earth is its completion," writes Basil, "corn waving in the valleys—meadows green with grass and rich with many coloured flowers—fertile glades and hill-tops shaded by

²¹⁷ For an analysis of the ways in which the "mother nature" metaphor is used see Catherine M. Roach, *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003

²¹⁸ Basil, *Hexameron*, 27.

²¹⁹ Ibid.,

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 29.

forests.”²²² Here, Basil sounds like many a modern nature writer or Romantic lauding the beauties of a landscape.

At this point in the homily, Basil shares his worries about dualistic Manichean thought.²²³ Much like Augustine, Basil warned against the Manichean penchant for deeming as evil creation, matter, nature, the body, or other aspects of the physical plane, while elevating spiritual or invisible qualities. This point requires Basil to offer a definition of evil. And like Augustine who would follow him, Basil finds no ontological merit in evil “because the contrary cannot proceed from its contrary.”²²⁴ If God is good and created all, then only goodness (i.e. creation’s goodness) may proceed from God. If God then, did not create evil, where did it come from? “Evil is not a living or animated essence; it is the condition of the soul opposed to virtue, developed in the careless on account of their falling away from good.”²²⁵ Therefore, evil is no-thing, it does not exist *in se*; for Augustine it is merely a privation of the good. It seems Basil would agree on that terminology. If one wishes to find a source for evil in terms of environmental health, it can only come by way of humanity’s lack of virtue. And this is precisely the Christian point, for it demands humans to live virtuously and toward the good of co-creation. Christianity does not prescribe a life of diabolical despotism toward nature—Basil would understand all such living as a “falling away from good.”

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 31.

²²⁴ Ibid., 32.

²²⁵ Ibid., 33.

For readers of Genesis then, creation must be contemplated in order to understand its goodness, and even its usefulness, so as to avoid falling away from the goal. “Survey creation,” says Basil, in the third homily, a section that reflects on the firmament, heat, and fire.²²⁶ Heat, or fire, according to him is essential for the flourishing of life. Nothing in creation is unnecessary when looking at each day of creation in Genesis (as the painstaking description of the creatures of each day proves), save for the ill will or non-virtue of reasonable creatures. Further, it is the “great wisdom of Him who governs all,” writes Basil, that “makes the sun travel from one region to another, for fear that, if it remained always in the same place, its excessive heat would destroy the order of the universe.”²²⁷ God’s great wisdom is the cause for creation’s design, for God is the “supreme artist,”²²⁸ and that design is for the mutual flourishing of biodiverse life, for when the whole creation is taken together it is praiseworthy according to Basil; it also he notes, shares in the divine *telos*.²²⁹

Contemplating creation, for Basil, constitutes a spiritual pursuit. He writes,

and shall we, whom the Lord, the great worker of marvels, calls to the contemplation of His own works, tire of looking at them, or be slow to hear the words of the Holy Spirit? Shall we not rather stand around the vast and varied workshop of divine creation, and carried back in mind to the times of old, shall we not view all the order of creation?²³⁰

²²⁶ Ibid., 57.

²²⁷ Ibid., 61.

²²⁸ Ibid., 67.

²²⁹ Ibid., 66-67.

²³⁰ Ibid., 70.

Such reflection will not only aid the rational soul in understanding creation better, it will also aid her in understanding the creator's character better, such is the case with God's many *fiats* like with standing and running water, or the gathering of water—in these cases the nature of the creature and *fiat* will always illuminate something of the creator's purposes.²³¹ One may put it in later terminology, say in the terms of Maximus the Confessor, *one Logos is many logoi*—the nature of anything within creation participates in a givenness and purpose of God. Thus, contemplating creation reveals the wisdom of God.

Now the goodness of a creature, beyond the fact that it is made by a good God, is in part because of what it adds to the flourishing life of another creature; to Basil, creation is interdependent. He writes, “thus, in the eyes of God, the sea is good, because it makes the under current of moisture in the depths of the earth. It is good again, because from all sides it receives the rivers without exceeding limits. It is good, because it is the origin and source of the waters in the air;”²³² and from here Basil paints a bigger picture of the water cycle and its assistance for earthly habitation. But it would be untruthful to argue that the goodness of the water cycle were not also deemed good by Basil because it in no way benefited humanity. “Finally the sea is good in the eyes of God, because it girdles the isles, of which it forms at the same time the rampart and the beauty, because it brings together the most distant parts of the earth, and facilitates the inter-

²³¹ Ibid., 71-73.

²³² Ibid., 80.

communication of mariners.”²³³ But why should this offend as if it were to fall into the trap of the accused anthropocentrism? It does not fit into the categories labeled by White et al. because humanity is not distinct from the rest of creation. There are more nuances, because a creature’s goodness is not defined solely by human benefit, but by the benefit of others in the biosphere, although this is not a term that Basil would be aware of.

Importantly, Basil insists upon following the pattern of days of creation for the reader’s spiritual understanding—which makes sense since Genesis is not a materialist text, but a spiritual one. In his fifth homily, Basil explains the germination of the earth. “The reason why the adornment of the earth was before the sun is the following; that those who worship the sun, as the source of life, may renounce their error. If they be well persuaded that the earth was adorned before the genesis of the sun, they will retract their unbounded admiration for it, because they see grass and plants vegetate before it rose.”²³⁴ This line of thinking demonstrates the reason that Basil ascribes to the order of creation. Indeed, much hexameron material is conscientious of the fact that the days of creation do not follow the logic of scientific explanation. When this occurs, the church Fathers and Doctors do not pretend to accept Genesis as a materialist account and then try to upend what is known scientifically about the world; rather, they see in the order a deeper spiritual reasoning. Twentieth century writers have followed this reasoning. Therefore, in fact, many have reasoned that the Genesis account was

²³³ Ibid., 81.

²³⁴ Ibid., 82.

written as a spiritual subversion of the deities common to the day. Take the creation of light and subsequently the sun and moon that appears later on the fourth day. The natural elements of the sun and moon were understood as divinities in the Ancient Near East. But in the Priestly creation account, those realities emerge much later in the poem after the creator begins creating (day four) after the general creation of light. Colin Gunton quotes Westermann on this spiritual subversion, “what distinguishes the priestly account of creation among the many creation stories of the Ancient Near East is that for P there can only be one creator and that all else that is or can be, can never be anything but a creature.”²³⁵ In this way, the Genesis narrative polemically communicates the belief that their God is superior to the Babylonian’s, as is their vision of humans and non-humans. Benedict XVI presses the biblical conclusion even further, “and in the face of any fear of these demonic forces we are told that God alone, who is eternal Reason that is eternal love, created the world, and it rests in his hands.”²³⁶

The second spiritual affirmation to be made is that in contemplating creation, the rational mind is perpetually brought to the goodness of the creator. St. Basil boldly exhorts his listeners, “I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator.”²³⁷ This is high praise for the revelatory capacity of creation, indeed. Additionally, Basil believes “in creation

²³⁵ Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, 17-18.

²³⁶ Benedict, “God the Creator,” 13.

²³⁷ Basil, *Hexameron*, 84.

nothing exists without a reason,”²³⁸ everything is useful. In the fifth homily, Basil explains how plants serve human life, either for food or for medicine. Even in plants that prove poisonous for humans there is a purpose that will support other creatures, thus usefulness in the creator order does not have humanity as the sole end.²³⁹

Basil’s homilies are extended meditations or contemplations over the nature of created life and the way that individual aspects of creation express God’s will. And this is what he asks of his audience: have “long experiences” with creation so as to better understand it and its spiritual lessons.²⁴⁰ In homily VI he writes,

thus, to investigate the great and prodigious show of creation, to understand supreme and ineffable wisdom, you must bring personal light for the contemplation of the wonders which I spread before your eyes, and help me, according to your power, in this struggle, where you are not so much judges as fellow combatants, for fear lest the truth might escape you, and lest my error might turn to your common prejudice.²⁴¹

According to Basil any such undertaking requires one bring their mind prepared to study. Properly contemplating creation leads to worship! For after being penetrated by the truths reasoned through

the work of God’s hands...we shall know ourselves, we shall know God, we shall adore our Creator, we shall serve our Master, we shall glorify our Father, we shall love our Sustainer, we shall bless our Benefactor, we shall not cease to honour the Prince of the present and future life, Who, by the riches that He showers upon us in this world, makes us believe in His promises and uses present good things to strengthen our expectation of the future.²⁴²

²³⁸ Ibid., 87.

²³⁹ Ibid., 90-92.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 97.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 101.

²⁴² Ibid., 103.

Though this piece of rhetoric is written, one can still sense its homiletic cadence, and imagine the silent attention of those listening to the sermon.

Contemplation, admiration of beauty, and joy over utility feature prominently in St. Basil's *Hexameron*, but it would be a mistake if one read this text as though it were not in favor of science, or reason. He preaches that there are many details about the moon and sun, for instance that he has not touched on, and many of these details "arrive by the aid of reason."²⁴³ A good orator or writer can always let the reader in on the fact that their work is incomplete. St. Basil avows his "weakness" by suggesting "we must not then measure the moon with the eye, but with the reason. Reason, for the discovery of truth, is much surer than the eye."²⁴⁴ Ancient Christianity is not antagonistic to reason or science, in fact for Basil it is a faithful means to contemplate divine and earthly knowledge.

After journeying this far with St. Basil in his *Hexameron*, a certain impatience grows to discover humanity's relationship to non-humans. Indeed, this is the crux of the matter for environmentalist writers. By way of response, it is important to remember, according to Basil's reading, that Genesis is not merely concerned with humanity's dignity, but with the dignity of all created life. Indeed, Genesis reminds readers of the goodness of other animals, even those that pose harm to humanity were created by the same divine *fiat*.

²⁴³ Ibid., 124.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 124-125.

Which is not included in the command of the Creator? Do we not see viviparous animals, seals, dolphins, rays, and all cartilaginous animals? Do we not see oviparous animals comprising every sort of fish, those which have a skin and those which have scales, those which have fins and those which have not?²⁴⁵

God's will is for all creatures to live and thrive, even those that appear unhelpful to the human being, because "it is from the same power, the same command, that all, small and great receive their existence."²⁴⁶

Throughout Basil's work persists the antecedent to biodiversity, i.e. the appeal to "innumerable variety."²⁴⁷ And by reflecting on the dietary habits of fish, Basil comes close to ecological notion of reciprocal relationships that make up creation.²⁴⁸ Here is where human kind can negatively enter into Basil's story of creation—human, rational animals can, and have overstepped their created purpose. Above, we noted that Basil describes such evil as "falling away" from virtue and wisdom. Now he speaks of the human ability for "devouring greed," "insatiable avarice," wickedness, and miserliness.²⁴⁹

Now the obvious answer to humanity's destructive tendencies for which humankind was not created, is to turn back toward God and thus toward virtuous living. But one has to appreciate the way that Basil suggests that his audience do this at this point in the sermon: Listen to creatures like animals and plants, listen to nature, for it obeys God and will help you obey God, too. He actually says,

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 128.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 129.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 130.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 131.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 132.

“Listen to the fish, who by their actions all but speak and say: It is for the perpetuation of our race that we undertake this long voyage. They have not the gift of reason, but they have the law of nature firmly seated within them, to show them what they have to do.”²⁵⁰ More than mere fables, creation has the power to speak to humans about morality, because within the laws of nature exist the laws of the creator. Basil goes on to say, “Let us hear these dumb creatures tell us the reason.”²⁵¹ Fish, in pursuit of their patterns of life, especially in relation to the seasons and environment reveal that they have a reason in them that is not unlike or un-foreign to the reason implanted in human nature “which tells us to identify ourselves with good, and to avoid all that is harmful.”²⁵² So, Basil learns morality from nature; here it is the fish, and later it is with the bees. They teach lessons to humanity that will not simply aid in practical wisdom but in the very depths of creaturely purpose.

As for the unique nature of the human animal, for Basil it has to do with the kind of soul, proper to her. He notes of the posture of cattle, they like other land animals are “bent towards the earth.”²⁵³ Yet humanity is upright which befits the “dignity” of the human soul. Surely, this is but a metaphor for St. Basil. He explains that animals are bent over toward their bellies, the animal soul is focused naturally upon food and the passions necessary for biological life, whereas for a human, her head may look heavenward for the pursuit of rational contemplation.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 139.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 139.

²⁵² Ibid., 140.

²⁵³ Ibid., 172.

Looking upward, in fact, is also the posture of a priest. Although St. Basil does not introduce this theme, there is much in the history of Christian thought that has claimed that a proper anthropology is that humans are priests of creation—representatives of the divine will to be done on earth and elevators of nature to its proper end, God. This is how the unique gift of the rational soul is to be utilized by human society within the world.

As for the animal soul, St. Basil argues, “Brutes have one and the same soul of which the common characteristic is absence of reason.”²⁵⁴ Therefore, the animal kingdom is filled with similarity. But Basil notes that there is also diversity, “but each animal is distinguished by peculiar qualities...each animal was created the distinctive character of his nature.”²⁵⁵ Further, these natures all share in one source—the mind of God. As for the human, animal that he is, the soul is different. The human rational soul allows for intelligent reasoning and freedom, thus it is in place for the purpose of executed virtue. “Virtues exist in us also by nature, and the soul has affinity with them not by education, but by nature herself,”²⁵⁶ writes Basil. This is the human distinction, and no matter how unique this makes humanity, it is not the same as the bare anthropocentrism defined by modern writers. Human uniqueness exists precisely for virtue so that humans would live for the good of all creation. It is for this reason that humanity was made in the image of God.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 73.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 176.

The Hexameron of St. Ambrose

Like St. Basil, St. Ambrose begins his Hexameron with a pagan foil. Ambrose, too, preaches against the assertion that the universe is eternal, and to do so he uses the example of a circle. Circles appear to have no beginning or end, but to draw one, someone did in fact have to begin somewhere; appearances can be misleading according to St. Ambrose.²⁵⁷ He theorizes that creation began in the spring, paralleling *pascha*, for this is the season of verdant generation.²⁵⁸ And St. Ambrose keeps the Christian tradition (from John 1:1ff, Colossians 1, etc) that Christ stood at the beginning of creation, and that all things were made through Christ. Further, he promotes the sacramental tradition of creation, rather than seeing it is a neutral stage for human drama, which states that creation demonstrates the glory of God. St. Ambrose summarizes “He who in a moment of His power made this great beauty of the world out of nothing, which did not itself have existence and gave substance to things or causes that did not themselves exist.”²⁵⁹ Therefore, each creature testifies to its creator; creation is thus revelatory for Ambrose. He then offers an example to prove his logic through the arts: “We have buildings or woven material which, even when the craftsman is silent, still exhibit his skill, so that testimony is presented of the craftsman own work.”²⁶⁰ In this metaphor God is the craftsman, and His work of creation is a testimony of God even when remains silent.

²⁵⁷ Saint Ambrose, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, Trans. J.J. Savage, Washington: Catholic University Press, 1961, 10-11.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 12-13.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 16.

These ideas represent for Ambrose a broad confession that creation is ontologically contingent. “All things depend on His will, which is the foundation of the universe and because of which the world endures up to the present.”²⁶¹ Further, according to Ambrose, creation was subject to vanity, in order for it to have a share in the hope of the divine drama recorded in scripture. This means that divine liberation or re-creation is not merely a hope for human actors, for it is for all of the creation—creation will be liberated too. The *telos* of creation then, is found in divine purposes not human ones, therefore and once more, Ambrose presents a view of the world that is not anthropocentric in the way that environmental critics suggest of Christianity.

St. Ambrose, like St. Basil, is keen to follow the days of creation as they are presented in Genesis 1. “God created first, therefore, heaven and earth, but He did not will them to be perpetual; rather they subserve the final end of our corruptible nature.”²⁶² This is important because Ambrose does not dichotomize humanity apart from other creatures. For him, the difference in humans is creativity to share in forming the world through their unique gifts. “The Land was therefore,” he continues,

unformed, since it was yet unploughed by the industrious attentions of the farmer, for the cultivator still had to appear. It was unformed because it was devoid of growing plants. The banks of streams lacked their grassy slopes; the land was not shady with groves or productive in fruits of the earth...God wished to show us that the world itself would have no attraction unless a husbandman had improved it with varied culture.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Ibid., 23.

²⁶² Ibid., 30.

²⁶³ Ibid., 31.

This idea might at first appear to support the assertion that Western Christianity's anthropocentrism encourages human dominance over the non-human world, or that the non-human world derives its "attraction" or value purely from its interaction with human life. But Ambrose would not support ideology or license for the mistreatment of nature, nor is he arguing that the only worth of the land is for human work, since he proceeds throughout his sermons to enumerate the declarations of creation's goodness. Ambrose's reflections here are nondualistic: human life and human art indistinguishable from non-human realities, they serve each other for mutual benefit (as seen in husbandry). It is an antecedent to the arguments that culture is natural, and that good human work should make creation more splendid, not desolate.

Furthermore, anything that harms creation is on par with Ambrose's understanding of evil; evil erodes creation. As he moves the conversation to the idea of evil, Ambrose is quick to remind his listeners that evil should not be connected with the early mention of darkness and light in Genesis. To clear up some apparent misunderstanding, Ambrose says, "I am not of the opinion that by darkness are to be understood the powers of evil, in that their wickedness was brought about by God. The reason is of course, that evil is not a substance, but an accident and that is a deviation from the goodness of nature."²⁶⁴ Ambrose, like St.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 31-32.

Augustine who followed him, did not believe evil to be a thing possessing an ontological reality, it is as Augustine argued a *privatio boni*.²⁶⁵

Evil in creation results from perversions (accidents) by beings with freedom (humans), and evil works to undermine creation's wholeness and goodness. In the Genesis narrative, the first humans instigated the movement towards privation, theologically termed "The Fall." When humanity took this first step toward the kind of anthropocentrism that Lynn White Jr. finds troubling, it was, in moral terms, *disobedience* to God. By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve succumbed to a particular temptation: to take the place of God. Inverted in the Christ hymn of Philippians 2:5-11, humans discerned that divinity was within their grasp. Symbolically, however, in reaching for this status, humans supposed themselves the recipient and *telos* of all creation, rather than God. This improper order represents the hubris, which caused creation's trouble.

And what of the cause for humanity's mistake? For Ambrose, it occurred because of humanity's mutable character. He writes "evil arose from us, and was not made by a Creator God. It is produced by the lightness of our morals; it has no prior right over any created thing, not has it the dignity of a natural substance."²⁶⁶ Moreover, according to Ambrose, God wishes for evil to be eradicated from the souls of humans. If we compare this account of evil to contemporary environmental descriptions of anthropocentrism, Ambrose would entitle it an

²⁶⁵ St. Augustine, *Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope, and Love*, Washington DC: Gateway Editions, 1996, 11.

²⁶⁶ Ambrose, *Hexameron*, 33.

accident of human overreaching, and God actively pursues its remedy. And whereas evil is a deviation from wisdom and “true virtue”²⁶⁷ the virtuous life is lived purposefully knowing that human life is not the *telos* of non-human life. Interestingly, Ambrose extols nature as itself an example for wise human living. “Why, then, man, do you accuse nature,” Ambrose rhetorically asks. “Nature has old age and illness which serve as so many impediments to our lives. But old age becomes sweeter and more useful by its wise counsels and characters. It becomes more ready to face inevitable death with constancy and becomes more heroic in quelling lusts of the flesh.”²⁶⁸ Like Basil before him, Ambrose utilizes creation as a contemplative tool for human wisdom. So the kind of anthropocentrism found in writers like Ambrose or Basil differs fundamentally from the prosecutions of Lynn White Jr. and his interpreters.

As for the character of creation, Ambrose marvels at creation’s many “dissimilar elements,” and that they “should rise to the level of unity in one body, that this body should combine by indissoluble laws of concord and love to link together and form a union of such discordant elements.”²⁶⁹ Creation’s character is united diversity. And he does not marvel directly at the creation of humanity, as you would expect a thoroughgoing anthropocentric mind to do. He finds much to praise in creatures large and small, following the biblical protological outline when praising creation. He predicts and addresses the murmuring of his audience, “how long are we to learn of other living creatures while we do not know

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 35.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 35-36.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 45.

ourselves? Let him tell me what is to be for my benefit, that I may know myself,”²⁷⁰ an attitude that Lynn White Jr.’s followers may accuse Christians of taking. But it cannot be said that this is Ambrose’ attitude; though he admits it “is a just complaint,” he retorts, “we cannot fully know ourselves without first knowing the nature of all living creatures.”²⁷¹ This is a profound insight that predates scientific knowledge of the human body being evolutionarily tied to other creatures. Consider what Larry Rasmussen says about human-cosmic relations:

Try breathing, for example. It only works because of the one-time furnaces of now-dead stars. They were the sources of gases and processes crucial to the eventual formation of oxygen. For that matter *all* the atoms in our bodies, with the exception of primordial hydrogen itself, were produced in supernova explosions. The atoms off the first generation of stars were thrown into space and cycled and recycled into new stars, planets, and eventually living creatures. All of us, all creatures past, present, and future, began in stardust and evolved in the transformations of the universe on its long pilgrimage to date.²⁷²

Certainly, Ambrose did not maintain this level of scientific understanding, yet from the biblical account he inferred that humanity cannot know itself without knowing geography, landscapes, plants, and animals. And it is also important to point out that Ambrose’ argument here is in no way about human dominance over these other realities, but rather a humble search into the bountiful world God has gifted humans to inhabit—by knowing its nature, purpose, and rhythms, a human will know how to live wisely and virtuously alongside other creatures.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 229.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 229.

²⁷² Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, New York: Orbis Books, 1996, 325.

Adding to Ambrose's nature of creation are the themes of its goodness and usefulness. He reminds his audience, "He saw that it was good,"²⁷³ referring to God's reflection on the making of each day. Quipping, Ambrose states, "He did not, of course, recognize that which He was ignorant."²⁷⁴ This means that all creatures, even those outside of human creation, are poised to give pleasure to the divine benefactor—this no doubt is a goodness beyond human use or imagination. Which is not to say that God wishes for creation to be without humanity, like there is in so much modern environmentalist thought. Tending toward the misanthropic at times, many environmentalist ideologues see humanity as a natural problem to mitigate against, which why groups like *Earthfirst!* have enacted acts of eco-terrorism and "monkey wrenching," etc.

Conversely for Ambrose, one of the goods of creation is its usefulness to humanity. He says, "what shall I say of the kindness of God in providing things useful for the human race? The earth returned with interest what it had received, even with compound interest."²⁷⁵ That is to say through thoughtful human planting and soil cultivation, the land produces many edible delights for the good use of humanity. And humans are to receive these gifts with gratitude. This will appear, no doubt, dubious to environmental writers, but there is nothing nefarious implied by Ambrose here. It is rather that the soil serves the humans who first serve the soil. Further, their charge of anthropocentrism is predicated not on

²⁷³ Ambrose, *Hexameron*, 63.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 94. He makes the same claim about plants used for medicine, etc.

human gratitude, but human entitlement. Entitlement is nowhere to be found in Ambrose' work, only gratitude and grace.

This is not to say however, that all plants are useful for human dietary or medicinal needs, and still they are good because they are useful to other creatures. Some plants, for example, are poisonous when humans ingest them. Ambrose cites the “poisonous hemlock”²⁷⁶ as an example. And if a human were not vigilant and consumed one of these harmful plants, Ambrose asks, “would you find fault with the earth?” No, for it is the same as not finding fault with the earth “because not all men are good” either.²⁷⁷ Again, Ambrose resists the tendency of nature-culture dualism; humans are creatures too. His actual point however, is that “each and every thing which is produced from the earth has its own reason for existence, which, as far as it can, fulfills the general plan of creation.”²⁷⁸ Ambrose reads creation with a hermeneutic of charity and gratitude. Indeed, some things are useful for human food or medicine. Plants that are not useful for humans are useful to other creatures. Creation is a panoply of creatures living in unceasing moments of reciprocity. And furthermore, the things of creation that are not readily usable by humans are still deemed good by the creator, meaning that their value is inherent by God, which once more does not sound like the anthropocentric worldview that Lynn White Jr. accuses the Christian West of.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 95.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 95-96.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 96.

As noted, God pronounces that creation is good. This is because creation pleases or brings pleasure to God. God delights in God's work. And according to Ambrose, this delight is something that humanity is intended to participate in. Ambrose' words are stirring here,

Alas, enticement, the mother of our life of ease, existed before the creation of man! Before man there existed things to delight us! The temptation of man antedated his creation. But this was not nature's fault. Nature gave us nourishment and did not prescribe vice.²⁷⁹

That there was something to delight in prior to the creation of humans means that there is value in creation beyond humanity. And though nature did not prescribe vice, humanity found its own way to turn away from nature's lead by seeking vice nonetheless. Examples of vice in an environmentalist tone are overconsumption, imprudence with technology/creative arts, and attitudes of human despotism. Ambrose sounds much more like an environmentalist however when he argues that the things of creation "were given for common use. Therefore, you were not to claim anything as your own for personal property"²⁸⁰ the way Adam and Eve did with a bit of fruit, medieval soldiers did with horses, or moderns have done with fossil fuels. Speaking against this tendency toward ownership, where creation's ends are dictated by human desires rather than God's, Ambrose exhorts, "be content with what is your own and do not let your well-being be based on doing harm to your neighbor. You may find your livelihood in the simplicity of innocence."²⁸¹ Again, Ambrose sounds like many contemporary environmental

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 160.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 160.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 178.

thinkers that act upon concern for poor countries that are more greatly affected by pollution than the Western first world.²⁸²

Above, I noted that Ambrose claims the delights of creation, and thus calls for humans to continue contemplating the world in delight. This delight can only come from the disposition of gratitude; it may never arise from entitlement. So even if a human consumes a creature for food, it is proper and an aspect of Christian virtue to delight in the gift. This also means delighting in the gift while it is living, which will affect the way it is treated. This implies priestly living, with an eye toward heaven even as it gazes over the world. An anecdote will be helpful here. It comes from the theologian and agrarian writer Norman Wirzba's book, *Living the Sabbath*. In this work, he describes his farmer grandfather who raised chickens for food. Their end was human consumption, yet he still took time to lavish the chickens with treats:

In the summer he would regularly give up his afternoon rest period to find an especially lush, sweet patch of grass to cut as a treat for the chickens. After gathering the grass in a bucket, he would walk to the chicken coop with an air of sheer delight, for without fail the chickens would run to greet him and gobble down the fresh blades of grass. I would swear the chickens had smiles on their faces as they came running! Nothing made my grandfather happier than seeing the chickens so much enjoy this little offering.²⁸³

²⁸² James Randerson, "Rich Countries Owe Poor a Huge Environmental Debt," Online 1/20/2008, The Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2008/jan/21/environmental.debt> Accessed 20 Jan. 2008).

²⁸³ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*, Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006, 27.

His grandfather exemplified what Wirzba wrote later in this text, “the meaning and goodness of others, that which makes them delightful, emerges in our loving interaction with them. We can’t really take delight from a distance or in a condition of apathy or ignorance.”²⁸⁴ His grandfather approached his land like a priest. The goal is that the chickens would flourish in life, though they would ultimately yield that life to human consumption. These anthropological moorings anchor the world beyond instrumentality; Wirzba’s grandfather’s care marked an appropriate *telos* for the creation under his care so he dutifully, and thus virtuously treated them with care, hospitality, patience, and prudence.

Let us transition now to the nature of the human creature as Ambrose understands her. Humans possess a distinction within creation; they are made in God’s image. Is this a gesture toward modern anthropocentrism? Given the power of the human to do good or harm within the cosmos with regard to two competing *viatorum* – virtue or vice – is relevant to consider given the nature of our question. “The image of God is virtue, not infirmity. The image of God is wisdom,”²⁸⁵ according to Ambrose. The *imago* is germane to the human soul for Ambrose²⁸⁶ whereas human bodies are much more like animals bodies. “The soul...is made to the image of God, in form and like the Lord Jesus. Those men are saints who are conformed to the Son of God...since justice, from which justification is derived, is naturally a mental, not a physical quality.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 59.

²⁸⁵ Ambrose, *Hexameron*, 254.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 256.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 259.

This means that the human is in fact quite unique within creation. But what is special to the human does not come at the expense of non-humans, as many critics have suggested. The unique human gifts allow for humans to “be fully aware”²⁸⁸ in the way they traverse this world. This gift is to aid in virtuous living, it is to avoid “concupiscence”²⁸⁹ or living by vice and passion that undoubtedly consumes without regard for other creatures and people. The image of God in humanity also does not imply that creation belongs to humans. Creation is, in fact, not a given, it is a luxury²⁹⁰ for Ambrose, and it belongs to God and is to be treated as such. For Ambrose like Basil, the image of God does not grant power over creation, rather it grants a power for creation. It allows for gentle living, stewarding, and priestly ordering. Nowhere in these ancient sermons may one find a hint of an idea that devalues non-humans so far below human life that has become systematized in the modern West.

Genesis in Augustine

St. Augustine, the Doctor of Grace, invokes much reflection on the doctrine of creation in works like *City of God*, *Confessions*, and *De Trinitate*. And since much of his work also reacts against a dualistic, Manichean sect he briefly belonged to, he fashioned his popular Christian teaching on the goodness of the material world in response to views that denigrated it. Regarding the book of Genesis, Augustine went so far as to write three separate commentaries on the

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 263.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 263.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 266.

work: *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis*, and *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*.

For now, I will focus specifically on Augustine's *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis* because of its size and scope, and within that context I will also reflect on similar ideas that Augustine fleshed out in other works. In his *Unfinished Literal Commentary* Augustine outlines his fourfold way of interpreting scripture:

- Historical ("when things done by God or man are recounted")
- Allegorical ("when they are understood figuratively")
- Analogical ("when the harmony of the old and new covenants is being demonstrated")
- Aetiological ("when the causes of things that have been said and done are presented")²⁹¹

Augustine aims to describe the nature of creation by similar methods to Basil and Ambrose, going verse by verse of Genesis, starting with the concept of time. The book's first phrase, "In the beginning God created..." implies that time was created. As Augustine writes, "everything has a beginning and that time itself is created, and thus itself also has a beginning, and is not co-eternal with the creator."²⁹² In book XI, chapter eight of *City of God*, Augustine reaffirms, "there can be no doubt that the world was not created in time but with time."²⁹³ This distinction is important for St. Augustine's cultural context: like Basil and Ambrose's, Augustine's audience imagined aspects of the universe as eternal, and

²⁹¹ Bradley Green, "Augustine, Genesis, and the Goodness of Creation," *Carl F.H. Henry Center For Theological Understanding*, 5/10/2017, <http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2017/05/augustine-genesis-the-goodness-of-creation/> (Accessed 1 May 2018).

²⁹² St. Augustine, *Unfinished Literal Commentary*, 118.

²⁹³ St. Augustine, *City of God*, 436.

thus as co-equal to God, whereas Augustine (in company with Basil and Ambrose) understands creation and all its parts as only divinely donated.

Materiality, too, finds its source in God. Augustine's rhetorical style suggests that he addresses the cultural question about the wording of Genesis 1:2 which asks, "how can God have made heaven and earth in the beginning, if the earth was already there?"²⁹⁴ He answers patiently,

they fail to understand that this verse was added to explain what the earth was like, about which it had already said, *God made heaven and earth*. So this is how we have to take it: *in the beginning God made heaven and earth*; but this earth which God made, was invisible and shapeless, until it was sorted out by the same God and from the original mishmash established in a definite order of distinct things.²⁹⁵

Like Irenaeus, Basil, and Ambrose before him, Augustine believes that all three persons of the Trinity were at work in creating and ordering creation. He likens the Holy Spirit to a craftsman²⁹⁶ and depicts "God's Word" (Christ) as the one through whom the Father creates.²⁹⁷ In his *Confessions*, Augustine explicitly states

and there was not another thing besides You from which You might make them O God, *one Trinity and threefold Unity*, and therefore, from nothing You made heaven and earth, a great thing and a small thing, since you are omnipotent and good, to make all things good. You were, and nothing else. *From nothing, You made the heaven [of heavens] and [the formless] earth*, these two, on to which [only] You would be superior, the other to which [only] nothing would be less.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ Augustine, *Unfinished Literal Commentary*, 119.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 119.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 122.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 124, 150.

²⁹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.7.7; see also Jared Ortiz, *You Have Made Us for Yourself: Creation in St. Augustine's Confessions*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016, 9.

The material world of creation therefore, is good according to Augustine, for it hails from a good God. In his commentary, Augustine briefly reflects on the Genesis refrain “it is good” in relation to the creation of light by saying, “this statement should be understood as signifying not joy at some unexpected good, but approval of work done.”²⁹⁹ And at other points when the God’s affirmation is made, Augustine simply says the above explanation will suffice. Important for Augustine is that creation’s goodness is no accident, and God’s approval for work done must then be read as a sign of the inherent dignity of creation as it originates in God’s purposes.

Augustine writes at length about the peculiarity of the fourth day of creation as it is reported in Genesis. How could days and nights exist prior to the creation of sun and moon? In his discussion, Augustine speculates questions and muses answers on this subject, and most of it will be dissatisfying to the modern reader.

Here is how he summarizes his conclusions in *City of God*:

In our experience, of course, the days with which we are familiar only have an evening because the sun sets, and a morning because the sun rises; whereas those first three days passed without the sun, which was made, we are told, on the fourth day. The narrative does indeed tell us that light was created by God, and that God separated that light from the darkness, and gave to the light the name of “day,” and to the darkness the name of “night.” But what kind of light that was, and with what alternating movement the distinction was made, and what was the nature of this evening and this morning; these are questions beyond the scope of our sensible experience. We cannot understand what happened as it is presented to us; and yet we must believe it without hesitation.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Augustine, *Unfinished Literal Commentary*, 125.

³⁰⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, 436.

His fourth century, literal reading leaves the reader with only mystery, but modern, literal-historical readings will assist here. In the case of the early creation stories of the Bible, many agree with Pope Benedict XVI's assessment of the exilic timeframe of authorship, who asserted that "the moment when creation became a dominant theme occurred during the Babylonian Exile. It was then that the account" found in the earliest chapter of Genesis "assumed its present form."³⁰¹ Though Benedict does not conclude that these stories were fabricated or fictional, the deep traditions surrounding creation received greater reflection, took clearer shape, and were chronicled almost by necessity, in the presence and prevalence of competing Near Eastern creation narratives.

The pressures of exilic life thrust into relief the Hebrew origin story, when the prevailing Babylonian myth offered startling conclusions about reality that the exiles could not hold themselves. These conclusions forced the Hebrew story to, as Benedict XVI elaborates,

find its own contours vis-à-vis the great Babylonian creation account of Enuma Elish, which depicted the origin of the world in its own fashion. There it is said that the world was produced out of a struggle between opposing powers and that it assumed its form when Marduk, the god of light, appeared and split in two the body of the primordial dragon. From this sundered body heaven and earth came to be. Thus the firmament and the earth were produced from the sundered body of the dead dragon, but from its blood Marduk fashioned human beings. It is a foreboding picture of the world and of humankind that we encounter here: The world is a dragon's body, and human beings have dragon's blood in them. At the very origin of the world lurks something sinister, and in the deepest part of humankind there lies something rebellious, demonic, and evil. In this view of things only a dictator, the king of

³⁰¹ Pope Benedict XVI, "God the Creator," *In the Beginning...*, 10-11.

Babylon, who is the representative of Marduk, can repress the demonic and restore the world to order.³⁰²

This historical and mythic context as a backdrop for the first biblical creation story reveals the subversiveness of Genesis 1:1-2:3, starkly contrasting all the basic worldview cues that the *Enuma Elish* offers. Where the Babylonian tale perpetuates diabolical humanity, the Genesis account imbues humanity with a holy and liturgical *imago dei*. While the Babylonian myth offers a violent vision of the world, the Genesis myth offers original peace and goodness. And whereas the captors' deity creates out of war, the creator of the captives is before all things and orders toward Sabbath delight. And since these Babylonians worshipped the sun and moon, the pre-existence of the Hebrew deity in the Genesis narrative could more clearly interrupt the persistence of the Babylonian worldview, to more clearly see that they are subservient to the one creator. In this way, the Genesis narrative polemically communicates the belief that the Hebrew God is superior to the Babylonian deities and to any other subsequent traditions, as is their vision of humans and non-humans, as well. Benedict XVI presses this importance even further: "in the face of any fear of these demonic forces we are told that God alone, who is eternal Reason that is eternal love, created the world, and it rests in his hands."³⁰³

Augustine's reflection on individual creatures corresponds to Basil and Ambrose, as well; Augustine too reflects on the nature of plants and animals as they were presented in the Genesis account of creation. As for plants, he wrote, "but all

³⁰² Ibid., 12-13.

³⁰³ Benedict, "God the Creator," 13.

these things are on the earth in such a way that they cling to the earth with their roots and are continuous with it, and again are somehow separate from it.”³⁰⁴ This quote sounds much like Basil and Ambrose, constituting unity and diversity with seeds of reciprocity within creation. But why is this statement about plants, seeds, and fruit not made when the more general notion of earth and sea were created earlier in Genesis? Augustine answers, “the reason I think this was not done with earth and sea is because there is a greater need to distinguish these things,” of which I assume he means the earth that plants are rooted in, “which propagate themselves by their seed when they spring up and then fall away.”³⁰⁵ Distinguishing creatures in this way implies their individual value to God. Which is reason enough for the divine command for flying, sea, and land creatures to multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:22). According to Augustine, “He wished the blessing to avail for fecundity, which shows itself in the succession of offspring, so that through this blessing, because they were created weak and mortal, they might preserve their kind and give birth.”³⁰⁶ And why was this not commanded of plants? According to Augustine, “they lack sensation which is akin to reason.”³⁰⁷

This leads to one profound Augustinian principle of creation—creatures are blessed according to their potential. Consider human creatures: Augustine elucidates widely that humans are created in God’s image and likeness. But image

³⁰⁴ Augustine. *Unfinished Literal Commentary*, 135.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 135.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 144.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

and likeness are not meant synonymously for Augustine. The whole universe shares in divine likeness, for like comes from like, and in this way the universe participates in God. Quite distinctly, humanity *bears God's image*, putting them on a different level of likeness because of their rational qualities.³⁰⁸ This separates humanity from beasts and brutes, which is the exact opposite claim that was made to birth the modern West, specifically that humans are more like animals, or brutes who, as the anthropologist Marshal Sahlins claims are defined by Hobbes' dictum *bellum omnium contra omnes*.³⁰⁹ This teaching about humanity required a *leviathan* of the state to keep populations of brutish humans in check.

Since humans are rational beyond other animals, how are humans to understand the world of other creatures? If read out of context or too flippantly, Augustine's answer to this question may seem to support Lynn White Jr.'s arguments about Christianity. From *De Trinitate*, book IX, Augustine draws a line when loving creatures:

this world is conceived in love of either the creature or the creator, that is of changeable nature or unchangeable truth; which means either covetousness or in charity. Not that the creature is not to be loved, but if that love is related to the creator it will no longer be covetous but charity. It is only covetousness when the creature is loved on its own account. In this case it does not help you in your use of it, but corrupts you in your enjoyment of it.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 148-149.

³⁰⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London: Penguin Books, 1985, 189. See also: Marshall Sahlins, *The Western Illusion of Human Nature*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2008, 1-2.

³¹⁰ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Trans. Edmund Hill, Ed. John E. Rotelle OSA, New York: New City Press, 2012, 280.

That Augustine prescribes us to use and not enjoy the stuff of creation appears to strip away creation's inherent goodness as well as to promote negligent human use. But for Augustine there is a deeper moral and spiritual difference between *frui* (enjoyment) and *uti* (use) when it comes to human relationships with other creatures. He elaborates his point further in *On Christian Teaching*, "for to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one's disposal to obtain what one desires if it is a proper object of desire; for an unlawful use ought rather to be called an abuse."³¹¹ To the ear of the environmentalist critic, Augustine's prioritization of "use" over "enjoyment" sounds utilitarian in the most negative of senses—especially in light of environmental concern. It appears that creatures exist purely for humanity's ends alone. But Augustine's point is deeper than that. In defense of Augustine's point, he is clearly concerned with use that brings about abuse of created things. And further, we must remember that his focus was spiritual in nature, not necessarily environmental; Augustine regularly critiqued the spiritual and moral decay of his society in his writings. Presumably, if Augustine were writing today, given all the praise he offers to materiality, he would write much about environmental abuses. But given his own moral purposes, Augustine says,

we have wandered far from God; and if we return to our Father's home, this world must be used, not enjoyed, that so the invisible things of God may be clearly seen, being understood by things that are made, [Rom. 1.20]—that is, that by means of what is material and temporal we may lay hold upon that which is spiritual and eternal.³¹²

³¹¹ Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Trans. J.J. Shaw, Digireads.com, 2009, 8.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

On the surface this employs a pietistic moralism that downplays materiality in favor of otherworldliness, which would definitely be a problem for environmental writers.

Rather, Augustine commentator Matthew Levering explains the nuance of Augustine's point this way,

to enjoy a thing is to cleave to it with all our heart. When we seek a thing in order to enjoy it, we make it our ultimate happiness and we consider it the resting point of our desire. If we can obtain a thing that we hope to enjoy, we think that we will be blessed and at rest, so that we will not wish to seek further things.³¹³

With Levering's further description of Augustinian enjoyment (*frui*), Augustine's deep understanding of human psychology is revealed. We are on "our journey back to our Creator God,"³¹⁴ which is the context of Augustine's work, thus learning to find true enjoyment in the only good object of desire—God is important. Therefore, *uti*, or use of things, is not meant in a despotic sense by Augustine, and Levering reminds us, "we must learn to use these things,"³¹⁵ created things, "in order to reach our true goal."³¹⁶ As Augustine professed effusively on dozens more occasions, creation is good; in this case, its virtue provides a sacramental sign for humans on their way back to enjoying God. Levering explains, "the world is good, but it is not an infinite good for which we are made, and so it cannot give us happiness."³¹⁷ Therefore, the world is not to be

³¹³ Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine: an Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013, 4.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

“enjoyed” in the Augustinian sense: it is not to be the final resting place of human desire.

Learning how to use creation on the pathway back to God can seem to disenchant it, the temptation to see it as merely a collection of spiritual tools. But within the scope of Augustine’s authorship and context, we may actually say that the human directive to use rather than enjoy creation actually enchants the world. With proper contemplation, this order teaches a new mode of “seeing” the world where all things serve as vessels of grace; Augustine’s preference for using the world over resting in it as an infinite good is also quite environmentally aware. Consider wine, as an example. To enjoy wine in the way Augustine uses the term is to fix one’s heart with wine as the sole object for desire—it becomes the reason for wine’s existence. This will no doubt lead to the overconsumption of wine. And since wine is material and not eternal, this inordinate desire for its consumption may well lead to one’s undoing. But if wine is used on the pathway back to God, it becomes something that does not lay claim on one’s being, but will delightfully assist one’s greater, spiritual pursuits. The proper use of wine in spiritual pursuits can be seen in the Eucharist as well as a meal of hospitality with guests in one’s home. To expand the point environmentally, to enjoy (*frui*) creation will no doubt lead to human over-consumption of it, but to use (*uti*) creation on the spiritual path will no doubt lead to virtuous, prudent, and temperate consumption and use. Furthermore, the ability to distinguish between the two motivations is proper to

creatures made in God's image. Here, we see that this ancient church father did not teach the *imago dei* as an ideological tool to overcome creation.

Each of these reflections on the six days of creation recorded in Genesis, as elaborated by both Eastern and Western church fathers, stand in conflict with Lynn White Jr.'s analysis and even more so with those who have followed him in anti-Christian rhetoric. In these works of tradition which have been handed down over the generations we see descriptions of a creation imbued with grace, filled with sacramental truth, and humans are given gifts to traverse this creation as priests.

The Seventh Day: Sabbath Delight

To begin a reflection on the final day of creation and its potential to encourage Earth health and not its demise, it is helpful to note that Old Testament scholar Ellen F. Davis argues that Genesis 1:1-2:3 is a poem and to understand it, one must discern its "aesthetic intention."³¹⁸ Consider the rhythmic approach: "And God said... and it was so... and he saw it was good. And there was evening and there was morning..." is the refrain repeated six times in this account, culminating in a seventh day of completion. In this light, the rhythmic "days of creation" serve as aesthetic accouterments suggesting that creation is permeated

³¹⁸ Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 43.

by order and *telos* since “the rhythm of the seven” has “cosmic significance.”³¹⁹ Yet modern readings, especially after the advent of Western humanism, suggest that the climax of this creation story arrives on the sixth day when humankind emerges with the *צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים* (*Image of God*; Gen. 1:26). Problematically, truncating the rhythm of the poetic work at human emergence and adoubement misses the essential significance of the seventh day. In addition, viewing the sixth day as the dramatic climax of this story leads to the impoverishment of the seventh day – the day of God’s *Shabbat* – to little more than divine rest from weary work, a mere creational post-script. Norman Wirzba argues against this truncation, even reversing it, claiming that each day of this creation account *anticipates* the Sabbath. Specifically, Wirzba argues that the Sabbath’s inclusion in the creation account acts to show “us what the whole creation is ultimately for,”³²⁰ teleologically. Not that creation exists for the purpose of idleness or superficial, human leisure, but rather for the true meaning of Sabbath: delight. And this delight does not undermine Augustine’s worry over *frui*, for it is proper delight in creation that leads those in delightful contemplation back to the worship of the Creator. Wirzba writes,

Quoting from midrash, the medieval rabbi Raschi claimed that after the six days of divine work creation was not yet complete. What it lacked, and thus what remained to be created, was *menuha*, the rest, tranquility, serenity, and peace of God. In the biblically informed mind, *menuha* suggests the sort of happiness and harmony that come from things being as they ought to be; we hear *menuha* resonances with the deep word *shalom*. It is this capacity

³¹⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, “The Meaning of the Biblical Creation Accounts,” *In the Beginning’: A Catholic Understand of Creation and the Fall*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 27.

³²⁰ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006, 31.

for happiness and delight, rather than humanity which sits as the crowning achievement of God's creative work...*menuha*, not humanity completes creation. God's rest or *Shabbat*,...is not simply a cessation from activity but rather the lifting up and celebration of everything.³²¹

This interpretation of the Sabbath principle reads much like the concept of leisure as Josef Pieper explained it. Pieper reclaimed leisure from its modern connotation of idleness by reasserting its thicker meaning from antiquity—as the practice that allows for the “apprehension of reality” and a “receptive attitude of the mind, a contemplative attitude, and is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation.”³²² Such is the human purpose of *Shabbat*; it thus contains two movements of the human soul. The first is the *agatheic* affirmation of being, by its nature as a divine donation. The second move realizes that the world is a diverse, collection of beings predicated upon reciprocal relations of dependence. The inter-working of symbiosis in creation ought to inspire in a person the disposition of gratitude. Such is the nature of this insightful prayer penned by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,

the fact that your creatures are not merely so linked together in solidarity that none can exist unless all the rest surround it, but that all are so dependent on a single central reality that a true life, borne in common by them all, gives them ultimately their consistence and their unity.³²³

Thinking theologically, the divinely donated creation, bound up with its reciprocal unity and diversity is a sort of cosmic sacrament, an icon of the divine. And the Sabbath implies that it exists for the sake of worship, not for human self-interest.

³²¹ Ibid., 33.

³²² Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009, 46-47.

³²³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, New York: Harper Colophon, 1965, 25.

But Sabbath delight is not only the aesthetic intention of the text, for it also informs the behavior with which humankind is to treat other creatures. In fact, the Sabbath principle is applied to the entire creation in much of the Old Testament. Consider this warning from Leviticus, provided after the writer describes the removal of Israel from the holy land as punishment for disobedience:

Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbath years. As long as it lies desolate, it shall have the rest it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were living on it. (Lev. 26:34-35)

This warning fits into a larger tradition that further applies Sabbath concepts to economics, e.g. years of Jubilee.³²⁴ These examples demonstrate the veracity of Wirzba's claim: the Sabbath end is the directional bearing for all creation, according to the biblical witness. Speaking philosophically, the Sabbath is creation's final cause. And we can go further here, pressing this theme theologically, reading the first creation account with an eye toward scripture's anagogical sense by quoting St. Augustine and his vision of eternal life with God, words appearing near the close of *City of God*: "We ourselves shall become the seventh day, when we have been replenished and restored by his blessing and sanctification. There we shall have leisure to be still, and we shall see that he is God."³²⁵

With the seventh day, readers of Genesis are to see in creation a sacramental nature. This is precisely what has been lost over time in the West. Put another

³²⁴ See Wirzba's argument about Sabbath economics in *Living the Sabbath*, 116-128.

³²⁵ St. Augustine, *City of God*, London: Penguin Press, 2003, 1090.

way, White and his ideological heirs claim that Christianity infected the West with anthropocentric and earth domineering ideas giving rise to environmental crises; however, this re-evaluation of the biblical text and its interpretations by the church fathers reveal that we have actually *lost* the traditional Christian valuations of creation's goodness and sacramentality.

Chapter 3 - Seeing Creation through Christ: Maximus the Confessor and His Christological Cosmology

According to most of Christian tradition, the triune God is fully involved in protology, Christology, and eschatology, disabusing the modernist tendency to reduce the doctrine of creation to a description of cosmic origins alone. “Creation and redemption are twin foci for theological reflection;”³²⁶ creation cannot be understood without Christological attention. As the New Testament Gospel and letter-writers agree, the Christ is the agent through whom, by whom, and for whom creation has come to be (John 1:1ff, Colossians 1:1ff). In fact, Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued that we actually cannot understand creation properly from Genesis forward. A protological interpretation of creation, without first considering Christ, results only in a shadowy, speculative picture, “for we cannot speak of the beginning; where the beginning begins our thinking stops, it comes to an end.”³²⁷ In an effort to follow this tradition, and to see how Christology informs Creation and what this marriage can offer an environmentally-concerned world, this chapter will reflect on the theology of Maximus the Confessor. Maximus’ place within the tradition is intriguing. He is venerated by both the East and West as a defender of Chalcedon. Belonging to the

³²⁶ David Burrell and Elena Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God’s Creation*, New York: Paulist Press, 1997, 56.

³²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall, Temptation: Two Biblical Studies*, New York: Collier Books, 1959, 13.

seventh century, Maximus, interestingly, spans the ancient and medieval theological mindsets, effectively bridging the gap. His theology is deeply affirmative of creation, and I will engage his work to show that a Christian *theoria physike* can provide a viewpoint that effectively elevates and enchants the non-human world, for it sees and validates creation's being and purpose within the divine drama, ultimately revealing that creation's meaning is found in the person of Christ. As he writes: "In the economy of salvation—the economy of creation—the mystery of Jesus provides the key to the cosmos."³²⁸

Creation's First Movement: The Logos and Logoi

Throughout his writings, Maximus reflects on the nature of created realities, their meaning laid open in the anticipation of the first coming of Christ, their *telos* revealed through the incarnation of God's *Logos*, and their many eschatological invitations to participate in the divine life. According to Paul Blowers, "crucially for Maximus, the universe is both structurally and existentially directed toward a reciprocal communion between Creator and creation that demands a redefinition of 'being' itself,"³²⁹ which reveals a particularly sacramental ontology. In *Ambigua* 10, for instance, Maximus argues that we are "standing on holy ground,"³³⁰ and that God's presence within creation is "ineffable, supranatural,

³²⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, Ed. John Behr, Trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003, 13.

³²⁹ Paul Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 128. See also: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003, 190.

³³⁰ Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation*, 57.

and divine fire... God the Word, *is present in the being of everything* as in a burning bush.”³³¹

Broadly, Maximus describes two movements of creation as creation *ex nihilo* (where creation is implanted with *telos*) and *theosis* (deification of created beings). “Maximus sets forth a coherent vision in which the ages of the created world are ordered to distinct ends; the first age of creation moves toward the incarnation, the second toward the incorporation of those Christ has saved into the very life of God.”³³² Beginning with the first movement of what Hans Urs von Balthasar famously called a “cosmic liturgy,”³³³ Maximus examines rational human discernment of meaning within creation. Famously opening his *Ambiguum* 7:II, Maximus asserts:

If by reason and wisdom a person has come to understand that what exists was brought out of non-being into being by God, if he intelligently directs the soul’s imagination to the infinite differences and variety of things as they exist by nature and turns his questing eye with understanding towards the intelligible model (λόγος) according to which things have been made, would he now know that one logos is many logoi?³³⁴

“One *Logos* is many *logoi*” has become the enduring phrase for a proper Christian *theoria physike* through Maximus. Recently, Jordan Daniel Wood remarked, these *logoi* “ground the world in God.”³³⁵ On the one hand, it means that Christ reveals and imbues meaning and reason for a unified whole of creation; at the same time,

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Cone, *An Ocean Vast of Blessing: A Theology of Grace*, 2.

³³³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003.

³³⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 54.

³³⁵ Jordan Daniel Wood, “Creation is Incarnation: The Metaphysical Peculiarity of the *Logoi* in Maximus the Confessor, *Modern Theology*, 34:1, January, 2018, 83.

Christ infuses the many diverse meanings of individual creatures, both organic and inorganic, resulting in creation's diversity. This principle supports a commensurate elevation of meaning and importance for each individual Maximus' affirmation of Christ's two natures in the Creed of Chalcedon. As Willis Jenkins writes,

his formula safeguards the integrity of the incarnation by explaining how the Son remains divine while assuming a creaturely nature: since creatures already are finite participation in the Logos, Christ's union of creaturely and divine natures repeats and perfects God's initial creative act.³³⁶

These *logoi* reflect and depend upon the one, eternal *Logos*, yet they also “exist” eternally, for they originate from divine wisdom.³³⁷ The profound implication here is that creation is divinely donated, inherently good, and enchanted by transcendence.

Maximus' unique teaching about the *Logos*, “which is the art of God,” according to Loudovikos, is also defined as “the divine art creative of essence,”³³⁸ and arguably Maximus' most important contribution to understanding God's immanence in the world, according to the Orthodox eco-theologian, Elizabeth Theokritoff.³³⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar said the following of God based on “the reciprocal relationship of God's transcendence and God's immanence,”³⁴⁰ found

³³⁶ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 190.

³³⁷ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 54.

³³⁸ Nikolas Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010, 63.

³³⁹ Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009, 53.

³⁴⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 85.

in Maximus' work: "He is like a gentle wind, which stirs through all things, imperceptible in himself yet perceived in each different creature."³⁴¹ In Maximus' *Ambigua* 10 the *logoi* exhibit God's providence and judgment over creation, and further, the *logoi* of individual creatures bring the rational mind toward theological reflection upon God. In that *Ambigua*, Maximus states,

...the fact of being teaches us theology, for it is through being that we seek the cause of beings and learn from them that such a cause exists, without however attempting to know what this cause is in its own essence, for its reflection is not projected outward into beings, on the basis of which we might have been able (if even only minimally) to refer back to it, in the way one infers a cause from its effects. Motion, on the other hand, manifests the providence for beings, and through it we contemplate the unvarying essential identity of beings in their particular species. In seeing these integral modes of distinct existence, we acquire the concept of Him who holds together and preserves them all in an ineffable union, in such a way that each is clearly distinct and marked off from the other, consistent with principles according to which they were created. Difference, moreover, signifies judgment, which is evident in the just distribution to all things of a natural potential commensurate with the substrate of their being (in accordance with the principle of each), by which we are instructed that the wise distributor is God.³⁴²

According to Joshua Lollar, a Maximian reflection upon God's providence and judgment within creation through *Logos/logoi* must not be interpreted as "Evagrian/Origenist," which suggests that "the material world" is merely a "place for the chastisement and training of fallen intellects."³⁴³ Following their projects, one may "call into question the integrity of the created order and treat it as though

³⁴¹ Ibid., 86.

³⁴² Maximus the Confessor, *On the Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua* vol.1, Ed. and Trans. by Nicholas Constas, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014, 205-207.

³⁴³ Joshua Lollar, *To See Into the Life of Things*, 237.

it had no enduring reality or connection to the original purpose of God.”³⁴⁴ Noting that this may be an extreme version of Evagrianist/Origenist cosmological understanding, Lollar nonetheless, argues that Maximus takes an opposing view, teaching that providence “is constitutive of all that is and preserves the *logoi* according to which the universe has been primordially endowed with substance.”³⁴⁵ “It is providence that preserves beings in their own being; it does not construct an alternate and lower realm for creatures that have fallen away in order to arrest their fall and provide a means for their return and escape from what they now are,”³⁴⁶ argues Lollar of Maximus’ views concerning the *logoi* of individual creatures under God’s providential rule.

Lars Thurnberg agrees with Lollar’s interpretation of Maximus’ deviation from Origen. The one *Logos* is many *logoi* doctrine, according to Thurnberg, represents Maximus’ “anti-Origenist understanding of the *λόγοι* and...his positive evaluation of the differentiated world of beings.”³⁴⁷ Wood attempts to put a finer point on this teaching, “the *logoi* are at once thoughts and wills,”³⁴⁸ belonging to the creator. This does not mean that the world is divided. Blowers claims Christologically, that creation is unified. “Indeed, the unity of the cosmos in Jesus Christ is not simply a transcendent universal pattern ontologically ‘downloaded’ into particular created beings, and into parts within those beings, but a movement

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., Lollar is quoting Maximus, *Amb.* 10, 1133D3-8, here.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Lars Thurnberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Chicago: Open Court, 1995, 74.

³⁴⁸ Jordan Daniel Wood, “Creation is Incarnation,” 84.

‘from below’ among those different beings/parts to achieve new integrity and solidarity such as enriches the whole universe.”³⁴⁹ Ultimately for Blowers,

in the *logoi*, Christ the Creator-Logos has already *pre-evangelized*, as it were, the whole of creation, and together they recite the Creator’s providence and judgment and attest to the depth of his identification with creation. As such, the *logoi* are necessarily objects of the sustained contemplation (*θεωρία*), or sanctified intuition, that induces in rational creatures a vision of the deeper rhythms and harmonies of creation.³⁵⁰

This is how, he argues, rational creatures can “align their existential ‘modes’ (τρόποι) with the *logoi* of their nature and thereby find their true rhythm, orientation, and freedom.”³⁵¹

As a helpful metaphor, Theokritoff likens the *logoi* to “blueprints”³⁵² for created realities. In this way, the *logoi* may be compared to Plato’s theory of ideas,³⁵³ but more importantly, the *logoi*, i.e. “exemplars or conceptions” differ from Plato’s forms in that they can boast of no ontological autonomy, nor do they occupy a space between God and creation. They are, rather, likened more to “divine energies”³⁵⁴ allowing for the *noetic* perception of the divine within creation. Maximus clarifies the way that the *logoi* exist before the *actus* of creation this way in *Ambiguum* 7, “Because he held together in himself the *logoi* before they came to be, by his gracious will he created all things visible and invisible out of

³⁴⁹ Paul Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 142.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁵² Theokritoff, *Living in God’s Creation*, 54.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

non-being.”³⁵⁵ The *logoi* – because of the *Logos* – are infused within creation because creation has come about, as Colossians contends, through Christ (Col. 1:16). “In his incarnation, the *Logos* is able to recapitulate the entire universe because all of its meanings preexist in him; therefore, the universe has being and comes to completion because it participates in him.”³⁵⁶ For Christianity therefore, creation is non-neutral. It abounds with meaning and significance, and that applies to the unified whole just as much as it does each individual part. Thinking of this tension—unity amidst diversity within creation—Maximus states,

We are speechless before the sublime teaching about the Logos, for He cannot be expressed in words or conceived in thought. Although he is beyond being and nothing can participate in him in any way, nor is he any of the totality of things that can be known in relation to other things, nevertheless we affirm that the one Logos is many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are One. Because the One goes forth out of goodness into individual being, creating and preserving them, the One is many.³⁵⁷

Though Theokritoff put forward the metaphor of the *logoi* as “divine blueprints,” it is important to remember that she does not liken them merely to “divine ideas” but rather “divine energies.” For, as Wood, argues, “it is a curiously counterproductive thing to *equate* Maximus’ *logoi* with divine ideas, for Christians have always had a special problem just there. The problem is that positing a protological plurality in the Word threatens divine simplicity.”³⁵⁸

Maximian *Logos/logoi* thinking offers several theological cues for Christian reflection upon faithful human-environmental relationships. Consider, as an

³⁵⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On The Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 55.

³⁵⁶ Cone, *An Ocean Vast of Blessing*, 21.

³⁵⁷ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On The Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 57.

³⁵⁸ Jordan Daniel Wood, *Creation is Incarnation*, 84.

example, Theokritoff's Maximian reflection concerning the relationship between God and creation: "God is in everything that exists because everything is a realization of his *logoi*, his creative will."³⁵⁹ To exist within a world of total and divinely-willed realities effectuates participation in God: existence takes shape from and within in a world that God creatively and willfully imagined. And since the *logoi* of all creatures is immutable,³⁶⁰ for they flow from God's unchanging desire, the keen observation and reflection upon such elements yields knowledge beyond their individual being. Hence, the Christian imagination may use science, poetic observation, theology, and philosophy to reveal truths about God. Perceiving the world rightly, as it is suspended from the creator and populated by creatures that are reciprocally and symbiotically related, elevates the imagination of rational souls to an awareness of the divine gift of creation. Maximus' insistence that Christ conceptualizes the universe, because all of it is sourced in and through the *Logos*, requires a renewed sense of human astonishment over the reality of created beings. This contemplative wonder leads to a re-enchantment, which demands a thoughtful ethic and a praxis of gentleness, justice, and flourishing for all of God's good creatures.

*Maximian Contemplation of Creation: A Christian Theoria Physike,
Virtue, and Environmental Prudence*

Contemplation takes up considerable space in his *Ambiguum* 10, and has been recently reflected upon by Norman Wirzba in a *Modern Theology* article,

³⁵⁹ Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation*, 54.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

“Christian *Theoria Physike*: On Learning to See Creation,” and Joshua Lollar’s book, *To See Into the Life of Things: The Contemplation of Nature in Maximus the Confessor and His Predecessors*. The following section dovetails their observations on contemplation of creation, which prove necessary for developing an environmentally helpful way of seeing and, consequently, being and living in the world. Wirzba argues for a particularly Christian *theoria physike* in response to contemporary environmentalist questions, and he, too, uses much of the writings of the earth-affirming Confessor. His reading of the *Logos/logoi* formula i.e. a Christological reading of creation, no doubt, argues, that Jesus Christ,

is the perfect mediator between heaven and earth, Creator and creature. In him we see the truth and meaning of all created being. As followers of Christ and members of his body, Christians are called to play a mediating role in the created world, a role that helps fellow-creatures move into the fullness of their life in God. They are, as Paul put it, to be “ministers of reconciliation” in the world (2 Corinthians 5:18). To do this, however, requires that Christians learn to see the world rightly. They need the proper *theoria*. For Maximus, having the proper *theoria* means learning to see the divine *Logos* in the *logoi* of all created things. If Christ, as the scriptures attest, is the one through whom and in whom and for whom all things come to exist, if it is indeed the case that all things hold together through him, then he is the *Logos* that is present to each thing, informing its own *logos* or way of being. What the scriptures reveal is that Jesus’ way of being, his *Logos*, is the way of love, the way of self-offering service to others.³⁶¹

Just how important is contemplation to Maximus? In *Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*, he likens the years spent without contemplation of visible creation to those of “an ailing man.”³⁶² In *Ambiguum* 10, where Maximus sets out principles for human contemplation of creation, beginning with a quotation from Saint

³⁶¹ Ibid., 221.

³⁶² St. Maximus the Confessor, *Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*, Trans. Luis Joshua Sales, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2015, 91.

Gregory, “the teacher,” on the philosophical life, which covers, “the acquisition and practice of virtue, the contemplation of the natural world, and the contemplation of and discourse about God.”³⁶³ Of note is the question about what the philosophical life is. Is it a quiet life of contemplation or a life of action? Lollar claims that Maximus’ upholds both, a “stillness filled with action.”³⁶⁴ it is the compelling fusion of these two—meditation and mobilization—that fills *Ambiguum* with provocation toward both practical *and* contemplative thought. Maximus writes, “of those who pursue divine philosophy solely through ‘reason’ and ‘contemplation,’ saying nothing about the practice of asceticism”:

when the teacher affirms that divine philosophy is achieved through reason and contemplation, he in actuality is quite clearly implying that the saints’ true judgment and action concerning beings (which alone I would be so bold as to define as philosophy in the fullest sense of the word) is twofold.³⁶⁵

For Maximus, practice and reason form a twofold structure of philosophy, because reason and contemplation take root and flower within the practical life;³⁶⁶ hence, Wirzba asserts that *theoria* precedes and produces both *ethos* and *askesis*. Maximus’ theological method provides an important ancient starting point for the modern environmental questions at play today. Toward an appropriate human relationship with non-humans, a Christian contemplation of the natural world can produce in the life of its followers a “power of the intellect to understand what pertains to beings, whereas the practical is the deliberative power that determines the right use of reason for those engaged in practice. The former they call

³⁶³ Joshua Lollar, *To See Into the Life of Things*, 206.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ St. Maximos the Confessor, *On the Difficulties of the Church Fathers*, 151.

³⁶⁶ See: Joshua Lollar, *To See Into the Life of Things*, 209.

contemplative intellect, the latter practical reason—but also wisdom, and prudence respectively.”³⁶⁷ Lollar adds that “rationality and contemplation are inseparable from the life of praxis: philosophical virtue is at once theoretical and practical.”³⁶⁸

This marriage of contemplation and praxis produces in Maximus’ writings a sense of bodily virtue that is possible in human, earthly creatures. When considering pleasure, Maximus seems to address a culture rife with an overconsumption that has produced a multitude of environmental tragedies:

Every pleasure taken in forbidden things arises from passion and through sensation is directed toward a particular sensible object. For pleasure is nothing other than a kind of sensation that has been formed within the sensing subject by some sensible object, or mode of sensory energy that has been built up and solidified around some irrational desire. For when desire is combined with sensation it produces pleasure, to which it gives a specific shape, and sensation moved by desire produces pleasure when it becomes attached to a sensible object. Upon seeing that the soul is clothed in an *earthly* form when, contrary to nature, it moves toward material things by means of the flesh, the saints redirected this movement so that the flesh, moved by the soul in accordance with nature, was fittingly assimilated to God, and, through the practice of the virtues, they adorned it, as far as possible, with the beauty of divine manifestations.³⁶⁹

Anxiety over human passions thrusts Maximus into reflection upon the “philosophic life,”³⁷⁰ with the counter-aim of *dispassion* through a life of virtue and ascetic practices after, of course, having contemplated the world rationally and rightly. Here a seeming paradox emerges. For all of Maximus’ affirmation of

³⁶⁷ St. Maximos the Confessor, *On the Difficulties of the Church Fathers*, 157.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.

³⁶⁹ St. Maximos the Confessor, *On the Difficulties of the Church Fathers*, 161.

³⁷⁰ Joshua Lollar, *To See Into the Life of Things*, 212.

creation, and for his apt reputation as a cosmic theologian, his teaching on *askesis* introduces an earthly estrangement into his work: "...in this way the ascetic accepts alienation that besets him in his initial experience of the world and follows it into the first stages of the philosophic practice."³⁷¹ Maximus writes, "the ascetic who is being tested through the endurance of temptations, cleansed through the disciplining of the body, and perfected through attentiveness to the contemplation of higher things is deemed worthy of divine comforting."³⁷² Moses is an exemplar of this sort of ascetic life *via* divine contemplation, whereas Herod, with all of his vice and insatiable appetites, represents an inordinate, and thus destructive, focus upon "fleshly" things.³⁷³ For Maximus then, one's rational contemplation of and even intimacy with creation ought to yield a praxis of self-limitation or a detachment that is paradoxically neither anti-earth nor otherworldly (in an escapist sense), but one that will lead to a proper relationship with creation; it quells the appetites of human living. Maximus' distinction maintains much the same reference as Augustine's aforementioned *frui* and *uti*. The result of this philosophical approach to life reveals a flourishing of the person as well as the earth, free of over-use or abuse. Furthermore, such a proper *theoria physike* aligns humanity with nature by means of moral directive:

Having therefore intensified the visual power of the soul by means of reason in accord with nature, and having heard, as it were, reason itself crying out that one must not use natural energies in a manner contrary to nature—since the misuse of natural powers necessarily leads to their destruction—they were taught by the corresponding principle of nature to be carried directly to the cause

³⁷¹ Ibid., 212.

³⁷² St. Maximus the Confessor, *Two Hundred Chapters on Theology*, 85.

³⁷³ Ibid., 85-87. See also, St. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Difficulties of the Church Fathers*, 171ff.

of nature, so that, whence they received being as such they might also receive the addition of true being itself.³⁷⁴

Maximus refuses the duality in the human contemplator/actor. Put another way, there is no either/or choice between human awareness of bodily, sensory, or “earthy” experiences and rational, mental, or contemplative ones. These ought all be unified, when conceived of properly in his exposition of the philosophic life, “that sensation should be ennobled by reason, so that when imagination perceives the various potentials and actualities that exist in the universe,”³⁷⁵ the soul can best navigate through created life.

Next, in *Ambigua* 10 Maximus moves to a reflection upon the lives of the Old Testament saints to show how they properly contemplated the sensible world of creation, and by which they gained understanding about the intelligible world of God. He praises David for writing, “the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmaments proclaim the work of his hands.”³⁷⁶ For Maximus this reveals David’s wonderful insight about non-human, created realities, which were not endowed with a soul, “yet with the ears of his intellect he heard inanimate beings proclaim the principles of theology.”³⁷⁷ In the same way, the book of Holy Scripture and the book of natural law put forward a “unitary idea of truth,”³⁷⁸ the scriptures

³⁷⁴ St. Maximos the Confessor, *On the Difficulties of the Church Fathers*, 169.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 169-171.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 181.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 181.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 195.

make plain about God what nature proposes by analogy.³⁷⁹ Creation teaches theology, according to Maximus; therefore, creation is a sacramental sign of God.

Between scripture and nature weaves a “reciprocal interchange,” in which, “one law is identical to the other, so that written law is potentially identical to natural law, and the natural law is by its permanent condition identical to the written law. Both laws simultaneously reveal and conceal the same Word: the one through written words and whatever is visible, and the other through ideas and whatever is hidden.”³⁸⁰ As Blowers describes it, the Logos of God is “at play” within creation³⁸¹ and proper contemplation of each revelation of cosmic law will reveal an unseen world of God. This world exists in humankind *via* the soul. On the other hand, within the visible, sensory world of creation is the human body. The result of this type of contemplation reveals not only necessary human asceticism or ethics; it also demonstrates that humanity plays a special role within creation—as both *microcosm* and *mediator*, one who seeks God within the world through contemplation or faithful play.

Humanity as Microcosm and Mediator with Environmental Implications

What does it mean to say that humanity is a microcosm? According to many Maximian interpreters like Andrew Louth, Maximus saw reality as filled with extremes such as mind, senses, paradise, earth, creation, heaven,³⁸² and since

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 197.

³⁸¹ Paul Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 87.

³⁸² Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 73.

“human beings are found on both sides of each division”³⁸³ they can accurately reflect within themselves a small version of the cosmos. Maximus developed this idea of the human microcosm with some inspiration from the Cappadocian Fathers and other ancient thinkers,³⁸⁴ not to mention his own contemplations. Remember also that subsequently, as shown in the previous chapter, humanity as a microcosm was proved scientifically in the modern world, supporting the idea introduced in the Genesis account of creation that God created humanity from the humus.

Ontologically, if humans are a microcosm and can bridge the world’s many extremes, humanity may maintain a mediatory role within the cosmos; like a priest,³⁸⁵ humans mediate God and creation. So let us now consider Maximus’ *Ambiguum* 41 where he writes about this unique human role within creation.³⁸⁶ When thinking about the extremes of reality, Maximus calls the human a “most capacious workshop containing all things, naturally mediating through himself all the divided extremes.”³⁸⁷ He sees as humanity’s most natural role and purpose to unite all things and order all things appropriate to their natural objective, which is God. According to Maximus, it was for this reason that humankind arrived only at

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Lars Thurnberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 132-136.

³⁸⁵ See: John Zizioulas, “Proprietors or Priests of Creation,” Online: Orthodoxy Today, <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles2/MetJohnCreation.php?articles2/MetJohnCreation.shtml> (Accessed 15 Oct. 2012), and Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1963, 15.

³⁸⁶ Lars Thurnberg reflects heavily on *Ambiguum* 41 and *Mystagogy* 7 for material that explains Maximus’ viewpoints on the subject.

³⁸⁷ St. Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 2, Ed. and Trans. Nicholas Constas, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016, 105.

end of the creation narrative—to unify creation before God. In Maximus’ own words, man’s vocation starts “by making his own divisions a beginning of unity which gathers up all things to God their Author, and proceeding by order and rank through the mean terms, he might reach the limit of the sublime that comes about through the union of all things in God.”³⁸⁸ And of course, in God, there is no division. Willis Jenkins puts a fine point on the matter: “Microcosmic humans gather creation into an ‘ecclesial hypostasis,’ ushering the cosmos into communion with God.”³⁸⁹

This is the divine plan for humanity, and for the pursuit of this union humankind was created. The human status as a microcosm makes such priestly mediation possible. Yet regrettably, as we find in scripture, humanity failed this priestly vocation; “instead,” says Maximus, quite

contrary to nature, he willingly and foolishly moved around the things below him, which God had commanded him to have *dominion over*. In this way he misused his natural, God-given capacity to unite what is divided, and, to the contrary, divided what was united, and thus was in great danger of lamentably returning to non-being.³⁹⁰

Elsewhere in *Ambiguum* 8, he writes,

Man came into being adorned with the God-given beauty of incorruptibility and immortality, but, having preferred the shame of the material nature around him over spiritual beauty, and in addition wholly forgotten the eminent dignity of his soul—or rather the God who beautified the soul with divine form—he plucked a “fruit” which, according to the divine decree that wisely administers our salvation, was worthy of the deliberative will...thus reaping not only bodily corruption and death, and the

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 109.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 109.

liability and propensity to every passion, but also the instability...and inequality of external and material being, and the capacity and proneness for undergoing change.³⁹¹

Thurnberg calls this a failure in humanity's destiny, one that "denied his relationship with God."³⁹² "The Fall" is explained in Genesis as a simple act of rebellion, but in the *Ambiguum* it is understood it is an overturning of the mechanics of cosmic sacramentality. It represents a movement away from humanity's intended role of theo-cosmic service, and a turn toward self-interest. And in *Ambiguum* 10, Maximus declares, "so, by not wishing to be nourished by the Word, the first man fell away from the divine life, and embarked upon a different life which engenders death, a life in which he acquired for himself an irrational form, obscuring the inconceivable divine beauty, and he handed over all creation as food for death."³⁹³ It may be described other ways as well; for example, God was to be the unifying end of all things, but under Adam's failing was humanity substituted in place of the divine. Surely, this represents just the sort of anthropocentrism in question for today's environmentalist literature. Think of the consequences: if creation exists for the delight of human consumption alone, and is in no way ordered by humanity toward God, then it will remain divided in value and most certainly fall under the weight of devouring human passions. But this is not what Christianity teaches as humanity's highest calling. And it certainly is not what is meant by Genesis' mandate of human dominion. As intimated by Maximus, dominion indicates a proper care of creation,

³⁹¹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 76.

³⁹² Lars Thurnberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 140.

³⁹³ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 1, 249.

ordered toward God, and brought into unity with God's divine purposes. Creation is a sacrament of God, with humanity fashioned specifically as the means by which the sacrament becomes blessed before God, and thus is put in right relationship with God.

Maximus laments the tragic human failure:

Had man united created nature with the uncreated through love (oh, the wonder of God's love for mankind!), he would have shown them to be one and the same by the state of grace, the whole man wholly pervading the whole God, and becoming everything that God is, without, however, identity in essence, and receiving the whole of God instead of himself, and obtaining as a kind of prize for his ascent to God the absolutely unique God, who is the goal of the motion of things that are moved, and firm and unmoved stability of things that are carried along to Him, and the limit (itself limitless and infinite) of every definition, order, and law, whether of mind, intellect, or nature.³⁹⁴

Would that have been the case, the *telos* of creation, *theosis*, or the fully-transfigured cosmos would already come to pass. For now, creation was applied only to human ends, and since humanity failed to mediate creation and God as "priests of creation" (our true and proper Christian anthropology) non-human creation is, like humanity, subject to futility (Rom. 8:20).³⁹⁵ At just this moment, Christ enters into the drama. Thurnberg argues that humanity "was rescued only thanks to Christ, the God incarnate, who fulfilled the unifying and mediating function of man, being himself man in true relationship to God."³⁹⁶ According to

³⁹⁴ St. Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 2, 109.

³⁹⁵ For an environmental interpretation of this text see: Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010.

³⁹⁶ Lars Thurnberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 140.

Maximus, Christ recapitulates in himself all things in heaven and earth,³⁹⁷ and Christ incarnates and recovers the project of uniting the extremes of creation. When God becomes humanity in Christ, Christ becomes that same microcosm imbued by the rest of the created order. Other examples of the mediatory and unifying work of Christ includes, for instance, Christ's ascension into heaven:

...it is obvious that He united heaven and earth, for He entered heaven with His earthly body, which is of the same nature and consubstantial with ours, and showed that, according to its more universal principle, all sensible nature is one, and thus He obscured in Himself the property of division that had cut in two.³⁹⁸

Christ, according to Maximus united “sensible things with intelligible things”³⁹⁹ displaying God's *telos* for creation as union with the divine life. Furthermore, as Thurnberg writes, when the unifying work of Christ is truly followed by Christians, “the whole world may expect a final, eschatological change, a day when the world dies away like a man, and both man and the world experience a resurrection, where the dualism is finally overcome, in that the body is completely united with the soul and the sensible things with the intelligible things”⁴⁰⁰ (Maximus' theology of *theosis* will be treated more fully in the next chapter where reflection will be made of his *Mystagogy*, for it is in the sacrament of the Eucharist where we will more easily see the destiny of the cosmos laid out.).⁴⁰¹ For Christian theology then, creation is not something that one can understand from the beginning, but rather from Christ—backward and forward. Such is the

³⁹⁷ St. Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties*, 111.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 113.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Lars Thurnberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 141.

⁴⁰¹ See: Nikolas Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology*, 145, 153.

reason that Benedict XVI claims that creation has “Christology as a criterion.”⁴⁰²

In summary, one can only explicate the Christian doctrine of creation by mining the intellectual resources of the incarnation, for the incarnation is the revelatory key that unlocks the purpose of all God’s work.

The Christian vision of creation, at least in terms of Maximus, therefore must not be called anthropocentric, at least in the way that modern environmentalists use the term. Rather, it must be labeled as *Christocentric*,⁴⁰³ as Christ contains the key for understanding creation, as well as its best hope and destiny in the divine life. Maximus’ Christocentric view of creation is a reminder of creation’s origin, destiny, and what was supposed to be humanity’s vocation. Maximus writes,

And with us and for us He encompassed the extremes of the whole creation through the means, as His own parts, and he joined them around Himself, each with the other, tightly and indissolubly: paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, the sensible and the intelligible, since like us He possesses a body, sense perception, soul, and intellect, to which (as His own parts) He associated individually the extreme that was thoroughly akin to each one of them (i.e., His parts), according to the mode described above, and *He recapitulated in Himself*, in a manner appropriate to God, *all things*, showing that the whole creation is one, as if it were another human being, completed by the mutual coming together of all its members, inclining toward itself in the wholeness of existence, according to one, unique, simple, undefined, and unchangeable idea: that it comes from nothing. Accordingly, all

⁴⁰² Pope Benedict XVI, *In the Beginning...A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995, 15.

⁴⁰³ This term interests me because of the ethical-theological project of James Gustafson. His is often described as theo-centric, and he applies his rubric to environmental thought and creation care in: James M. Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment From a Theocentric Perspective*, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994. But theo-centricism can be used to describe any deity, whereas the term christocentric is meant to apply only to the interpretation of the world around Christ specifically.

creation admits of one and the same, absolutely undifferentiated principle: that its existence is preceded by nonexistence.⁴⁰⁴

By his description of the importance of Christ, who is the exemplar of humanity, we can see here in Maximus no hint that the apotheosis of humanity is found in mastery over creation. When the first humans attempted mastery, it not only had cosmic consequences, it also represented a self-induced reduction of the human to the frame of the sensible world. But for Maximus, the sensible world is only made intelligible by God, as it exists by God and for union with God. How is this not Christian enchantment writ large? And if there is a charge of anthropocentrism here as Lynn White Jr. contends, it can only come from one of two movements in Maximus' theology. And no matter which one is chosen it is at best an attenuated anthropocentrism compared to the one criticized in the 20th century. Firstly, Maximus may be called an anthropocentrist in that humankind has special gifts enabling a special role within creation's economy. That role is "microcosm and mediator" as his thought has been described. I have been attaching the notion of priesthood to it as well. But how can this role be interpreted as environmentally irresponsible? Surely, no environmentalist critic will go so far as to say that humans possess no unique gifts within creation. Demonstrably, humans do possess a uniqueness, as reason, intellect, and freedom make plain. But Christianity has historically interpreted the meaning of these gifts as for service, not despotism. Humanity's charge was to unify creation, the sensible world, with the divine—and an *ethos* of self-service is an anathema to this sort of thinking. Secondly, one may also accuse Maximus of anthropocentrism, because of his

⁴⁰⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 2, 115.

central focus on the God-Man, Christ—indeed salvation comes to man by a God incarnated into humanity. But again, in Christ, God takes on humanity, and humanity is a collection of created things, ergo, Christ assumes all creation into the divine life, recapitulating the cosmos into one person. “Within human personhood, Christ draws creatures into more perfect union with God,”⁴⁰⁵ argues Jenkins. This implies that the incarnation of God into humanity can only be anthropocentric when humanity is dichotomized from creation, but Maximus’ view, like many of the Christian ancients and early medievals, unites humanity closely with non-humanity—there is no dualism to be found.

Moreover, the fact that Christ fulfills the mediatory role that humans abandoned showcases the true “greenness” of Christianity. Christ – the great unifier of creation to divinity, and unifier of the diversity of creation – rescues the world from the very real despotic, anthropocentric problems, as well as uneven dualisms that prioritize human society, which belong more appropriately to the narrative of the “Fall.” Christ is thus the picture of the beginning, what the created order was meant to be, and how humans were to behave in light of God’s wishes. The life of Christ also represents the destiny of all creation—union with the divine. Christ is savior of the earth.

Theosis: Creation’s Transfiguration and Destiny

As mentioned previously, the Maximian ages of creation include the anticipation of the incarnation. As Blowers reports, “the Creator’s *original* plan for the world

⁴⁰⁵ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 192.

was to reveal himself in Jesus Christ. Creation was not the ‘beginning’ per se but was itself a staging-point toward gradually disclosing the fullness of the mystery of the incarnation and cross.”⁴⁰⁶ The second movement is creation “saved into the life of God,” the doctrinal term being *theosis*, sometimes called deification, and less so, divinization. In *Ambiguum* 42, Maximus states, “God took on himself both of these for our sake,” referring to the *logos* and *tropos* of creaturely being,

and thus renewed our nature, or better yet he created our nature anew, and returned it to its primordial dignity of incorruptibility through his holy flesh, born of our own flesh and animated by a rational soul. What is more, he generously provided our nature with the gift of deification, which he could not possibly have failed to bestow since he was himself God incarnate, indwelling the flesh in the same manner that the soul indwells the body, that is, thoroughly interpenetrating it in a union without confusion.⁴⁰⁷

Jean-Claude Larchet explains that *theosis* is the total, final transformation of human beings by God, without affecting human nature. While Maximus’ doctrine of deification means that humans become God in some sense, it happens without loss “of their essential properties.”⁴⁰⁸ Humans remain human, but they become much more like God as they become enveloped into the divine life. “The doctrinal basis of man’s deification is clearly to be found in the hypostatic unity between the divine and human nature in Christ,”⁴⁰⁹ argues Thurnberg.

⁴⁰⁶ Paul Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor*, 103.

⁴⁰⁷ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 83.

⁴⁰⁸ Jean-Claude Larchet, “The Mode of Deification,” *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, Eds. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 349.

⁴⁰⁹ Lars Thurnberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 430.

Seemingly absent from this exploration of *theosis* is the fate of non-humanity. However, reflecting again on the microcosm language in Maximus' anthropology may provide a hidden answer: If humans are a microcosm of all creation, and Christ hypostatically unites his divine life with human life which paves the way for human deification, the rest of creation will follow in like fashion. Willis Jenkins, a theologian and ethicist who has written a book about ecology and theology called *Ecologies of Grace*, reflects on Maximus' image of deification as it may apply to the natural world. "The cosmic Christology Maximus deploys to defend Chalcedon thus brings all creation within its divinizing aegis. By revealing the logos as the secret heart of the world, Christ's incarnation reveals the world's communion with God, in whom its diverse natures already abide."⁴¹⁰ By the very act of inhabiting a creaturely body, Christ embraces and deifies all creation. Reflecting on Maximus' exploration of the Transfiguration of Christ in *Ambiguum* 10, Jenkins explains a theme in much of Maximus' writings: "the Logos indwells all things, as a soul to a body, says Maximus, calling creation a 'garment' and 'flesh' of God. By assuming that cosmic body, Christ elevates creation into union with God."⁴¹¹

Personhood, an important theme for Maximus following the Chalcedon formula concerning Christ, provides a key ingredient in the hypostatic union of the two natures, which abide in Christ.⁴¹² Likewise, "human engagement with nonhuman

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 192.

⁴¹² Ibid., 193.

natures” is “cosmologically central,”⁴¹³ because the human, mediatory act of unification, imitates the unification of all being in Christ. But is personhood – a key concept for deification in the works of Maximus – simply another term for anthropocentrism? Not according to Jenkins, precisely because it is a gateway for created beings – both human and nonhuman – to be taken up into the divine life. According to Jenkins,

Natural change and ecological processes therefore provide natural indicators of the way creation anticipates divinization and invites fulfilled personhood. As Jean-Claude Larchet points out, the anthropocentric moments in Maximus do not subdue the cosmic scope of deification; rather they reinforce it, for creation awaits its elevation through personhood. In its movements and changes, creation groans for humanization, that its natural desire for God may be liberated into voices of praise, modes of communion.⁴¹⁴

Of these modes of communion and voices of praise, or liturgy to be exact, we will reflect on in the next chapter, with special attention to Maximus’ *Mystagogy*. Maximus interprets everything in cosmic scale—Christology, creation, humanity, *theosis*. To conclude, for Maximus it is in and through Christ that creation has being and meaning. It is also in Christ that all creation anticipates union with divinity. Whether one considers his protology or eschatology, it is clear that Maximus believes that the truest cosmology is Christology. This framework deeply enchants creation, but it also demands human practices that do not diminish creation, for it demands its flourishing of non-humanity and human assistance on its own path back to God.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 194.

Chapter 4 – *Mystagogy*

All great Orthodox theologians and hierarchs have always referred to its worship texts, have reasoned, written and spread its teachings using a liturgical language. They have done this in their struggle to initiate the faithful into the mystery of Jesus Christ's personal presence into the Church, in and through its sacramental work.

-Ciprian Streza,
“Saint Maximus the Confessor’s *Mystagogia*
as a Complex Liturgical Commentary”

St. Maximus the Confessor’s *Mystagogy* is a work of liturgical ecclesiology. The term “mystagogy” incites the enigmatic and is often applied to the celebration of a sacrament, such as baptism or the Eucharist.⁴¹⁵ Albeit brief, *Mystagogy* serves as a liturgical summary of Maximus’ entire work, “in the framework of Chalcedonian theology.”⁴¹⁶ This mysterious expression of closeness between creator and created, this “union without dissolution of personal identity”⁴¹⁷ was, as Lollar says of Maximian mystagogy, “the original purpose of human existence,”⁴¹⁸ but since this vocation had been abandoned it was achieved by the Incarnation. Subsequently, the liturgy of the church, the community of Christ, represents a repeated sign of this union, re-revealing creation’s purpose. In this work, Maximus notes his supreme indebtedness to “the divine interpreter Ps-

⁴¹⁵ Thomas Cattoi, “Liturgy as Cosmic Transformation,” *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 416.

⁴¹⁶ Ciprian Streza, “Saint Maximus the Confessor’s *Mystagogia* as a Complex Liturgical Commentary,” *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, 4:1, 2013, 64.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Joshua Lollar, *To See Into the Life of Things: The Contemplation of Nature in Maximus the Confessor and His Predecessors*, Turnhout: Belgium, 2013, 308.

Dionysius the Areopagite” and his treatise *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*,⁴¹⁹ affectionately calling him a “blessed old man,” according to Andrew Louth.⁴²⁰ Maximus’ goal “is not to offer a detailed description of the liturgical rite, but to outline a liturgical theology that emphasizes the cosmic, Christocentric dimension of the liturgical action, as well as its fundamental import.”⁴²¹ In short, the liturgy exercises habits that teach people to see the world correctly. By exploring Maximus’ *Mystagogy*, we find the church’s identity in its worshipping life, which is an expression of contemplative practice/identity that unifies creation with the realm of divinity in each of its practices. And the heart of the liturgy renders the church the “community of creation,” not one apart from or over creation as environmentalist critics claim of the religion. This community of creation is also a “green community,” because its worshipping life mediates creation and God and elevates creation to its best possible end. As Thomas Cattoi commends, “Maximus’ dazzling intellectual virtuosity, as he unveils the net of correspondences between inner and cosmic transformation, bestows extraordinary dignity on even the most seemingly insignificant liturgical action, each of which appears pregnant with extraordinary salvific potential.”⁴²² This extraordinary dignity falls likewise upon even the most seemingly insignificant of beings within creation as well.

⁴¹⁹ Thomas Cattoi, “Liturgy as Cosmic Transformation,” 416.

⁴²⁰ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, London: Routledge, 1996, 74.

⁴²¹ Thomas Cattoi, “Liturgy as Cosmic Transformation,” 417.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 417.

Mystagogy includes three parts: chapters 1-7 reflect on the “symbolism of the church,” including the actual church building;⁴²³ chapters 8-21 muse upon the Byzantine liturgical rite; and in the final three chapters, Maximus considers the methods by which the liturgy aids human movement toward God. In chapter one, Maximus restates what appears elsewhere in his work, that God brings forth creation from nothing and “in his Providence binds both intelligible and sensible beings to himself and to one another.”⁴²⁴ God’s desire for dissimilar parts of creation is their unification. Therefore, since God is the creator, sustainer, and designer of *teleological* purpose for all things, Maximus states of the disparate beings of creation, “he makes them converge in each other by the singular force of their relationship to him as origin.”⁴²⁵ Though informed by Denys, Louth contends that Maximus parts ways from him as well as Origen at this point for in Denys and Origen creation sustains “primordial circular movement,” but Maximus “breaks with this by placing rest, not at the beginning but at the end, as the goal.”⁴²⁶

For Maximus, though God unifies the differences of creation, they remain “unconfused” in terms of “identity of moment and existence.”⁴²⁷ Hans Urs von

⁴²³ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 74.

⁴²⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, Trans. George C. Berthold, New York: Paulist Press, 1985, 186.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 75.

⁴²⁷ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, Trans. George C. Berthold, New York: Paulist Press, 186.

Balthasar calls this thread of Maximus' work a "synthesis"⁴²⁸ or his "ability to read the whole of reality—the vastness of the cosmos and the depths of the human soul, the tragedy of the cosmos wounded by sin and the unfathomable design of divine providence—through the one, single prism of the Incarnation."⁴²⁹ The diversity of creation experiences unity by its divine source, origin, and purpose, yet in God they retain their uniqueness; thus, creation weaves a tapestry of grace. Maximus writes forcefully,

For just as the parts come from the whole, so do effects properly proceed and get known from the cause and hold their particularities still when understood with exclusive reference to the cause and, as was said, according to the singular force of their relationship to it. For being all in all, the God who transcends all in infinite measure will be seen only by those who are pure in understanding when the mind in contemplative recollection of the principles of beings will end up with god as cause, principle, and end of all, the creation and beginning of all things and eternal ground of the circuit of things.⁴³⁰

As important to Maximus as this relationship between parts and the whole is the one who properly contemplates it. The proper *theoria physike* leads the rational mind from contemplation of being to theology, and moreover will become a school for proper living within the world. Liturgy is one particular way of developing this Christian *theoria physike* that we pursue.

⁴²⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 65-73, 2003.

⁴²⁹ Thomas Cattoi, "Liturgy as Cosmic Transformation," 417. Cattoi cites, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 277-284, 2003.

⁴³⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, Trans. George C. Berthold, New York: Paulist Press, 186-187.

The Church: A Symbol of Creation

Maximus begins chapter two of the *Mystagogy* by describing the church as “a figure and image of the entire world composed of visible and invisible essences because like it, it contains both unity and diversity.”⁴³¹ The church’s edifice with its theological architecture displays a metaphor for the cosmos. Though at first it appears as though Maximus dichotomizes the world, distinguishing between spaces occupied by “priests and ministers”⁴³²—sanctuary—and the nave occupied by the congregation, Louth reminds readers, “this division is not a separation: it is a division within a unity...it is a matter of complementarity, not opposition.”⁴³³

“Still,” Maximus contends,

it is one in its basic reality without being divided into its parts by reason of the differences between them, but rather by their relationship to the unity it frees these parts from the difference arising from their names. It shows to each other that they are both the same thing, and reveals that one is to the other in turn what each one is for itself.⁴³⁴

The sanctuary becomes the nave by the principle of its sacrament and the nave becomes the sanctuary by its sacramental potency. Maximus, more fully expounding upon his metaphor in terms of creation, states that likewise “the entire world of beings produced by God in creation is divided into a spiritual world filled with intelligible and incorporeal essences and into this sensible and bodily world which is ingeniously woven together of many forms and natures.”⁴³⁵ It is as though Maximus sees creation’s sanctuary, all that is unseen, and nave is that

⁴³¹ Ibid., 188.

⁴³² Ibid.,

⁴³³ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 75-76.

⁴³⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, Trans. George C. Berthold, New York: Paulist Press, 188.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

which is seen, and the point is that these two must overlap under the one purpose of God, revealed ultimately in the same unity as the Chalcedonic interpretation of Christ.

According to Maximus, “there is but one world and it is not divided by its parts. On the contrary, it encloses the differences of the parts arising from their natural properties by their relationship to what is one and indivisible in itself.”⁴³⁶ The spiritual invades the sensible, and what is sensible is understood by the mind. Since creation contains both spiritual and sensible things, both a sanctuary and nave, these are not unrelated: they make sense of and complement one another. Similarly, the practices of the church can make sense of the spiritual meaning revealed in non-human creatures, simultaneously elevating the figures of the sensible world within its sacramental/liturgical practices. And environmentally speaking, when worshippers undertake these actions properly, they reveal prescriptive attitudes for humans concerning non-human realities. All material is seen as holy, and is therefore to be treated with the care of a sacrament.

In chapter four, Maximus sets out another metaphor of the church that clarifies how it is a microcosm of Theo-cosmic intention. In the same way that the church mirrors all of creation, yet with a narrower focus, the church also symbolizes humanity. The human soul is like a church’s sanctuary, and the human body is like the church’s nave, while the mind is like the church’s altar, according to

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 188-189.

Maximus.⁴³⁷ “By means of the nave, representing the body, it proposes moral wisdom.” And “by means of the sanctuary, representing the soul, it spiritually interprets natural contemplation, and by means of the mind of the divine altar it manifests mystical theology.”⁴³⁸ Behind Maximus’ words here is the anthropological notion presented in the previous chapter, namely that human beings are both a microcosm and mediator within the cosmos. “Conversely,” Maximus follows, “man is a mystical church, because through the nave which is his body he brightens by virtue the ascetic force or the soul by the observance of the commandments in moral wisdom.”⁴³⁹ Further, the soul, being a sanctuary, “conveys to God in natural contemplation through reason the principles of sense purely in spirit cut off from matter.”⁴⁴⁰

Thus far, Maximus has compared the church to the whole of creation, and to humanity. In chapter five of *Mystagogy*, he further compares the church to the human soul, “that God’s holy Church can be an image but also of the soul considered in itself by reason.”⁴⁴¹ Now if the soul is made up of intellectual and vital faculties and contemplation stirs and undergirds the intellect, then the “active power belongs to the vital faculty,”⁴⁴² writes Maximus. “The contemplative power” is called the mind, which is also in his metaphor likened to the altar, is,

the active power reason. The mind is the mover of the intellectual faculty whereas the reason provides for the vital faculty. The

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 189-190.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 190.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

former, that is, the mind, is and is called wisdom when it directs its proper movements altogether unswervingly toward God. In the same way the reason is and is called prudence when in uniting to the mind the activities of the vital faculty wisely governed by it in sensible direction, it shows that it is not different from it but bears the same divine image by virtue as does the mind.⁴⁴³

The soul synthesizes the contemplative and active powers. And each are present in the human in order to direct the human soul toward truth and goodness. Each aspect of the soul in its own way aids the journey toward God.

Truth does this when the divine seems to be revealed in its essence, for truth is something simple, unique, one, identical, indivisible, immutable, impassable, all-seeing, and wholly eternal. Goodness, on the other hand, reveals God when it manifests him in its activities: for the good is beneficent and provident and protective of everything that comes from it.⁴⁴⁴

Thus when the soul properly utilizes its components, it will be directed toward God and thus united to God. For God is the truth that the mind is naturally inclined to pursue through contemplation, knowledge, or moral pursuit. And all of the powers described are directed toward the “mystery accomplished on the divine altar” which, made by human hands as a “symbolic copy” is “given to us for our guidance toward the highest good.”⁴⁴⁵ The church is a symbol of God’s creation, and so too is the human soul; the meanings of each parallel and symbolize one another. Each reflects the intelligible and sensible realities of creation meant for their restful unity under the aegis of the creator. One may achieve this understanding through contemplating the cosmos or even the human soul. But because of these parallels, the church serves as a tremendously palpable sign of the same truths; after all, early letters to the church deemed it the “Body of

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 191.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

Christ,” a physical sign of Christ in the world, and Christ is “the one concrete universal; the key that unlocks all mysteries; the paradigm of deification; and finally, the one from whom the cosmos emerged and in whom the cosmos will finally find rest. In him, all difference is healed and finds its resolution,”⁴⁴⁶ according to Cattoi. In the church’s liturgy, the Eucharist is blessed and received at the altar, demonstrating quite a high and even “green” Christian practice of contemplating creation toward union with God. During this event, human, non-human, and divine realities unify and bring heaven and earth into unity, too.

From this point in the *Mystagogy*, Maximus proceeds to examine the cosmic meanings of various liturgical rites such as the entrance of holy synaxis, holy readings, the holy kiss, chants, passing the peace, and others. Maximus highlights, as Cattoi explains, “the intrinsic reciprocity...between the inner dynamics of the hypostatic union and the trajectory of the individual striving to attain deification.”⁴⁴⁷ For now however, I will narrow my reflections to Maximus’ teaching about the sacrament of the Eucharist, the Holy Communion. This is where the celebrant shares “with us the gifts of Christ’s love, the incarnate Word returns to his Kingdom to prepare a place for us.”⁴⁴⁸ According to Maximus, “by holy communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries we are given fellowship and identity with him by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed

⁴⁴⁶ Thomas Cattoi, “Liturgy as Cosmic Transformation,” 418.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 426.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 427.

worthy from man to become God.”⁴⁴⁹ Communion is the rite of union with God, and other believers, mediated through created, non-human realities that symbolize perfect union between what is seen and unseen. Maximus continues,

For we believe that in this present life we already have a share in these gifts of the Holy Spirit through the love that is in faith, and in the future age after we have kept the commandments to the best of our ability we believe that we shall have a share in them in very truth in their concrete reality according to the steadfast hope of our faith and the solid and unchangeable promise to which God has committed himself. Then we shall pass from the grace which is in faith to the grace of vision, when our God and Savior Jesus Christ will indeed transform us into himself by taking away from us the marks of corruption and will bestow on us the original mysteries which have been represented for us through sensible symbols here below.⁴⁵⁰

“There is a correlation,” in Maximus, “between the soul, the Church and the Eucharist,” according to Nicholas Loudovikos, but it is not to say that they are “identified with one each other.”⁴⁵¹ Loudovikos claims,

through the Eucharist, the soul becomes the Church, so that the actual man-made church building, with the various services celebrated in it and the Eucharist, which sums up and unites them all, forms an image of the Eucharistic restoration of the soul and its deification through grace, upon which it becomes ‘truly a church of God.’⁴⁵²

Holy communion, the central sacramental feature and social vision⁴⁵³ of God’s holy church is a proleptic feature of Christian hope, embodying future hopes in present circumstances. Cattoi notes that in the *Mystagogy*, Maximus “does not address the question of the nature of Christ’s presence in the Eucharistic species,

⁴⁴⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, Trans. George C. Berthold, New York: Paulist Press, 207.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 207-208.

⁴⁵¹ Nicholas Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology*, 30.

⁴⁵² Ibid. 30-31.

⁴⁵³ See: William Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

and in fact he bypasses the discussion of the anaphora altogether.”⁴⁵⁴ He muses that one can find what Maximus believes in *Myst.* 21, because there Maximus “envisages the reception of the sacrament as the lynchpin of the process of deification,”⁴⁵⁵ for it is in this rite where humanity unites with God through lifting up physical realities in honor of Christ as the high point of the liturgy.

Next, Maximus reminds his readers that the church is both a symbol of the invisible God and a “figure of both the spiritual and sensible world, with the sanctuary as symbol of the intelligible world and the nave as symbol of the world of sense.”⁴⁵⁶ The human likewise represents both—its body the nave, its soul the sanctuary—and is thus both contemplative and active in nature. Then, he walks through the Byzantine liturgy. “The first entrance of the holy synaxis which is celebrated in the church signifies in general the first appearance of Christ our God, and in particular the conversion of those who are being led by him and with him from unbelief to faith and from vice to virtue and also from ignorance to knowledge.”⁴⁵⁷ Then the holy readings are presented. These are morally instructive for the community. Furthermore, “it signifies the contemplative habits of those who have knowledge,”⁴⁵⁸ and they aid in seeing the world of sensible realities and spiritual principles rightly.

⁴⁵⁴ Thomas Cattoi, “Liturgy as Cosmic Transformation,” 432.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, Trans. George C. Berthold, New York: Paulist Press, 1985, 208.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

The next liturgical movement of the church is just as embodied—chant. These musical moments represent the delight of the worshipper’s soul. They are a respite from the workaday world and lead one into an emotive connection with the Divine. The presentation of the Gospel follows, which represents the fulfillment of all creation, and when a life bound to fleshly passions is left behind for communion with God. At the apex of contemplation, the Gospel invokes thought about God and creation at the point of their union, in Christ. Each subsequent step of this cosmic liturgy, whether the “descent of the bishop” or the “dismissal of the catechumens,” rehearses of the biblical witness as it proclaims the recapitulation of creation in Christ.

The doors are closed next in the liturgy,

and the entrance into the holy mysteries and the divine kiss and the recitation of the symbol of faith in general the passing away of sensible things and the appearance of spiritual realities and the new teaching of the divine mystery involving us and the future concord, unanimity, love, and identity of everyone with each other and with God, as well as the thanksgiving for the manner of our salvation.⁴⁵⁹

This is when persons leave the active stage behind for the contemplative stage because liturgically, there is no discernable division between the sensible and the spiritual—it is as if heaven has fully penetrated the sanctuary. As worshippers sing the *Trisagion*, they begin to sing like the angels themselves. The church practices in the present what will become fully true in the age to come, the time when all of heaven and earth will bend incorruptible knees in worship.

The blessed invocation of the great God and Father and the acclamation of the ‘One is holy’ and what follows and the

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

partaking of the holy and life-giving mysteries signify the adoption and union, as well as the familiarity and divine likeness and deification which will come about through the goodness of our God in every way on all the worthy, whereby God himself will be 'all in all' alike to those who are saved as a pattern of beauty resplendent as a cause in those who are resplendent along with him in grace by virtue and knowledge.⁴⁶⁰

Proper contemplation of both divine things and created things reveals a unity or a non-reciprocal relationship of dependence. For the human soul, proper contemplation yields wisdom and virtuous living, which is different than but engages bodily living since the human is a microcosm, a mixture of spiritual and sensible qualities. This synthesis of spiritual and sensible strikes the heart of the church and its liturgical rituals. It is designed so that there is a reminder through physical and embodied rituals and images, that God has given creation, ordered it, and has entered into it through Christ.

The Church as the Community of Creation

Maximus' reflections of the liturgy and church practices can apply to the environmental accusations levied against the church and Christian faith today. While there may be evidence to indict current, supposedly Christian ideas for ideologies and practices that profoundly harm the earth, Maximus' exposition of the church's liturgy provides much evidence to the contrary of the environmentalist claim that the Christian church and community perpetuate the problem. In fact, the church may well represent the answer to the problem of human conflict with non-humanity, for reasons collected from the reflections of Maximus's *Mystagogy*.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 210.

To identify the church as a symbol of creation links it inextricably to the non-human world. Like humanity, the church as a community, and even as a physical edifice, is a microcosm of all creation and represents the unity of diversity of identities, a synthesis of spiritual and physical realities. When guided by its truest liturgical imagination, the church sees no simple duality within creation. The church must see in itself a cosmic ecumenicity where all things are brought together toward God's appointed end of divine rest. It should be concluded of Maximus' contemplation of nature that his is one where all created things exist in a dynamism of reciprocity and ultimate unity.

Secondly, the church is given through the liturgy to share its way of contemplating the world. Through architecture or formal liturgy, the church discerns the fact that the spiritual and the physical are realities that overlap and make sense of one another. Although Maximus does not make use of this term, modern writers would call his vision of the unification of spiritual and physical realities as "enchanted." No matter where Maximus looks he contemplates this union. The human is an image of creation—filled with things seen and unseen. The church is an image of creation—filled with things seen and unseen. And the cosmos, heaven all the way down to the smallest bits of dust, is replete with the sensible while being penetrated by the spiritual, and all throughout are both the human and non-human caught up in the mystery. The church's liturgy provides a

communal act of affirming these realities, and to it the liturgy affirms that each individual being (*logoi*) of creation shares in the same God-ordained purpose.

While it draws heavily upon human formative practices like repetition and response, the church's liturgy is not merely rote. These rituals and habits offer sincere, radical, and proleptic hope for the world, thus they must shape human habits outside of the church's walls and gathering times. In this way, the liturgy is morally formative.⁴⁶¹ These practices are meant to guide individuals and communities in ways to navigate the paths of their created life within the rest of creation. The liturgy shows the church a mission—to faithfully mediate between God and the world, and to offer the world up to God like a priest. St. Paul would address this same mission when he calls the early church members to be “ministers of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18), and by reconciling the church must first realize the profound unity of all things as they are given by God, and at the same time attest to their disunity through human failing. By practicing the liturgy in the church, all things are reconciled palpably before a community. People are reconciled in the passing of peace, and creation is reconciled to God by the lifting up and calling blessing upon bread and wine, for example. The church is a sort of school for seeing the world this way, and the liturgy is the teacher. These ideas and practices accompany worshippers into the world as the church's social vision. Therefore, through becoming agents of reconciling all things to God, the church cannot see the world of nature as neutral, but as sacrament.

⁴⁶¹ See: James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.

In conclusion, the church was genuinely designed to be the community of and for all creation (including all matter living and non-living), for it is a community shaped by a particular liturgy that reconciles each and every created reality to God. When applied to today's environmental concerns, the church, whether it hears it rightly or not, has received the call to more than earth care or even sustainability (by its common connotation which often sees no better vision than today's state of the environment); the proper work of Christian community advances and multiplies the flourishing of all creation. Creation flourishes most when directed toward the reason it was created. In the case of traditional Christianity, whether in Irenaeus, Basil, Ambrose, Augustine, or Maximus the Confessor, the reason or end of creation toward is divine rest (or Sabbath) in God. That is precisely what the church is called to do through its liturgy. At least as environmentally cautious and conscientious as the greenest of ideals epitomized in the environmentalist heralds of the American 1960s, the Christian community of creation cultivates the added benefit of everlasting rest and delight with its deity. When practiced well and when un-polluted by rival ideas like those mentioned in previous chapters, like modern metaphysical flattening, nature-culture dualism, and blatant anthropocentrism, the church is poised to be the genuine community of and for creation.

Chapter 5 – Leisure: A Discipline for Proper Sight

-There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Norman Wirzba correctly asserts that the various visions of the non-human realm dictate behavior within and toward it. Further, he finds Maximus' way of seeing or contemplation to demand a cultural *ethos* and personal *askesis* that would be not only welcome to environmentalists but also faithful to classical Christian understanding of creation. As demonstrated in previous chapters, several writings by Maximus can provide a salve for modern environmental concerns, offering helpful dogmatic material for the church to reconsider its relationship to nature as well as its sacramental *cum* ethical role in overall earth health. Also, from Maximus' theology flows the helpful distinction between and potential synthesis of contemplative and practical thought. Acknowledging the power of these two modes when combined, this chapter will proceed to synthesize Maximus' work with that of the 20th century Western, Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper. Pieper's theories of leisure and festivity include practices that create space for contemplation to discern within creation, which Maximus the Confessor sees when he says that natural reflection is theological reflection. And while Lynn White Jr. lauded the Byzantine church for its expressions of faith that acknowledge the importance of non-humanity, we will find exemplified in Pieper

a vein in the Western tradition, since Pieper was greatly influenced by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, that is similarly invested in reflecting upon nature.

This exposition will begin by reflecting on the related notions of leisure and contemplation through the works of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, leading into an analysis of Pieper's faithful transmission of these concepts within a philosophy deeply affirmative of creation. Pieper develops theories about leisure and cultural festivity that begin with reception of creation in contemplation, which creates the sort of space required – as a discipline or holy habit – to develop a Christian *theoria physike* like the Confessor's. For without leisure as a habit, contemporary people scarcely have the time and patience to discover the “Logos at play” within creation.

Pieper's Influences: Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas

Aristotle viewed leisure as important for both the individual as well as the community. He called all work vulgar if it left “no leisure for the mind.”⁴⁶² Speaking of the role of music in education in his *Politics*, Aristotle notes that music is mostly studied for pleasure, “although those who originally assigned it a place in education did so because...nature itself seeks not only the right use of work but also the capacity to use leisure well.”⁴⁶³ The leisure referenced by Aristotle involves more than mere idleness or passivity; it had a purpose for the human mind. Leisure is just as necessary as work is in Aristotle's imagination; in

⁴⁶² Aristotle, *Politics: Books VII and VIII*, Trans. Richard Kraut, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 36.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 37.

fact, the very goal of work is leisure. Therefore, he argues that it is important for one to consider carefully the content of his leisurely hours, for this reveals a person's *telos*. "Definitely they should not be amusing themselves,"⁴⁶⁴ Aristotle claims of the true goal of leisure, for if they do, a person's *telos* would simply be amusement or distraction. Though, Aristotle is not antagonistic to amusement totally, for it is a time of relaxation from work, a time of pleasure, or as he says, a time of "loosening up."⁴⁶⁵ Rather, leisure is both a respite from work and time to think about and appreciate life. For Aristotle, this is exactly the role music plays in leisure: a delight that aids human reflection. He writes of music education, "for they assign it a place in the leisure time that they think befits free people,"⁴⁶⁶ for it is meant to bring delight to the soul. Most education, according to Aristotle, serves certain practical ends, but leisure and musical education are ends unto themselves. They are gifts to the human being to find more than a life of toil, for true delight is discovered in them. Aristotle considers work, leisure, and contemplation also in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here, he deems work an extrinsic good, because it is meant for some necessary end like housing and food procurement. Leisure, on the other hand, is intrinsically good:

Also happiness is thought to involve leisure; for we do business in order that we may have leisure, and carry on war in order that we may have peace. Now the practical virtues are exercised in politics or in warfare; but the pursuits of politics and war seem to be unleisured—those of war indeed entirely so, for no one desires to be at war for the sake of being at war, nor deliberately takes steps to cause a war: a man would be thought an utterly bloodthirsty character if he declared war on a friendly state for the sake of causing battles and massacres. But the activity of the politician

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 38.

also is unleisured, and aims at securing something beyond the mere participation in politics—positions of authority and honor, or, if the happiness of the politician himself and of his fellow-citizens, this happiness conceived as something distinct from political activity indeed we are clearly investigating it as so distinct.⁴⁶⁷

For Aristotle, leisure aids in happiness and blessedness for persons, for it is rest from work, and allows the soul room to reflect on the delights of life.

Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas notes in question 182 of the *Summa* that the contemplative life is “more excellent” than the active life.⁴⁶⁸ He offers eight reasons for this differentiation, but his sixth reason is explicitly about leisure. He praises the contemplative way “because the contemplative life consists in leisure and rest, according to Psalm 45:11 ‘Be still and see that I am God.’”⁴⁶⁹ In this way, he demonstrates that way of contemplation and leisure is patently faithful to the Bible’s teachings. While the active life of work is necessary for survival and flourishing, so too is time set apart for genuine leisure, which gives rise to genuine contemplation. As he notes from St. Augustine, “the love of truth seeks a holy leisure,”⁴⁷⁰ not to mention that the demands of charity require of the soul time for contemplation, research, study, and reflection, to allow the active life to be lived most properly. For Thomas, one needs time to reflect in order to live the active life virtuously.

⁴⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Trans. H. Rackham, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934, Online: Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0054%3Abooker+page%3D1177b%3Abooker+line%3D1> (Accessed 11 July 2018).

⁴⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Q 182, Art. 2, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981, 1938.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

Leisure as the Basis of Culture

Adding yet another voice to the arguments of Aristotle and Thomas, Josef Pieper asserts, “It is essential to being by reckoning with the fact that one of the foundations of Western culture is leisure.”⁴⁷¹ He cites the first chapter of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* to make such a bold claim. There, Aristotle writes about the bodies of thought that produced the arts and discoveries in mathematics: “They appeared,” Aristotle writes, “first in those places where man had leisure.”⁴⁷² Once again, the sort of leisure that Pieper describes in this exhortation is not idleness or passive receipt of entertainment. Considering etymology, Pieper claims, “for leisure in Greek is *skole*, and in Latin *scola*, the English ‘school.’”⁴⁷³ Therefore, the places of social education, public or private, institutions called schools are, at root of nomenclature, places of leisure. This appears counterintuitive, Johan Huizinga points out, because school “has now acquired precisely the opposite sense of systematic work and training, as civilization restricted the free disposal of the young man’s time more and more and herded larger and larger classes of the young to a daily life of severe application from childhood onwards.”⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷¹ Josef Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture: Including the Philosophical Act*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1963, 19.

⁴⁷² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960, 5.

⁴⁷³ Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 19.

⁴⁷⁴ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, New York: Roy Publishers, 1950, 148.

To arrive at a clearer sense of these terms, Pieper argues that word leisure indeed meant “school” in Greek antiquity. Ancient Hellenic society was highly civilized. And for Pieper it represents a sharp contrast to capitalist modernity, which is defined not by leisure, but by “total labor.”⁴⁷⁵ The “total labor” model of modernity is a “workaday” world, and proof of it is seen in contemporary phenomenon sometimes referred to as “small talk.” Quite often, upon first meeting a social acquaintance, one may ask, “What do you do?” or “What line of work are you in?” Today’s social vision imagines that humans live to work.

Pieper writes in *The Philosophical Act*,

more and more, at the present time, ‘common good’ and ‘common need’ are identified; and (what comes to the same thing) the world of work is becoming our entire world; it threatens to engulf us completely, and the demands of the world of work become greater and greater, till at last they make a ‘total claim upon the whole of human nature.’⁴⁷⁶

Societies of “total labor” not only diminish the human experience, they also limit the flourishing of creation: as a primary example, the modern world has become so enthralled with technical prowess that nature becomes nothing more than an enormous testing field for machines. The technique society, argues Jacques Ellul, prioritizes efficiency, not virtue; in fact, efficiency has become the chief virtue of modern *technocentric* “total labor” societies. He writes “when technique enters into every area of life,” as it has done in the modern world, “including the human, it ceases to be external to man and becomes his very substance. It is no longer face to face with man but is integrated with him, and it progressively absorbs

⁴⁷⁵ Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 20.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

him.”⁴⁷⁷ In the modern technological world, humans become more like their machines; for example, a human farmer would now identify more with tractors or implements than with the farm fields themselves, which are non-human creation.

Pieper envisions a world where man is not so much identified with his techniques, but with the world unencumbered. He would have it another way, an older way, where our society understands work as a means for leisure, as Aristotle taught.

Pieper notes that those living in a “total labor” milieu will find his ideal “immoral” and dangerous to the foundations of society.⁴⁷⁸ Citing Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, arguing that this notion is present there, Pieper translates the Greek literally, “the Greek says, ‘we are unleisurely’ — in order to have leisure.”⁴⁷⁹

Working for the sake of having work would make no sense to the Greek mind, according to Pieper. Work existed by necessity, but it produced time for leisure, which is another human necessity alongside food procurement and shelter.

Leisure frees the human mind for learning. It cultivates curiosity. As Simone Weil writes in *Gravity and Grace*, “we have to cure our faults by attention and not by will,”⁴⁸⁰ leisure makes room for the soul to develop this depth of attention.

Supporting these ideas both ancient and current, the educative notion of leisure bears out in contemporary scientific research about the human brain and learning. In *Homo Prospectus*, Seligman, Railton, Baumeister and Sripada consider “mind-wandering” and its effects on the human learning in contrast to active planning.

⁴⁷⁷ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, New York: Vintage Books, 1964, 6.

⁴⁷⁸ Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 20.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, London: Routledge, 2002, 116.

Playing a pivotal role in learning, the authors suggest that the wandering mind “contributes to building a highly general ‘map’ of the world that can later be queried for whatever specific purposes a person happens to have.”⁴⁸¹ Mind-wandering, the unhurried, spontaneous path of thought taking place when the mind is “at rest” or free, addresses open ended questions that will later aid in “action-directed questions”⁴⁸² when they become necessary in life. The researchers in *Homo Prospectus* find this course of inactive learning as necessary for human life, because humans have evolved to require times of mind-wandering to create the various connections in the mind.

Yet this conviction of the importance of “inactive” thought is nothing new. According to Pieper, “among other things, it might be pointed out in reply that the Christian and Western conception of the contemplative life is closely linked to the Aristotelian notion of leisure.”⁴⁸³ Leisure, like contemplation, can provide freedom and space to explore creation and a person’s place within it, to discern patterns of connection, to receive freshly the gift of the world and to explore its many fascinating modes of interrelating. And as Weil’s pointed out, environmentally speaking, one needs the time and attention as aid to retreat from the way of vice and toward environmental virtue.

⁴⁸¹ Martin E. Seligman, Peter Railton, Roy F. Baumeister, and Chandra Sripada, *Homo Prospectus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 105-106.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 105.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 21.

Pieper's analysis of the rise of "total labor" and the fall of leisure constitutes an all-out critique of contemporary society. In such a culture even intellectual work, where the life of the mind ought to be cultivated, reduces to rigor and production, to only "observation." "Observation is a tense activity," and often even an aggressive one,⁴⁸⁴ with goals meant for production of ideas that will benefit humanity. Such observation in a "total labor" society becomes instrumental and graceless. "To contemplate, on the other hand, to 'look' in this sense, means to open one's eyes receptively to whatever offers itself to one's vision, and the things seen enter into us, so to speak, without calling for any effort or strain on our part to possess them,"⁴⁸⁵ contrasts Pieper. Contemplation can lead to human possession of what is seen, but not in a proprietary way. Rather, this movement of possession takes shape in wonder through reception. Through grace, and not aggression, contemplation allows for the astonishment of what is real, and it finds delight or even amusement in the contemplated object.

Pieper asks, "Is there such a thing as pure 'intellectual contemplation'—to adopt the terminology of the schools?"⁴⁸⁶ The answer is different whether considering examples from antiquity or modernity, wherein Immanuel Kant is an example of the latter. For Kant, knowledge is discursive; ideas and objects must always be compared, examined, and probed for complete understanding. The modern mind allows little room for intuition. By contrast,

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

The Greeks—Aristotle no less than Plato—as well as the great medieval thinkers, held that not only physical, sensuous perception, but equally man’s spiritual and intellectual knowledge, included an element of pure, receptive contemplation, or as Heraclitus says, of ‘listening to the essence of things.’⁴⁸⁷

Certainly both sorts of knowledge acquisition are important. Pieper does not deny need for a certain type of rigorous observation in order to understand, for example, the migratory nature of aves. In the Middle Ages, both forms of knowledge acquisition were tied together, therefore, both *ratio* and *intellectus* were roughly equal to the life of the mind. As the above quotation by Heraclitus says, through “listening to things” we come very close to the Maximian notion that the one *Logos* is many *logoi*—that within each and every being of creation exists order, logic and rationality. Thinking in the mindset and culture of the Middle Ages required both *ratio* and *intellectus* forms of knowledge. During this timeframe, the insights of contemplation were perfectly acceptable, along with more formal modes of study. Whereas *intellectus* or contemplation is emphatically “not work”⁴⁸⁸ but rather arises effortlessly through leisure, *ratio* rounds out the process by contributing very difficult intellectual work. Roger Troisfontaines puts these two forms of learning differently, he writes, “science and technology,” the two we may put on the side of *ratio*, “are meant to apply to the *objective* world. No wonder their methods turn out to be unfitted for the study or expression of personal experiences,”⁴⁸⁹ and in the case of Troisfontaines, he is referring to the human experience of death. “Feelings,” he goes on, “are not dissected by the

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁸⁹ Roger Troisfontaines, *I Do Not Die*, New York: Desclee, 1963, 10.

surgeon's scalpel, nor do we examine our conscience by using a microscope."⁴⁹⁰

It is not as though *ratio* lacks explanatory power, it is simply that "we are acting in different fields. Why should we suppose that the objective sciences can be the proper, or the only tools for dealing with questions that in point of fact may not be objectified?"⁴⁹¹ Love, the mystery of death, friendship, and even inter-species relationships: the human also needs *intellectus* to make sense of each of these.

The science of *ratio* deals with "problems" according to Troisfontaines, but also one needs contemplation for "mysteries." Pieper continues:

If, as the philosophical tradition holds, man's spiritual knowledge is the fruit of *ratio* and *intellectus*; if the discursive element is fused with 'intellectual contemplation' and if moreover, knowledge in philosophy, which is directed upon the whole of being, is to preserve the element of contemplation, then it is not enough to describe some knowledge as work, for that would be to omit some essential things.⁴⁹²

Ratio, like laboratory study, and contemplation or *intellectus* knowledge, which is gained through intuition, are two sides of a learning coin, according to Pieper. But he is troubled by the Kantian view that anything worth while requires hard work and effort, which still infiltrates the modern West; by this standard, only *ratio* matters and *intellectus*, which arises outside of labor, sinks to much lower status. But if we assign ethical stature only to what follows from rigor, control, and determination, then we may invite attitudes and practices that neutralize nature. Pieper quotes the *Summa*: "the essence of virtue consists in the good rather than in the difficult. 'Not everything that is more difficult is necessarily more

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 29-30.

meritorious; it must be more difficult in such a way that it is at the same time good in a yet higher way.”⁴⁹³ Labor and toil do not always produce virtue by themselves; one must rather work hard in the right way in order to be virtuous. And work is not always required for a person to be virtuous; indeed, to simply exist in contemplation rightly may arouse virtue. As we have gleaned from Aquinas, contemplation or attentiveness will teach the person how to behave morally in the active life.

Although Pieper does not use these terms, his sense of contemplation or *intellectus*, is profoundly helpful in attaining a *theoria physike* quite on par with the gentleness of the *Arcadian* impulse proffered by Donald Worster, or what Pierre Hadot called the “orphic attitude” that emerges through poetic, philosophical, and subtle reflection.⁴⁹⁴ Pieper’s promotion of genuine leisure opposes a “Promethean attitude” or human domineering approaches to nature. He writes,

just as the highest form of virtue knows nothing of ‘difficulty,’ so too the highest form of knowledge comes to man like a gift—the sudden illumination, a stroke of genius, true contemplation; it comes effortlessly and without trouble. On one occasion St. Thomas speaks of contemplation and play in the same breath: ‘because of the leisure that goes with contemplation’ the divine wisdom itself, Holy Scripture says, is ‘always at play, playing through the whole world’ (Prov. 8.30f).

With leisure at the foundation of culture, more time and space open for proper cultivation of the mind through contemplation, play, and all other ventures that have no other purpose beyond themselves. It creates room for the reception of

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 155.

truth through sight, interaction, discerning interrelationships, and the astonishing fact that creation exists rather than not. Consider the concept of play as explicated by Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens*:

A certain play-factor was extremely active all through the cultural process and that it produces many of the fundamental forms of social life. The spirit of playful competition is, as a social impulse, older than culture itself and pervades all life like a veritable ferment. Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play. Wisdom and philosophy found expression in words and forms derived from religious contests...we have to conclude, therefore, that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come *from* play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises *in* and *as* play, and never leaves it.⁴⁹⁵

Play, apart from labor, is basic to human nature. Like other forms of leisure, play offers no checklists or goals, yet it has produced many cultural contributions to knowledge.

Aquinas describes divine wisdom as persistently “at play in the whole world,” which calls to mind Blowers’ explication of Maximus’ sense of the “Logos-at-play” within all of creation. Calling for humans to enter into “his game of hide and seek,”⁴⁹⁶ the one Christ invites humanity to see nature correctly, which includes seeing that (divinity) which wills and designs beyond nature, itself. In *Ambiguum* 71, Maximus invokes the notions of play and contemplation, as they each in their own way assist humanity with the ability to see the divine source of the nature of all things. Maximus begins with an interpretation of a phrase, “The sublime Word plays,” from, as he calls him, “the teacher,” St. Gregory:

⁴⁹⁵ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 173.

⁴⁹⁶ Paul Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 87.

We know that parents—if I may use examples we are familiar with to illustrate things that are above us—providing their children with opportunities to shake off their sluggishness, frequently condescend to their level, and thus we see them indulgently taking part in childish games, such as playing with nuts and knucklebones with them, or showing them many-colored flowers and colorfully dyed clothing to beguile their senses, thereby attracting their attention and filling them with amazement, for young children have no other kind of work or occupation. But eventually their parents send them to school, after which they converse with them in a more mature manner, and allow them use of their own things. Thus, perhaps the teacher is saying that God, who is superior to all, by leading us through the nature of visible creations, as if it were a kind of story, seeks to amaze us or attract our attention by the sight and knowledge of these things, as if we were no different than children, after which He directs us to contemplation of the more spiritual principles within these things, and finally leads us by way of theology up to the more mystical knowledge which in the initial stages is purified from all varied appearances and compounds, whether of form and quality or shape and quantity, found in either numerical multiplicity or bodily mass, and son on to the end of contemplation – and this is called ‘playing’ by the God-bearing Gregory, and ‘beguiling’ and ‘going out of Himself’ by the godly-minded Dionysios.⁴⁹⁷

Not only Maximus and Pieper, but also Thomas considers these intriguing and now-foreign tools of play and contemplation essential for proper viewing of the world. Both the Eastern and Western forms of the Christian tradition contain warnings against human dominance over nature and the implied worldview thereof, rather imagining Christian *theoria physike* to deem nature as a graced, revelatory reality, if one allows himself the time and freedom to simply see it, to take it in.

By contrast, some modern Western viewpoints place hard work atop virtue lists and consider anything effortless necessarily unmeritorious; As Pieper puts it,

⁴⁹⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, Vol. II, Ed. and Trans. Nicholas Constas, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014, 324-325.

these views refuse “to have anything as a gift.”⁴⁹⁸ Pieper distrusts much of the mindset predicated upon – in varying degrees – toil, industrialization, capitalism, and all features of what Weber has famously labeled, *The Protestant Work Ethic*.⁴⁹⁹ Perhaps America is the most conspicuous example of this mentality. As an American myself, I witness the Protestant-puritanical roots of American, work-obsessed society regularly. We affix a social badge of honor to those who are “busy” and regularly applaud the employee who works the longest hours with the least personal time. It has eroded even the unified goals of the university. Higher education, it seems, no longer entreats the mind to a higher level of thought so much as assists in attaining qualifications for employment. Pieper diagnosed this a half century before I would personally consider higher education through his distinguishing of the liberal arts and servile arts within the education system. The servile arts are utilitarian in focus, a means to an end, a cycle of production and consumption. Currently, these are the fields most recommended to study in higher education since jobs are plentiful in these fields and are more easily commoditized. The liberal arts on the other hand, “include all forms of human activity which are an end in themselves.”⁵⁰⁰ The disparagement of the liberal arts (“What are you going to do with that philosophy degree, be a barista?”), the commodification of education, and the prioritization of earning potential exemplifies Western culture’s slog further down the path toward “total labor” or

⁴⁹⁸ Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 36.

⁴⁹⁹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, Trans., Talcott Parsons, New York: Charles Scribner’s and Sons, 1930.

⁵⁰⁰ Pieper, *Leisure as The Basis of Culture*, 37-38.

the “workaday world” where leisure and content for leisurely contemplation is not so readily available, or at least valued.

Pieper questions, “Whether the world, defined as the world of work, is exhaustively defined; can man develop to the full as a functionary and a ‘worker’ and nothing else; can a full human existence be contained within an exclusively workaday existence?”⁵⁰¹ While a decidedly humanistic question and not an environmental one, we will see below it has great environmental implications, because it can only be answered by humans who have the time for leisure to properly see their place within a given reality, and who do not imagine that knowledge can only come about by toiling to split things apart. Now, Pieper answers his own question emphatically with a “No.”⁵⁰² Pieper theorizes through his observations of history, that “total labor” societies allow no room for philosophy, which is a technical term for contemplation. Furthermore, such societies do not prize work without explicitly economic purpose, like the liberal arts. The liberal arts promotes a kind of work that frees the human person from feeling like a cog in the wheel, and allows persons to understand the world through intuition, all the while birthing delight. Leisure is a feature of society for which Pieper praises the ancients and medievals. He cites Aquinas’ commentary on Proverbs to this end: “It is necessary for the perfection of human society that there should be men who devote their lives to contemplation,” and Pieper adds that it is “not only for the good of the individual who so devotes himself, but for

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 40.

the good of human society.”⁵⁰³ I would augment further still, it is good for creation when societies have people who devote time to leisure and contemplation, for that is the only way a holistic picture of God’s given world can emerge in the mind of a society.

Leisure and Acedia

Some may associate Pieper’s “life of leisure” with wealthier classes, or more crassly with the lazy who never lift a finger. To many, it evokes the concept of sloth, and rightly so. Sloth is famously noted as one of the “seven deadly sins,” although the term “sloth” is a poor medieval translation of the original term, *acedia*. *Acedia* may better be described as apathy, or as Pieper quotes Kierkegaard to say, “despairing to be oneself.”⁵⁰⁴ He advances, “metaphysically and theologically, the notion of *acedia* means that a man does not, in the last resort, give the consent of his will to his own being; that beneath the dynamic activity of his existence, he is still not at one with himself.”⁵⁰⁵ Though this is the deeper meaning of *acedia*, many still associate it with mere inactivity, or idleness. So it is tempting to answer the soul’s sickness of *acedia* with vigilant work and business, but Pieper resists: “No, the contrary of *acedia* is not the spirit of work in the sense of the work of every day, of earning one’s living; it is man’s happy and cheerful affirmation of his own being, his acquiescence in the world and in God—which is to say love.”⁵⁰⁶ To arrive at this affirmation and love requires an

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 44. Pieper is quoting Kierkegaard’s famous work *Sickness Unto Death*.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 45.

acknowledgement of one's indebtedness to God for her being. And she must simultaneously be aware of her reliance upon the rest of creation for her existence—plants and animals for food, sturdy wood for shelter, and so on. In short, to love or to affirm one's being, one must both affirm God and the being of all creation, so even though the antidote to *acedia* is focused on affirming human life, it is in no way done to the detriment of created non-human life, because one cannot affirm human life without also affirming the life of creation.

Proper leisure should not be tied to *acedia*, though there are contemporary examples of inactivity that society connotatively calls “leisure” that ought to rather be associated with *acedia*: binge-watching television, hours-long video-gaming sessions, and drug use, to name a few examples. But these examples are not genuine leisure as Pieper retrieves it from antiquity. They too represent a denial of one's being, a despairing escape from one's own self and embeddedness within creation. Leisure may be similar in that it is a mode of inactivity to a point, but it is dissimilar in that it is no way rooted in mindlessness and despair—it is grounded in a deep affirmation of being. Further,

Leisure, it must be clearly understood, is a mental and spiritual attitude—it is not simply the result of external factors, it is not the inevitable result of spare time, a holiday, a weekend or a vacation. It is, in the first place, an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul, and as such utterly contrary to the ideal of ‘worker.’⁵⁰⁷

Leisure is a gift of time blended with an open disposition to calm, silence, attentiveness, and “letting things happen.”⁵⁰⁸ The silence of leisure “means...that

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

the soul's power to 'answer' to the reality of the world is left undisturbed. For leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation."⁵⁰⁹ Pieper's concept of leisure as the basis of culture can cultivate impulse through contemplation by stripping away many projections and artificial barriers to gain a clearer picture of reality. Reading his work within the 21st century context, leisure also could serve as tonic for a culture sick with "total work," producing an unhealthy, cyclical pattern: use of natural resources, produce products, consume them, dispose and repeat *ad absurdum*. This cycle has clearly resulted in many environmental problems, but it also routinely separates humanity from non-humanity, thus enabling a dualistic delusion to develop. While most human experiences with non-humanity are mediated in some way, the current "total work" culture encourages observation of nature at increasing distances, within sterile environments, and in front of computer screens. Into this new world, Pieper calls us to revive a practice of leisure to reconnect culture once more with the rest of creation in far gentler ways. He writes,

Leisure is not the attitude of mind of those who actively intervene, but of those who are open to everything; not of those who grab and grab hold, but of those who leave the reins loose and who are free and easy themselves—almost like a man falling asleep, for one can only fall asleep by 'letting oneself go.'⁵¹⁰

Leisure and Festivity: Gratitude for Creation

In contrast to modern anthropocentrism, leisure allows persons to contemplate and learn about the world and their place within it, beyond the sort of study that

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 46-47.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 47.

requires dominance over non-human realities. Leisure may call one into a lake and to float on its waters whilst gazing at the sky. She will be open to her own being and open to the apprehension of all the being around her. Leisure is akin to *theoria* or contemplation. *Theoria* through Pieper's prescription of leisure as the root of a society is not only consistent with Maximus' many teachings about contemplation, but it also allows for the social space to reflect on the world and deduce the nature of reality as proclaimed by Maximus dogmatic material concerning creation. Pieper calls contemporary society to renew its emphasis on leisure and allow for space away from work for the purpose of reflection; there, we may receive our proper sight, in which creation is not distinct of humanity or existing for humanity. While incompatible with the "total labor" economy, this sight may still be accessible within our memories: the ability to receive the grace of all created realities, to see within all things evidence of God, to experience that "the one *Logos* is many *logoi*."

For Pieper, the culture that adopts leisure as its basis once more will also invite a renewed sense of celebration, play, or corporate festivity. "In leisure" he writes, "man too celebrates the end of his work by allowing his inner eye to dwell for a while upon the reality of the Creation. He looks and he affirms: it is good."⁵¹¹

Leisure is likened to contemplation, but it is not necessarily performed in solitude. It ends in an affirmation of creation that is best expressed in the festival, or communal celebration,⁵¹² although paradoxically he states that the festival occurs

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 49.

⁵¹² Ibid.

before leisure. We begin to see the symbiotic relationship among the various expressions of Pieper's concepts: "The festival is the origin of leisure, and the inward and ever-present meaning of leisure,"⁵¹³ writes Pieper. Festive, communal celebrating of the goodness of creation, which are practices that profoundly tie society to nature, are the reasons that leisure as a practice is required at all. The one thing that seems to bind all together, leisure to festivity and corporate celebration, is an unforced simplicity, an almost instinctual response, "because leisure is thus by its nature a celebration, it is more than effortless; it is the direct opposite of effort."⁵¹⁴

Further, in Pieper's book *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, he argues that true festivals cannot happen without first acknowledging divinity. "Secular as well as religious festivals have their roots in the rituals of worship. Otherwise, what arises is not a profane festival, but something quite artificial."⁵¹⁵ From the dawn of humanity, festivals marked joyous occasions of communal praise over the gratuity of life, of sunlight, of harvests, and of all other influences outside of humanity's direct control. This is of course true of other religious and pagan festivals, although the Christian festival falls nicely into his point. Regardless of the deity name or location, Pieper's primary point is that no true festival can take place where there is not already the acknowledgment of divine grace—and human contingency—lying at the foundations of that which is celebrated. Take for

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1963, 35.

example harvest festivals. The harvest, in pre-modern leisure societies⁵¹⁶ culminated in a festal joy of thanksgiving, for the yields represented all the provisions for winter survival. Religious civilizations regularly celebrated the harvest as a gift of grace, received in gratitude. Harvest festivity included large fires, banquets, and land blessings. Religiously speaking, these were acts of worship, for divinity was credited for the harvest. In the world of “total labor” a modernist dream has come true—society has severed its contingent bonds of authority, community, and divinity for food procurement. Governmental subsidies and industrial engineering have freed advanced societies from food scarcity with genetic modifications that increase yields to excess, making it possible to undervalue harvests. There is, in the modern, liberal (workaday) political space, no need to honor divinities for food harvests, nor the land itself. Politics are freed from natural bonds and their reliance upon fields of agriculture. Pieper’s point that for a true festival required is a sense of divinity is obvious here.

Harvest festivals are challenging to uphold in the contemporary “anti-leisure” society if the harvest or gratitude are no longer social necessities. This is especially true when all foods in season and out are readily procured at the market when the pantry is empty. Mealtime prayers are now quasi-pious acts of traditionalism, with sincere gratitude no longer required.⁵¹⁷ Without feeling the need of the gods, harvest festivals have become benign from a religious, cultural,

⁵¹⁶ See: Marshal Sahlins, “The Original Affluent Society,” Website: *primitivism.com*, <http://www.primitivism.com/original-affluent.htm> (Accessed 1 Jan. 2018).

⁵¹⁷ See the prayer offered in the film *Shenandoah*. Universal Studios, 1965, Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzzyZ1M-kVU> (Accessed 23 Aug. 2017).

and political point of view. Yet, they still occur in churchyards, street corners, and manicured agricultural spaces, each arousing little more than eco-tourism or “Kodak moments” for families with children,⁵¹⁸ nostalgia, or the delight of seasonal weather change. This political shift away from harvest festival importance reveals the diminishment of gratitude and modernism’s ideological flattening of agricultural hierarchies. For Pieper, festivity cannot happen in these flattened metaphysical modes—there is no celebration where there is no benefactor. Without divine focus, festivity reduces to entertainment or time off from the workaday world. This example reveals the desire of modernity—that humans no longer perceive the need of agrarian spaces, or that need is ideologically veiled beneath the layers of the state, the market, supermarkets, marketing, and human engineering. Yet this is also the reason why nationalistic holidays or festivals lose their power over time: they do not arouse a sense of total human contingency, and they become less than holy. Pieper cites the nationalistic festivals of 1790 France as an example of a national festival that patterns worship. The rituals of these festivals parodied an exodus-like freedom and even rebirth. A profound sense of contingency and divine destiny was wrapped up in these celebrations. But as time goes on, societies tend to forget the profound changes that these days are meant to celebrate. In America, for example, the nationalistic festival holidays “Memorial Day,” “Labor Day,” and even “Independence Day” are decreasingly observed in their traditional modes. Predominantly they serve society as a chance for a three-day weekend, half-off sales in the marketplace, and a time to cook food outdoors. Where there is no

⁵¹⁸ More contemporary culture would label these moments “instagramable.”

divinity to speak of, festivity lacks. Festivity only can occur, when there is a deep and profound acknowledgment of grace permeating the whole of reality.

There can be no festivity when man, imagining himself self-sufficient, refuses to recognize that Goodness of things which goes far beyond any conceivable utility; it is the Goodness of reality taken as a whole which validates all other particular goods and which man himself can never produce nor simply translate into social or individual 'welfare.' He truly receives it only when he accepts it as pure gift. The only fitting way to respond to such gift is: by praise of God in ritual worship. In short, it is the withholding of public worship that makes festivity wither at the root.⁵¹⁹

Today's "total labor" society deludes humanity into thinking itself as self-sufficient. Therefore, it also erodes the notion of the inherent goodness of things. And it certainly allows no time to play and discover the Logos at play within creation. It is a rigid society, and as such it has radicalized the fourth commandment to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy (Exodus 20.8).

Albert Borgmann agrees that communities of celebration are required to cure our society's individualism and lack of better communitarian features. He states that the "advanced contemporary culture" is too rigid, something required for a good society is for "festive celebration as the orienting center needs to be recovered."⁵²⁰

Borgmann explains that communal celebration, another term for festivity, is, in fact, a public affair. But "the possibilities of celebration in an advanced industrial society are delimited by technology. The shape of technology," he furthers, "assumes in this case is the public-private distinction."⁵²¹ He argues that

⁵¹⁹ Pieper, *In Tune with the World*, 71.

⁵²⁰ Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003, 102.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

modernity is when this distinction became most pronounced. According to Borgmann, “capitalism began to destroy the substance of the village community, and secularism began to supersede the cultural authority of religion and the feudal order.”⁵²² The decline of the public life where true celebration occurs began, he argues, in the nineteenth century, because that is when labor shifted away from the family toward businesses and corporations. This means that the public need for festivity and leisure declined too. “But the labor side was growing enormously and diverted attention from the loss of public leisure. As labor moved out of the family, it became a public affair, something that was done out in the open, requiring cooperation with strangers and conformity with impersonal rules.”⁵²³ This was of course, only heightened in the twentieth century, argues Borgmann. The public space was transformed yet again by the highway system, office buildings, and the public life of labor was instrumentalized in full. Communal ties became “seen as burdens,”⁵²⁴ and consumption was privatized. Borgmann summarizes, “if we are concerned to promote a more communal common order and if we agree that public celebration is at the heart of community, then we must recognize and take issue with modern technology and the public-private distinctions that both articulate and conceal it.”⁵²⁵ Because modernity’s public space is solely for production, not celebration, it conceals the basic human need to express gratitude for life. And like Pieper’s notion of festivity, Borgmann describes celebrations as the “joyful engagement with the physical presence and

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid., 39.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 46.

radiance of that thing,”⁵²⁶ the goodness, given-ness, and gratitude for the creation that surrounds human communities.

Pieper follows the Western tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas when considering the source of leisure: a wealth of existential riches that requires festivity. Both Aristotle and Aquinas, as already noted, suggest that leisure and the corporate festival can be a wonderful respite from one’s labors. In this way, leisure is restorative and may improve work to be done later. But Pieper, like Aristotle and Aquinas, also notes that leisure is not simply a “pick me up,” whether mentally or physically,⁵²⁷ because it maintains an element of self-fulfillment.

Leisure, like contemplation, is of a higher order than *vita activa* (although the active life is the proper human life in a more special sense). And order, in this sense, cannot be overturned or reversed. Thus, however true it may be that the man who says his nightly prayers sleeps the better it, nevertheless no one could say his nightly prayers with that in mind. In the same way, no one who looks to leisure simply to restore his working powers will ever discover the fruit of leisure; he will never know the quickening that follows, almost as though from some deep sleep.⁵²⁸

One of the gifts of a festive-leisure economy is the disposition it gives to the human soul, much like the Sabbath, because it is an effortless practice that calls to mind one’s situation within a good and given world of endless diversity amongst unity. “The point,” concludes Pieper, “is also that he should retain the faculty of grasping the world as a whole and realizing his full potentialities as an entity

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁵²⁷ Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 50.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

meant to reach Wholeness.”⁵²⁹ Reaching that wholeness ends in festivity, or put another way, it reaches the sacramental understanding of creatures and creation where each entity participates in divinity. Leisure does not elevate the human mind to its potential by the modern understanding of human capability. Modern humanity desires a sort of *theosis*, a self-sustaining advancement. This desire is a holdover from Christian teaching and its prior ubiquity in the middle ages, a residue within modernity’s intellectual, creative soul and quite ironically, its roots have persisted in a more secularized manner through the hopes of modern technology. Technology, it is thought, will elevate humanity from his present station of “time-boundedness” and contingency. While historic Christian hope was for humans to become deified in the ultimate work of Christ, the modern hopes to experience a simulacrum of deification through the works of human *techne*. This secular parody of Christian thought plays out through many contemporary artifacts such as artificial intelligence and agricultural engineering. Artificial intelligence ushers in the death of the human in post-humanist or trans-humanist eschatological hope. It aims to elevate the human beyond creatureliness by mitigating the biological decay and death of the body. This is modern hyper-Cartesianism in full, because it conceives of a rationality (*res cogitans*) that will live beyond the body’s (*res extensa*) death, in machines *via* computer programs. In agricultural engineering, the maximization of food production reduces human contingency upon land, rain, and seasonal cycles. In so doing, another human-creaturely reality is eclipsed: reliance upon other beings for survival. Both are

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

examples of modernity's *ontic* primacy of the individual, which seeks *aseity* over and against the contingency proper to the nature of humanity.

The ecological problems of this mindset unfold in turn: on the one hand, artificial intelligence promotes denial of the body (and from a Christian perspective the “body’s grace”), which is at least an ecological habitat for countless other organisms. Moreover, by disconnecting the human mind from its bodily reality, as if the body and mind could be so easily dichotomized, the individual person’s communal identity within a wider “primordial community”⁵³⁰ of creation is lost. And similarly, with agricultural engineering, we pay witness to the denial of land and its community in full. Now the loss of species has been noted in the previous chapters, and ecological realities are lost and will continue to be lost in order to maximize perceived human needs based on market-driven desires. So secular society has not lost the Christian tradition’s focus on deification as the apotheosis of humankind, it has rather enacted a sub-par parody through anti-creational inversion, where humanity achieves its fulfillment not through grace but through clever *technocentrism* that promises success in overcoming creaturely contingency. In response, Larry Rasmussen calls us to a more humble and sober reflection of human creaturliness predicated upon deep embeddedness in this world. “This primordial community is a home without an exit. The science, technology, economics, and politics of the industrial revolution never understood

⁵³⁰ Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, New York: Orbis Books, 1996, 326.

this,”⁵³¹ and so it trudges along for the sake of “progress,” perpetually breaking up the earth community along the way. And to be attentive to this reality, one needs time away from productive labors—in leisure, festivity, and celebration—to sense the primordial community.

Leisure: A Practice for Development of a Christian Theoria Physike

Beginning from the basic, every day practices, Pieper argues that leisure can reconnect one with the “superhuman, life-giving existential forces that refresh and renew us before we turn back to our daily work.”⁵³² Although Pieper does not speak of *theosis* in *Leisure as the Basis of Culture* or *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, the concepts and practices he suggests can lead one back into the true Christian way of conceiving the world, where all is given by God, and humans find their home as part of creation, with creation, and are to give thanks for creation as a sacramental sign of God’s love.

Over the course of this project, I have been arguing that the way one sees the world will inevitably instruct the way one lives within the world. This simple notion may be applied to whole societies just as much as to individuals. That there is an environmental crisis is not arguable, for many problems are reported nearly every day. The question raised by Christians and environmentalists alike asks, are Christian ways of seeing the world to blame for industrial society’s many abuses of creation? Specifically, Lynn White Jr.’s critique of Western Christianity

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 51.

represents the most influential and enduring of the environmentalist arguments against Christianity in this regard, especially the teachings rooted in the earliest writings of Christian scripture. Moving to the Christian perspective, chapter two analyzed several of the Christian Church Fathers from both the West and East and their teachings on the texts in question, and we determined that the church's mode of seeing creation was much different than its characterization by White, et al. Next, we explored the ideas of him whom many deem the most creation-affirming theologian, Maximus the Confessor, to understand and commend his *theoria physike* not only to the church, but as continued sign of Christianity's pro-environmental heritage. Finally, we have engaged a modern Christian thinker of the West, Josef Pieper. Pieper sits astride a strong velvet thread within Western Christian tradition, yet his philosophical theories of leisure and festivity, put forward a decade before Lynn White Jr. wrote his famous article, argue forcefully against the same social imaginary that White does. Like White, he stands opposed to a solitary workaday world, a world of "total labor," and a worldview where human knowledge and advancement come only by actively dominating nature. Pieper upholds a strong Western tradition that is at the same time Christian, within a world made sensible by leisure. The practices prized by Pieper do not condone domineering over nature, but rather effortlessly receiving it, so that creation in full may be received as a gift, and treated as such.

There is power in bringing Pieper's leisure practice into conversation with Maximus' way of seeing nature. Maximus sees a world given by God through

Christ, where divinity willfully plans each and every single creature's meaning. Therefore, each creature, whether human or non-human, living or non-living, testifies of God's creative energies. Further, God is at play in each and every reality, and the human soul gets to play along with the invitation to discern God's grace present in each thing. Or as Vigen Guroian has said, "the creation is good and beautiful because it gloriously reflects God's own Perfect Being."⁵³³ This God has furthermore called together a community that proclaims this sanctity of all life in its liturgy, prophetically recognizing and enacting God's presence in the world. This community, the church, maintains also characteristics of a priest in that it enacts God's intended *telos* for the cosmos in its festive liturgy by putting all things into union with God. The world is seen by Maximus as enchanted: everywhere is holy ground, and everything is meant for union with the divine.

To bring Maximus' dogmatic vision of creation into conversation with Pieper can provide stronger footing for the human who seeks to hold both a Christian worldview and a reverence for all creation. Today's society is economically driven by consumerism; therefore, work or production is seen as the highest good. In this world there is no room or patience for the contemplation Maximus exhorts. Today's Christian likely feels this conflict between the call of Christ and the incantations of culture. Pieper's challenge to subvert this society and to regain a shared priority for leisure can introduce proper *theoria physike*. Pieper's arguments for leisure wedded with play and festivity are a prophetic challenge to modern society. Whereas contemplation and leisure today are valued as luxuries

⁵³³ Vigen Guroian, *The Fragrance of God*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006, 77.

for those who have worked hard enough (by self-sustenance or by privilege) to afford them, Pieper knows a more profound truth about humanity: leisure and contemplation are so incredibly necessary for humans that they actually provide the foundation for good work—to speak in a modernist tone, leisure and festivity are basic human rights. When humanity makes time for genuine leisure, contemplation, festivity, or play, humanity will learn its place in the world and then discover the sorts of work that are virtuous, rather than those driven by vice, waste, and environmental harm.

Finally, as society has been turned upside down from the ancient to the modern workaday world, so too has the notion of leisure. The “total labor” world is exhausting, and it is so narrow in focus that contemporary people hardly know what all their work is for. This is at once dehumanizing and anti-creational. So much of contemporary work disconnects humanity from what is produced—people are cogs in machines, working under fluorescent lights inside of lifeless boxes. The value of work is obscure within modernity. Even agriculture brandishes a giant veil to sedate consumers and obfuscate their practices that prioritize commodity prices over an organism’s health. The veil prominently features the grocery store, which socially separates producer from consumer. If humans are disconnected from the sources of their work and consumption, it becomes all too easy to ignore the fate of non-human realities present in the system. In the “total labor” milieu, people are given work they rarely understand, to afford to consume what they rarely understand, then get up the next day and do

it all over again. Leisure under this cycle has become reduced to inactivity, laziness, and even *acedia*, for those who are loathe to discipline their leisure to reflect on the nature of reality, so busy are they with distractions of entertainment. All these obstacles may reduce all hope that one could come to a Christian *theoria physike*, which is environmentally helpful, but Pieper's proposed practices can provide that needed room for the soul to discover the depths of creation as Maximus laid out in his authorship.

Although misinformed in some of his allegations about Christianity, Lynn White Jr. is not totally wrong. Any society or group that raises its level of importance above another group or set will inevitably see it appropriate to exploit the subset. But White and those who have followed his interesting argument missed a critical detail: only when Christian ideas concerning human uniqueness blended with non-Christian ideas like warfare, overconsumption, and nature-culture dualism did despotic anthropocentrism rise to the fore. By reaching back to the sources of the Bible, ancient and medieval church teaching, and even some modern reflection upon these sources, we observe that Christianity sees the world where God is at play in every part of it, from rock to race. This view elevates creation and its study to the level of theology, for everywhere is holy ground. And if humanity permits the time away from work to contemplate nature's truths and develop a Christian *theoria physike*, it will see that humans are priests of creation, meant to order all life toward God. Christianity never promoted bald anthropocentrism, but rather *Christocentrism*, where we see God identifying

and transforming creation in full. The late theologian James Cone modeled God as the “God of the oppressed,”⁵³⁴ because God has made himself known in Christ, the greatest image of one who was oppressed, even by way of hanging upon a cross or, as he calls it, a “lynching tree.”⁵³⁵ If one cannot deduce in creation God’s intention through contemplation, or if one cannot permit oneself leisurely time to discern these truths, then one can at least note that creation is suffering under the oppression of the modernist, industrial, technological society. We each cry out for enough time and space to see that God is also the God of oppressed creation, and God identifies with non-human realities as they groan (Romans 8.22) for transfiguration and renewal. This is a call to the church as well as society in general to take the time to see that God is present in our environmental trouble, and therefore, it is a call to develop the eyes to see, so that we as a human race can put into place virtuous actions that do not simply sustain creation but cause it to flourish as God has intended. Over the course of the great tradition, whether East or West, Christianity has taught people to see creation as a gift of grace and thus good; therefore, it is a source of divine revelation. Christianity also asserts that humanity is part of and thus indebted to non-human creation for life, knowledge, and grace. Traditional Christian teaching calls humans to a priesthood, through the liturgy or in labor, where we elevate that which is from God, which is everything, unto to God and thus to anticipate cosmological *theosis*. This can happen if humanity sees the world properly, if we all take the time to play, to contemplate, to celebrate, and to experience the *Logos* at play in everything. And

⁵³⁴ See: James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997.

⁵³⁵ See: James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011.

perhaps when starting from this joyful and effortless practice, we can build a new culture fit to regain the health of our non-human environment.

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