

# Nine Christian Responses to the Ecological Crisis

*Michelle Rebidoux*

## Preview

For nearly five decades now, Lynn White Jr.'s influential article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis"<sup>1</sup> has been pointed to as a part of the bedrock of Christian discourse on the environment. Of course, an environmental movement was already taking shape long before the appearance of this article—largely in the form of conservationism (reaching back to the 1940s)<sup>2</sup> and in the growing body of knowledge about the complex functioning of ecosystems. White's article of 1967, however, is famous for defining the whole problem of the environment as a problem of "worldviews"—with the "Christian worldview," drifting as it did historically into an "anthropocentric instrumentalist" stance towards the environment, according to White's analysis, taking the lion's share of the blame.

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For nearly five decades now, Lynn White Jr.'s influential article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis"<sup>1</sup> has been pointed to as a part of the bedrock of Christian discourse on the environment. Of course, an environmental movement was already taking shape long before the appearance of this article—largely in the form of conservationism (reaching back to the 1940s)<sup>2</sup> and in the growing body of knowledge about the complex functioning of ecosystems. White's article of 1967, however, is famous for defining the whole problem of the environment as a problem of "worldviews"—with the "Christian worldview," drifting as it did historically into an "anthropocentric instrumentalist" stance towards the environment, according to White's analysis, taking the lion's share of the blame.

At this point, White's critique of Christianity is well-known—indeed, so well-known that it in no way needs further rehearsal here. In the literature of the field one encounters from time to time an expressed annoyance not only at the persistent appearance of such rehearsals, but even at the very mention of White's critique as a point of departure for discussion! Nevertheless, any attempt at a typology of Christian responses to the ecological crisis (as this paper is) would do well to make at least some reference to the cosmology, anthropology and value system—which any "worldview" involves—that were the targets of White's critique, for it is precisely in the interpretation of these that the variety of responses unfold themselves.

Cosmologically speaking, Christianity has traditionally promoted belief in an *ex nihilo* creation brought into existence by a unique God.

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155, No. 3767 (10 Mar. 1967), 1203-1207.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the work of forest conservation done by Aldo Leopold, as well as Walter Lowdermilk's work on soil erosion.

Early Christian fathers, White points out, were eager to avoid any association with pagan animism, fearing rivalry for that God, and thus they, little by little, “disenchanted” the world. Meanwhile, anthropologically speaking, Christian (and, of course, Jewish) scripture establishes the human being as created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27)—a creature who is, moreover, the high point of creation (created last, as the best)<sup>3</sup> and thus given dominion over other creatures (Genesis 1:28), whose purpose it is (or so it is assumed) to instrumentally serve the human.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the value system that developed out of this cosmology and anthropology has interpreted this human dominion, and non-human instrumentality for the human, as a form of progressive mastery of the human over “nature” on its way towards a utopian ideal. Of course, this development spanned several centuries and, according to White, also depended upon factors such as the harshness of the northern European climate, especially with regards to the way in which advancements in technology served to buttress an *ideology* of mastery.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is

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<sup>3</sup> That is, created, in some sense, as the *only* “enchanted” thing in the creation, because alone “rational soul-possessing”—the traditional interpretation of what it means to be created in the *imago dei*.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase “anthropocentric instrumentalism” in relation to White’s critique generally refers to the ontological and moral privileging of human beings who alone among creatures, on account of possessing rational souls, have an inherent value—whereas all other creatures have only an instrumental value, are not “ends in themselves,” but have their end in their service to human purpose.

<sup>5</sup> In brief, White points out that, in the early medieval period, the Latin *scientia*, a translation of the Greek *episteme*, intended an understanding of nature from out of which the mind and the will of God could be read. science was none other than a *natural* theology, or natural contemplation (what the Greeks called *theoria physike*), a contemplation of created beings in their essences as vestiges of God (the first step, one might say, in the rejection of animism), and it was indeed the occupation of the educated religious elite. Technology, on the other hand, from the Greek *techne*, was associated with craftsmanship and the building work of the lower classes; it had very little, if anything, to do with science. But all this began to change in the later medieval period of the Latin west. For one thing, with the rise in the twelfth century of European universities, and with the preeminence of the rigorous method of Scholasticism—a rigor which was valued almost for its own sake—*scientia* came to be viewed less as a matter of the contemplation of communications from God hidden deep within nature and more as a coming to *possess* in knowledge, indeed to *master*, the mind of God. At the same time, rapid advances in farming technology, paper making and more efficient sails, along with other chance climatic factors such as heat spells, spawned a steep rise in the population, the growth of an educated middle class and far-reaching colonial conquest. What one sees here, asserts White, is the slow and steady closing of the gap between the concepts of (and the social classes associated with) science and technology—until at last, in the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the two came to be, so to speak, *betrothed*. Nowhere is this betrothal, perhaps, better illustrated than with Francis

the Christian “worldview” that is at the heart of White’s critique.<sup>6</sup>

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Bacon—the “father of the modern scientific method”—and the utopian vision of his *The New Atlantis*, in which the elite rulers of society are scientists who not only *investigate* and *contemplate* nature but also *manipulate* it, forcing plants and even animals, for example, to grow larger and more fruit-bearing than their nature would otherwise allow. Such marks the explicit beginnings of the Western *ideology* of instrumentalist mastery, in the development of which, says White, Christianity, or at least Christian culture, played a significant part—not least because the very idea of a utopia accomplished through science and technology could not even have been possible without the traditional Judeo-Christian orientation towards the future Kingdom of God in the *eschaton*. The early Modern period, with the Enlightenment and its accompaniment of deism following close on, merely secularized that orientation, brought it back down to earth from its medieval place in the heavens, and placed the Kingdom of God in the hands and under the powerful mastery of human beings—with, of course, the final securing of this mastery, and therewith of the instrumentalist worldview, through the advantageous *marriage* of science and technology in the Industrial Revolution.

<sup>6</sup> Actually, it is not as if White was the first to make such an “anthropocentric instrumentalist” charge. A decade before White’s article, Joseph Sittler, in his “A Theology for Earth,” already denounced the reduction of “nature” to a resource for man’s needs. Sittler’s main concern in the article is to, on the one hand, reject the strong orthodox emphasis of his day on the “other-worldliness” of salvation which abandons the earth and in so doing devalues it (so that it might be reduced to a mere resource to serve man’s interim needs), while on the other, to safeguard core orthodox doctrines from liberalizing tendencies which might either 1) also reduce nature to a resource (for example, in the service of liberal individualism which subjectivizes religion while outwardly promoting capitalism) or 2) invoke a return to a more “pagan” understanding of the environment which appreciates the earth as filled with nature spirits or even as a Mother Goddess. To avoid all these stances—i.e. other-worldly orthodoxy, liberal individualism/subjectivism, and a return to “paganism”—Sittler promoted instead, inspired primarily by St. Francis of Assisi, the image of “nature” as “beloved sister,” who, alongside her brother “man”, also requires redemption. In this way he intended to both preserve core orthodox doctrines (of original sin and of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ) while revaluing the earth as having an inherent value, and indeed an eschatological destiny, of its own. See, Joseph Sittler, “A Theology for Earth,” *Christian Scholar* 37, No. 3 (Sep. 1954), 367-374. Why, then, was White’s article so pivotal and Sittler’s not? Perhaps for two reasons: 1) Sittler’s article was published before and White’s article after the appearance of Rachel Carson’s highly influential book of 1962, *Silent Spring*, which warned of the disastrous effects of the use of pesticides on the bird population. This book is today considered a classic that helped to launch the environmental movement in the 1960s; 2) Sittler’s article was published originally in a Christian journal and White’s article in a scientific one, so White’s article may have been received far more readily by people who were already involved in environmentalist science and associated conservationist activities, and who might also have been more “secular” in their outlook and thus more ready to accept White’s critique of Christianity (of course, themselves disregarding the fact that the very idea of a “secular” critique of “religion” is itself a product of the Modernist worldview which itself developed out of Christian culture). This second reason is further accentuated by the fact that while

The effect of White's article was that the environmental movement at that time, rooted firmly in the burgeoning fields of ecology and the environmental sciences, became increasingly secular and/or dramatically "anti-Christian" in tone. Actually, we can distinguish something of a range of responses to White unfolding in the decades following his article. First of all, there were those who, in some sense, may have accepted (aspects of) White's critique, but put the blame less on the Christian worldview *per se* than on the very idea of "worldviews" in general, religious or otherwise. These respondents emphasized a strongly "secular" and generally very practical orientation (of course, disregarding the fact that the very idea of a "secular" critique of "religion" or even of "worldviews" is itself a product of the Modernist worldview which itself developed from out of Christian culture). On the other hand, there were those who fully agreed with White in his critical assessment of Christianity, but who did not abandon the "worldviews" approach altogether. Rather, they took White's critique even further, questioning whether anything at all ecologically sound could be salvaged from the Christian tradition,<sup>7</sup> and looking hopefully, even overly *romanticizingly*, towards non-Judeo-Christian traditions as providing a more *authentic* vision of human relationship with the environment. New environmental philosophies began to develop which explicitly defined themselves not only in non-instrumentalist terms, but even in non-anthropocentric terms—such as Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess' more "biocentrically" focused ethic of "Deep Ecology", first articulated in the early 1970s (and itself significantly influenced by Buddhism).<sup>8</sup> Finally, there were many who

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White's critique of Christianity has been widely cited, his own promotion, along with Sittler, of Saint Francis' more ecologically-friendly orientation has not been.

<sup>7</sup> White himself, as mentioned above, along with Sittler, finds positive resources within Christianity for an alternate reading of the tradition through the spiritual vision of St. Francis of Assisi (who, not surprisingly, was declared by Pope John Paul II as the Patron Saint of Ecology in 1979), and also in the tradition of *theoria physike* (natural contemplation) which White acknowledges has been more faithfully preserved in the Orthodox east than in the Latin west. More will be said on the tradition of *theoria physike* below, in the context of the contemplative approach.

<sup>8</sup> Those who looked towards non-Judeo-Christian traditions generally contested not only the instrumentalism of Christian culture, as identified by White, but also the anthropocentric nature of the Judeo-Christian tradition in general. This is not to say that non-Judeo-Christian traditions (or even non-Abrahamic traditions) can't themselves be interpreted as having anthropocentric features. But what seems to be at issue for those who rejected the Abrahamic traditions' specific brand of anthropocentrism is their privileging of humans by way of the exclusive attribution to them of a rational soul. In religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism, all living creatures have souls (Buddhism speaks rather of the "Buddha-nature"), not just humans, and reincarnation of

simply rejected White's critique, or else acknowledged instrumentalism as an historical outgrowth from Christian *culture* (also shaped by modern secularist and/or individualist values) without, however, accepting it as a necessary expression of Christianity itself. Rather, these Christian scholars and environmentalists sought to defend, against White (or else they were inspired by White's own appreciation of Saint Francis), a more "eco-friendly" Christianity re-interpreted through the exploration of new (and old) resources at the tradition's heart. And thus was the discipline of "eco-theology" born, with the contention that religion, and more specifically Christianity, *could* make a positive contribution to the environmental movement.

Of course, over the past five decades, a wide range of Christian responses to the ecological crisis has unfolded, and what all (or most) of these responses share in common is their articulation of the problem as a problem of "worldview"—and, indeed, in this emphasis lies White's great influence on the development of the discourse. Or, more precisely—since the *cosmological* foundations of the Christian worldview were (for the most part) not *themselves* in question (namely, an *ex nihilo* creation, linear history progressing towards an *eschaton*, humans as enjoying a privileged status within that history, indeed *as* that history)—the problem rather has been articulated as one of *anthropology*. The ecological crisis, in other words, is at heart a crisis of *anthropological identity*: humankind has lost

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souls takes place across human, animal and even plant realms (indeed, in Jainism, even inanimate objects are often said to have souls). Another consideration is that some traditions, such as Hinduism, Sikhism and Daoism, teach what might be called "emanationist" cosmogonies. In these traditions, the universe is seen as a projection or emanation from out of the very substance of the divine Being itself. That Being might be an originary impersonal principle, such as with the Hindu "Brahman" or the Chinese "Dao," or a distinctly *personal* God as in Sikhism, according to which the universe is a manifestation of the *Name* of God. The world, indeed the universe as a whole, is thus inherently valuable, and to be honoured as *itself* divine in its essence. This was often contrasted approvingly with the wholly creaturely nature of a universe created *ex nihilo* (as one generally finds in the worldview of the three Abrahamic traditions, at least in their orthodox expressions), which, on account of its wholly creaturely nature, might not be given its due value, even reverence. But, of course, the bottom line here is how the tradition is to be interpreted and what features of its worldview are to be emphasized. Even emanationist cosmogonies, or traditions promoting the blurring of the ontological divide between humans, animals and plants, can pose challenges for environmentalism of their own kind; for example, Jainism and certain forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, with their ultimate goal of liberation from the cycle of reincarnation, are often pointed to as being inherently world-renouncing rather than world-valuing traditions. Nevertheless, such world-renunciation, too, has something significant to contribute to the ecological crisis, if only indirectly through its discouragement of consumerism and promotion of detachment from material desires.

all sense of its proper being and function within the created cosmological order. In what follows I will briefly discuss the range of Christian responses to this “eco-anthropological” crisis. Several of these responses will overlap, or be used in combination with one another, and some of them have slightly different expressions depending on which Christian denomination takes them up, as well as the extent to which they incorporate secular influences. Nevertheless, one can identify at least the following nine approaches.<sup>9</sup>

### The Stewardship Approach

One of the most prevalent responses to White in the 1970s and 80s was the promotion of what might be called “anthropocentric stewardship”. Such a stance generally preserves both the ontological privileging of humans (that is, as uniquely created in the image of God and in possession of a “rational soul”) and the cosmogony of *ex nihilo* creation. As many Christian (as well as Jewish and Muslim) writers on the environment point out, it is not the anthropocentrism itself which is the problem, environmentally speaking, only the attitude of *instrumentalism* which has, through what they consider to be an incorrect reading of scripture (especially of Genesis 1:28),<sup>10</sup> often accompanied anthropocentrism. The proper moral attitude, by contrast, would be one of “stewardship” (or “vice-regency”, as it is usually called in the Islamic tradition), in light of which humans *do* have moral obligations to the earth, precisely because they have moral obligations to *God* as stewards (or vice-regents) over the created realm—a realm that ultimately *belongs* to God. Moreover, in belonging to God, *all* creatures must be considered as having an inherent value of their own, not merely an instrumental value for humans. It is often pointed out, for example, that in the creation story in Genesis 1, God sees that his creation is “good” after each day of creation, even though humans are not created until the sixth day. *All* creatures are said to be reflections of God’s will

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that all of the following approaches are integrated, with varying emphases, into Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si’*. To that extent, those who have become seriously fatigued with encountering, in so many Christian articles on the environment for the past four and half decades, at least some reference to White’s critique, may (or may not) be pleased to consider that this encyclical is likely to rival White’s critique as a new major point of reference for Christian discourse on the environment in the upcoming years!

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:28: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

and being (though humans alone are created in his image). Indeed, God, in his personal relationality with the whole of creation, has made covenants with the earth and with non-human creatures (about which humans know little or nothing). God commands not only humans, but also birds and sea creatures to be fruitful and multiply. God's covenant with Noah is made also with all of the ark animals. In the prophetic books, God promises peace in the messianic age not only to humans, but also to animals and plants. Numerous passages in the Hebrew scriptures (Christian Old Testament) speak of the earth (mountains, hills, valleys, fields, trees, forests, rivers, seas) as praising God and rejoicing in God's word. In the New Testament, the whole of creation is redeemed in Christ. In short, God loves and wills the flourishing of his creation *in toto*. We are, therefore, called as stewards not to the privilege of dominion as a form of *mastery* over the creation, but rather as caretakers for it, an obligation we owe first and foremostly to God. Indeed, it has often been pointed out that the Hebrew word usually translated as "dominion" in Genesis 1:28 has the connotation of a responsibility to "make flourish."<sup>11</sup> Again, the Old Testament is filled with commandments requiring care for the land, protection of trees, and humane treatment of animals. Leviticus warns that the land will vomit the people for abomination; and the warning of the prophetic tradition is that humans will lose their dominion if they are unworthy stewards.<sup>12</sup>

The ecological crisis, then, from this perspective, involves a rejection, or an *ignorance*, of the anthropology defined by stewardship. It involves human usurpation and exploitation of the created realm, a form of human self-idolatry, stemming from an improper interpretation of "dominion" as domination/mastery/ mere instrumentality of non-humans—an expression of human disordered, sinful behaviour. Our good

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, in *The New Atlantis*, Bacon also depicts his scientific elite as "making flourish" by forcing plants and animals to grow larger and more fruit-bearing than their nature would otherwise allow. But that is just the point. A faithful steward would not force a creature to "flourish" in ways that are against its God-given nature, but rather brings forth the fullness and perfection of that nature—whereas Bacon's intent regarding nature is not stewardship (not husbandry), but *mastery*. It should be pointed out that the scientific elite of his utopia not only force plants and animals to "flourish" (against their nature), but also, in altogether different expressions of this mastery (or perhaps one should say in altogether *indifferent* expressions), force them to become distorted, to become sterile, to prematurely die.

<sup>12</sup> See, Aloys Hüttermann, *The Ecological Message of the Torah: Knowledge, Concepts, and Laws Which Made Survival in a Land of "Milk and Honey" Possible* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999); Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Ecology in a Biblical Perspective," in *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, ed. Richard C. Foltz (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003).

stewardship is thus a model for true Christian discipleship. It is a faithful, obedient response to God’s command, and thus a model for conversion away from sin in imitation of Christ’s obedience. It is a witness to God’s will for His creation and for the human place within it—a place not *above* creation or separated from it, but interdependent with all creatures (despite human distinctiveness). It involves, further, human participation with God in bringing about the Kingdom on Earth, a model for sharing in the redemptive work of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Natural Law Approach**

Among Christian denominations, the stewardship approach is most commonly promoted within Protestant and especially evangelical orientations, with a strong emphasis placed upon stewardship as a model for true discipleship. A specifically Catholic version of stewardship, on the other hand, appeals more to the medieval (Thomistic) natural law tradition, which sees the created order as hierarchically arranged with humans at the top (under only God and the angels), and animals, vegetables, and minerals being ordered under them. In this scheme, which is dynamic rather than static, all creatures tend towards their supernatural fulfillment in God. The human acts as a co-mediator (with Christ) of that fulfillment in that lower creatures are led to their supernatural fulfillment in God through their service to the human within the natural order. In other words, not only traditional anthropocentrism is preserved, but even instrumentalism. Yet this does not imply that the ultimate purpose of lower creatures is in their natural instrumental service to the human, but that they achieve their supernatural purpose in God *through* their natural service to the human. The inherent value of creatures, therefore, which lies precisely in their supernatural purpose, ultimately takes precedence over

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<sup>13</sup> Note that this is a specifically Christian way of articulating stewardship. Jewish promoters of the stewardship approach will equally commend participation with God in bringing about the Kingdom on earth (an idea captured in the expression *tikkun olam*, “healing the world” or “redeeming the world”), but obviously will do so without reference to Christ. The Islamic tradition, by contrast, holds the Kingdom to be wholly other-worldly (as did medieval Christianity, though in late Modernity, one might say, Christianity has, by and large, taken again a “this-worldly” turn), with the earth being only a temporary dwelling place (indeed, a testing place) for God’s creatures. To that extent, Islamic environmentalists who promote vice-regency will not stress participation with God in bringing about the Kingdom; rather, they will primarily stress obedience— i.e. *islam*, “submission” to God’s will—and good care-taking of what belongs to God, with our behaviour in this regard being a test of our faithfulness.

their instrumental value—so that humans do have an obligation to God to be stewards of these creatures’ journey towards their end, guiding them in their natural service to us towards their fulfillment in God. Furthermore, human stewardship over lower creatures requires an understanding of these creatures’ nature, intelligent observance of them, and love for them. Also, our reliance upon the service of lower creatures marks our interdependence within the natural order of creation. Such understanding and love, interdependence, and constant remembrance of the supernatural end of all things in God, ideally holds in check any possible improper instrumentality to which the human may be tempted. The following passage from Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* (§83) illustrates this idea perfectly:

The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things. Here we can add yet another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures. The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.

Of course, this approach does little to direct us in concrete action in the world. It is also rather vague, if not obscure, as to what the supernatural fulfillment of, say, a tree, or an ocean would be. But that is just the point! The approach is largely about the cultivation of a spiritual vision, about envisioning the world as at all times dynamically in movement towards God, and in participating in that movement—not just passively moving forward with it, but actively guiding all things towards their ultimate destiny. The idea is that, if the vision is cultivated, an understanding of what such a destiny would entail and look like, and what concrete actions one should take, will unfold naturally from that.

### **The Eco-Feminist Approach**

Another approach developing quickly after the publication of White’s

article is the eco-feminist approach. In fact, there are two distinct yet interconnected expressions of this approach, each developing under the influence of distinct yet interconnected concerns of feminism generally. The focus of the first expression is (a critique of) Christian orthodoxy's<sup>14</sup> centuries-long, and largely Greek-inspired, tradition of denigration of the body and of the earthly and/or material world in general, with women being associated with this realm, while men have been associated with reason (and/or spirit) and its own attendant and much superior realm. At times, this "superiority" of the latter realm has been depicted in strong ontological terms; at other times it is more a matter of the material realm being rather a calamitously disordered, "fallen" realm, corrupted and distorted by sin—even to the point of the (near total) loss of the goodness of its "natural" (i.e. created) being.<sup>15</sup> Add to this outlook the doctrinal articulation of God as a Trinity of three divine Persons referred to in masculine terms,<sup>16</sup> and over the centuries one can track a series of emerging conceptual and value-laden dichotomies typically identified by

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<sup>14</sup> I distinguish here between "orthodoxy" and "Orthodoxy," the latter referring to that branch of Christian Churches generally referred to as "Eastern Orthodox." By contrast, "orthodoxy" means, simply, "true praise" or "true opinion," and refers to that collection of core beliefs or doctrines which are widely taken to be definitive of the Christian faith (such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the (atoning) Crucifixion, the Resurrection, etc.).

<sup>15</sup> The Greek influence here comes more from Plato and/or Neo-Platonism as filtered primarily, in Latin Christianity, through Augustine; whereas the Greek influence in the Thomistic natural law tradition, which is far less denigrating of the material world, comes from Aristotle. Of course, for Augustine, the material world can never *wholly* lose its natural goodness, since his understanding of evil is that it does not have independent being, but is only a deprivation of the "Good." To that extent, for Augustine, the "Good" and "Being" are inseparable, so that a thing that had no good in it could not exist (which is also a key idea from the Platonic tradition). But it should also be pointed out that the early Christian Fathers had not only Greek but also Jewish influences, as well as the historical/New Testament/Pauline tradition of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, to absorb. The redemption of the material world (or at least of the "fallen" body) was a core pillar of Christian orthodoxy well before Augustine's day. Nevertheless, for Augustine, on account of its inheritance of the structural corruption caused by the Original Sin, the material world (or at least the body, to which the will is bound) could be redeemed *only* through the sacrifice of Christ, and was not capable of contributing anything of its own (at least before baptism) to that redemption—a point so strongly emphasized in the Reformation (especially through Luther's doctrine of "imputed righteousness") that it became very much a part of the Protestant orthodoxy of Modernity to insist that the material world, and anything associated with it, was so fallen and disordered that it contributed nothing at all, at any time, to one's salvation.

<sup>16</sup> It is true that the Spirit has sometimes (for example, in the Wisdom tradition) been referred to in feminine terms, but such references have generally been rejected or downplayed—or at best been allowed as a (largely disingenuous) concession made to feminists who have tried to retrieve them—within modern orthodoxy.

feminist writers as structurally definitive of patriarchy: heaven/earth, spirit/matter, spirit/body, soul/body,<sup>17</sup> mind/body, intellect/body, reason/body, reason/emotion, reason/feeling, spirit/nature, culture/nature. In each of these pairs, the masculine (or men) has been associated with the first, and the feminine (or women) with the second (and subordinate) term.<sup>18</sup>

This first expression of the Christian eco-feminist approach, then, has focused, critically, on deconstructing these dichotomies of patriarchy and, constructively, on retrieving and promoting alternative traditional images and valuations of God and the natural world which have been side-lined or suppressed over the centuries as subversive to patriarchy. Among constructive anthropomorphic images of God, for example, one finds such roles as Lover, Friend and Companion replacing the long dominant images of God as Father, Ruler and Lord. Among ontological images, anything emphasizing God's creative power in more "earthly" or "immanent" (or even more "Motherly") terms will be stressed, such as God (or the Spirit, or Jesus) as Holy Wisdom, or God as the Source or Wellspring of all being. God's creative power also gets tied to "the Deep" (Genesis 1:2), interpreted as a dimension of transcendence *within* immanence, an ultimate source of life and renewal of life sustaining the cosmos.<sup>19</sup> Another image is the world as the "Body of God"—not so much a "pantheist," or even a "panentheist-emanationist," image of God (both of

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<sup>17</sup> It is true that often the soul has been referred to in feminine terms as well; but almost just as often the "soul," at least when it is considered to be in a purified state, has been conceptually blurred with the "spirit," or else depicted as the perfectly submissive bride of Christ, such that its real strength and value still end up coming from a masculine source. Whereas the soul in its unpurified state ends up being still so connected with the body and its distorted desires that the same denigration of the feminine, which has consistently been associated with the body and depicted as either weak or in rebellion against its masculine ruler, applies here as well.

<sup>18</sup> It is worth here considering Francis Bacon's depiction of the feminine and nature (the two concepts being blurred) as having three states: 1) fallen; 2) perversely fruitful (if left to follow its own inclinations); and, 3) redeemed and truly fruitful (if forcefully mastered by masculine reason and science). See Carolyn Merchant, "Dominion Over Nature," in *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, ed. Richard C. Foltz (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> A pioneer among feminist eco-theologians who take this route is Rosemary Radford Ruether, who argues that the strongly patriarchal colouring of Christian orthodoxy reflects men's fear of mortality and hatred of women and nature for their life-giving power. Of course, it should be pointed out that Radford Ruether goes so far in her critique of Christian orthodoxy as to reject even the traditional doctrine of immortality.

which would be decidedly unorthodox),<sup>20</sup> but an emphasis on the whole of creation as redeemed by being assumed into the Mystical Body of Christ<sup>21</sup> (an emphasis to be discussed further below, in the context of the sacramental approach).

The second expression of eco-feminism is more directly influenced by “third wave” feminism, burgeoning in the early 1980s, and might also be called “post-colonial” feminism, being initiated and carried out largely by women of non-European descent in critical dialogue with feminism’s first two waves. Though differing in their emphases (in their intellectual and in their socio-political concerns), the two earlier waves were dominated by the voices of well-educated and for the most part middle class women of European descent in the developed world.<sup>22</sup> Their main

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<sup>20</sup> “Pantheism,” meaning literally “all (is) God,” holds the manifest universe to be divine and, further, to be the whole of Being. “Pantheism,” meaning literally “all (is) in God,” by contrast, has two versions, both rejecting the confining of the divine to the manifest universe. One version can be characterized as “emanationist,” which holds the universe to be a manifest emanation from out of the very substance of the divine, while yet allowing for a transcendent dimension of the divine beyond the universe which does not manifest itself. To that extent, one might say that while the universe is divine, its totality does not exhaust the divine. One finds emanationist pantheisms, for example, in traditions such as Hinduism, Daoism and Sikhism (see footnote 8 above), in some expressions of Neo-Platonism, and indeed even in some mystical or esoteric expressions of the Abrahamic traditions (though such expressions have never been accepted as orthodoxy). The other version of pantheism is non-emanationist (and is closer to Abrahamic orthodoxy) in that God creates a wholly *creaturely* universe *ex nihilo* (rather than *ex deo*, from out of his own being), but accomplishes the sustenance of that universe through its “participation” in his being. Such “participation” should be understood as an ontological principle (whatever that might entail), rather than as a spatio-physical metaphor; yet often enough such metaphors do get employed, envisioning creation as “floating”, so to speak, within the “infinite ocean” of God, “in whom we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

<sup>21</sup> This idea is promoted by Sallie McFague, another pioneer eco-feminist theologian. Of course, precedence for this image is to be found in Romans 8:20–22: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but because of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until the present time....” Precedence is also to be found in the eastern Christian emphasis on the assumption of the entire creation into a state of union with the divine in the Incarnation. Christ didn’t just assume (and therewith sanctify) *human* nature, but he assumed *created nature in general* to himself— an argument put forward by John of Damascus in the eighth century, in the midst of the iconoclast controversy, to support the continued depiction of Christ in the materials of paint and wood (i.e. in icons). Today, this argument is used often by Eastern Orthodox theologians in an ecological context (though generally without a feminist tone).

<sup>22</sup> The first two waves of feminism are traditionally defined as follows. The first wave spans the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century and is rooted in the

concern was the oppression which women experienced along basic lines of gender<sup>23</sup> in their societies, lines generally held in place by the cluster of implicit and patriarchally-invested relationships as listed above. Third wave feminists, by contrast, highlight a vastly more complex web of interconnecting, global power relations, all constituting together a structure articulated as Western patriarchy, and oppressing along lines of which first and second wave feminists have generally been (often without realizing it) on the privileged side: race lines, class lines, lines of west and east, north and south, and a host of others.<sup>24</sup> Thus eco-feminism within

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Enlightenment. It largely rejected Romantic gender essentialism in favour of rationalist human essentialism, focusing on the cultivation of reason and moral autonomy for women. Its main socio-political concerns were women's education and property rights, and women's suffrage. Second wave feminism, an expression of the women's liberation movement of the 1950s–70s, is a bit more diverse. Socio-politically it focused on the issues of women's (in)equality in the workplace, sexuality and reproductive rights for women, and women's right to divorce. It was also heavily inspired by the existentialist and "social deconstructivist" feminism of Simone de Beauvoir and her now classic book *The Second Sex* (1949), in which she distinguishes the concept of biological sex from "gender," a socially constructed identity and sphere of activity which has largely been constructed as an "essence" (for women as well as for men) by men. Of course, as an existentialist, for de Beauvoir, no such "essences" exist *a priori*—not even the rationalist human essence of the Enlightenment and first wave feminism. Rather, we must *create* our essences in a radical act of existential freedom. De Beauvoir's point is that women's "essences" have been created for them by men and foisted upon them without the realization that such "essences" are simply that: created social constructions. It is incumbent upon women (as well as upon men!), therefore, to reject these essences created for them by men and to create their own. By contrast, another, somewhat later expression of second wave feminism, known as "gender essentialist" or "radical" feminism, has quite the opposite emphasis. Here, the concepts of "sex" and "gender" are *re*-conflated, and the "feminine essence," along with its attendant virtues, is celebrated— and at times even promoted as morally superior to the "masculine essence," with the suggestion that it is the feminine (i.e. women) which should morally govern society. Mary Daly is probably the most widely recognized example of such radical feminism.

<sup>23</sup> I am here setting aside, for the sake of brevity in this paragraph, the whole problem of conflating the concept of "gender" with "sex." See the footnote above and the footnote following for more discussion of this issue in the context of second and third wave feminism.

<sup>24</sup> The north/south dichotomy refers to developed versus developing parts of the world. But even within developing countries, a further dichotomy arises—namely, between developing and the "non-developing," as indigenous peoples are often negatively labeled, the global network of power being fueled as it is by the goal of "economic development" or "progress." Furthermore, in the envisioning of this goal, the human ideal established for all persons is to be autonomous individuals (consumers) participating in and contributing to the global market. Anyone not effectively able to do this is deemed burdensome to the system. So, for example, the very elderly, the sick, the poor are marginalized, as well as the disabled (unless they have "conquered" their disability to the

this vein is often called “eco-womanism” to distinguish itself from earlier, more strictly gender-focused expressions of feminism. It also goes hand-in-hand with the early-developing “eco-justice” movement, which has pointed out that the brunt of environmental pollution and degradation has been shouldered, both in developing and in rich, developed countries, by poor persons of colour.<sup>25</sup> The main critical (i.e. deconstructive) contention of this expression of eco-feminism is that the ecological crisis is itself only one dimension of a comprehensive network of power relations which requires dismantling; meanwhile, its constructive side often involves an emphasis on communitarian social efforts and grassroots liberationist movements. Of course, many eco-feminists who take this approach do not identify themselves as Christian, nor would they hold this approach to be a specifically Christian response—though few, if any, would deny the fact that the very structural network of power relations here identified as Western patriarchy has developed over the centuries (and especially since the Industrial Revolution) out of the Judeo-Christian cultural west. Nevertheless, the idea of “eco-justice” does have its own specifically Christian articulation, also focused upon the interconnectedness of relations of power globally and movements of “liberative justice.” This liberative justice approach—also called the “prophetic justice” approach—will be given its own treatment in a section below.

### **The Contemplative Wisdom Approach**

Another approach—which has been preserved more faithfully in the

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point of achieving a relative measure of “able-bodiedness” within the system). Human interdependency is considered a weakness within the system rather than as the full flowering of human community. Interdependency with non-human creatures, with nature, is distrusted as “primitive.” Also, since the whole global system of Western patriarchy still has its roots in the early Christian dichotomies of spirit/matter, mind/body, etc.—all in some way connected to the dichotomy of male/female—anyone “deviating” from the heterosexual norm is marginalized. Or, even if some same-sex (labeled “homosexual”) relationships within the system are, little by little, starting to be more widely accepted, much oppression (and misunderstanding) is still experienced by those whom neither the “heterosexual” nor the “homosexual” label truly fits (for example, bisexual or transgendered persons).

<sup>25</sup> In developing nations, millions of people suffer from the exploitation of their labor and their region’s resources by huge multinational corporations given access to such resources by the profiting elite of those nations. Meanwhile, in developed nations, the neighborhoods of the poor and ethnic minorities are often targeted as sites of dangerous waste disposal and other environmentally harmful industrial operations and so-called “development” projects.

Christian east than in the Latin west, and is today most prominently articulated among Eastern Orthodox eco-theologians<sup>26</sup>—appeals to the early medieval understanding of science as natural theology or natural contemplation (what the Greeks called *theoria physike*). The Latin Fathers promoted contemplation of *vestigia Dei*—of created beings as vestiges of God, or traces of the Creator within His creation. The Greek Fathers promoted contemplation of the *logoi*—of the individual essences within created beings which all participate in the being of the divine *Logos*. Of course, the primary source for this tradition is Plato’s theory of the eternal forms—that is, the universal forms in the intelligible world, or in the Mind of God, according to which all things have their individual being, as particular instances of the forms. Another source of influence was the Stoics’ concept of the *Spermatikon Logos*, the divine, immanent ordering principle in the world; the individual essences hidden within things which participate in that order are the *spermatikoi logoi*. There is also the scriptural Wisdom tradition, which sees the divine Wisdom’s trace in the world in the sweet ordering of all things (Wisdom of Solomon 8:1).<sup>27</sup>

The basic goal of the contemplation, then, was to see past the individual particularities of things into their hidden essences, so as to come to an understanding of, and to be able to serve, God’s purposes for each thing within the creation—to (re)awaken that natural wonder which allows for the contemplative envisioning of the entire creation as the site of communication with God. Of course, there is also an appreciation of

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<sup>26</sup> The current Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, widely referred to as the “Green Patriarch” (as he was dubbed by *Time* magazine in the earliest years of his patriarchate), has been particularly active in promoting this approach. In recent years, he even lent his support in a forward written for a collection of essays, the first of its kind, highlighting Orthodox Christian perspectives on the environment, and containing a number of excellent contributions on the theme of natural contemplation. As mentioned above (as White himself acknowledged), and as many of the essays in this collection stress, eastern Christianity preserved this tradition far more faithfully than did western Christianity. See, John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz, eds., *Towards an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). In the Islamic context, the work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr has served for decades to revitalize the same natural contemplative tradition in the service of environmentalism.

<sup>27</sup> “Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily: and sweetly doth she order all things.” Consider also Wisdom’s call—and ontological status as dwelling with God before the creation of all things—in Proverbs 8. Within the contemplative wisdom approach, sometimes Wisdom is stressed as an expression of Spirit, and sometimes, more Christologically-focused, it is identified with Christ. See, for example, Sallie McFague, “An Ecological Christology: Does Christianity Have It?”, in *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, ed. Richard C. Foltz (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003).

great beauty associated with hidden essences revealing themselves, a hidden order revealing itself, at the heart of the sensual world—and for this reason, this approach is also sometimes called the “aesthetic” approach.<sup>28</sup> But the emphasis is really less on the beauty per se, less on the sensual world per se, than on the divine communication that is hidden, and comes to be revealed, within it.<sup>29</sup>

It should be pointed out, however, that the interpretation of the precise nature of these essences, or *logoi*, has varied among the early Greek Fathers.<sup>30</sup> It is slightly ambiguous, for example, as to whether the individual *logos* hidden immanently *within* each thing is a created entity made “in the image” of its eternal form, or whether it is in some sense an eternal entity itself. Also, there is the problem of general versus individual forms. All tables share, as Plato teaches, the same eternal form of “Table(ness)”, but what about irreducibly unique persons, what about souls? For that matter, what *is* a person’s “soul” in relation to the individual *logos* hidden within him or her? At times, as stated above, the *logoi* have been interpreted as essences determining God’s *purpose* for, or the *meaning* of, each thing within the created order. They have also been interpreted as acts of the divine Will, expressions of the uncreated energies of God.

Whatever may be the case, in this approach emphasis is placed on the moral-spiritual obligation of *cultivating* such a vision of creation, with correct (that is, un sinful, non-exploitative, non-self-idolatrous) concrete action unfolding naturally therefrom. Here, the correct anthropology— from which a healthy ecological orientation, too, would naturally unfold— defines the human, uniquely among all creatures, as, first of all, the recipient of the divine gift of communicative relationality with God through the created world; and secondly, as the being who is responsible for understanding and for serving God’s purposes for each thing as revealed in each thing’s hidden essence.<sup>31</sup> But the cultivation of such a

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<sup>28</sup> From the Greek *aisthetikos* (sensitive/perceptive), from *aisthanesthai* (to perceive, by the senses or by the mind).

<sup>29</sup> In some sense, the tradition of *theoria physike* preserves the creation as an “enchanted world,” but still rejects pagan animism in that the sole source of the enchantment here is the one eternal God.

<sup>30</sup> For an excellent summary of this tradition’s influences and differences in interpretation of the nature of the *logoi*, see, David Bradshaw, “The *Logoi* of Beings in Greek Patristic Thought,” *Towards an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, eds. John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> To that extent, there is overlap here between the contemplative wisdom approach and the natural law approach, as discussed above, in which the human is responsible for

vision, and ultimately the fulfillment of such a responsibility, requires a certain asceticism. Such asceticism, while indispensable for the contemplative wisdom approach, has in fact often been promoted as an approach in its own right.

## The Ascetic Approach

The spiritual practice of *theoria physike* has traditionally been tied to the “3-stage path” (of purgation, illumination, and union) of monasticism. Of course, before contemplation can even begin, it is necessary to adequately purify and discipline the will, master the passions, subdue the ego and make progress in the virtues. *Askesis* (discipline), from which the word “asceticism” derives, and *praktike*, a practical daily routine in the service of God—involving regularly scheduled prayer offices, spiritual study, work and selfless service to others—are the core of the initial stage of “purgation”, which unfolds, for the most part, by one’s own natural efforts. Only with one’s entry into the second stage, “illumination”, which unfolds wholly by God’s initiative as a spiritual or mystical grace, does contemplation proper begin. *Theoria physike* is itself only the first of three levels of contemplation in a dynamic spiritual movement which begins with the contemplation of the traces of God (the *logoi*) in the created world, passes into an inner contemplation of the *logos*, the image of God, in one’s own soul (*theoria propria*), and culminates in the direct contemplation of God (*theoria theologia*), most often, among the Greek writers, revealed apophatically in his energy of the uncreated, infinite Light. It is this final level of contemplation that constitutes the final stage of the three-stage monastic path—namely, union (or communion),<sup>32</sup> with *theoria propria* bridging the two stages of illumination and union/communion. The overall dynamic might be described as a movement “outwards, inwards and upwards.”

Of course, one major question that arises here is whether the privileging of *theoria theologia* as the highest stage of contemplation, and constituting the goal of the whole path in establishing (comm)union

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envisioning the purpose of all things as, and guiding all things towards, their supernatural fulfillment in God.

<sup>32</sup>The mystical literature varies on this point. Some describe the union as a complete loss of self in God, as a total mergence with God through his uncreated light, like a drop disappearing into the ocean. Others maintain some semblance of the self within a relationship of communion with God, for which quite often the image of the soul as the bride of God or Christ is evoked.

between the soul and God, entails also a privileging of spirit over matter, of spirit over body—with the implication being that the material world has ultimately little value and must be left behind. In that case, the ascetic approach, tightly tied to monastic spirituality, would have little to contribute to the ecological crisis, except indirectly through its discouragement of consumerism and promotion of detachment from material desires.<sup>33</sup> Yet proponents of the contemplative wisdom approach will emphasize an anthropology which establishes the human not only as the visionary of God's traces (the *logoi*) in the material world, but as responsible for the fulfillment of—even, *redemption* of—these *logoi*, as God's purposes for all things within his creation. Rather than cultivating the vision of these *logoi* just in order to, so to speak, follow them inwards and upwards to God, leaving the world behind, proponents will emphasize the revelation and manifestation of God's uncreated light, *through* these *logoi*, in the world, fully penetrating it and upholding it in being. To that extent, *theoria physike* is not merely about seeing (traces of) God in the world, but about seeing the whole world in God—a comprehensive panentheism.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the specific brand of asceticism which seeks to

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<sup>33</sup> To that extent, there is ground in the ascetic approach for interfaith dialogue (see footnote 8 above).

<sup>34</sup> It is worth here quoting a rather long passage by Thomas Merton, the well-known Catholic (Trappist) monk of the mid-twentieth century who was deeply influenced by the Greek Patristic authors and the tradition of *theoria physike*. He wrote beautifully about the human responsibility to participate with God in *redeeming* the world through such contemplation: "...*theoria physike* is a most important part of man's cooperation in the spiritualization and restoration of the cosmos. It is by *theoria* that man helps Christ to redeem the *logoi* of things and restore them in Himself....Man by *theoria* is able to unite the hidden wisdom of God in things with the hidden light of wisdom in himself. The meeting and the marriage of these two brings about a *resplendent clarity* within man himself, and this clarity is the presence of Divine Wisdom fully recognized and active in him. Thus man becomes a mirror of divine glory, and is resplendent with divine truth not only in his *mind* but in his *life*. He is filled with the light of wisdom which shines forth in him, and thus God is glorified in him. At the same time he exercises a spiritualizing influence in the world by the work of his hands which is in accord with *the creative wisdom of God* in things and in history. No longer are we reduced to a *purely negative* attitude toward the world around us, toward history, toward the judgments of God. The world is no longer seen as merely material, hence as an obstacle that has to be grudgingly put up with. It is spiritual through and through. But things are not fully spiritual in themselves; they have to be spiritualized by our knowledge and love in our use of them. Hence it is impossible for one who is not purified to 'transfigure' material things; on the contrary, the *logoi* will remain hidden and he himself will be captivated by the sensible attractions of these things....[But when purified], we are able to *understand* the hidden purposes of the creative wisdom and the divine mercy of God, and can cooperate with Him as sons with a loving Father. Not only that, but God hands over to man, when he is thus purified and enlightened, and united with the divine will, a certain creative initiative

cultivate such wisdom, what might be called an “earth-honoring” asceticism, must be distinguished from a “world-renouncing” asceticism based in a strong dualism which privileges spirit over matter.<sup>35</sup>

It should also be noted that there are expressions of such earth-honoring asceticism that are not tied to the tradition of *theoria physike*. For example, some expressions are personal and/or social acts of resistance to a global economy which, in order to continue functioning—to continue “developing”—must ideologically define all persons in their essence as perpetual consumers whose individual fulfillment is necessarily endlessly deferred. They must go on consuming without cessation, day in and day out—though they are led to believe by the advertising that their true happiness is really only just around every corner, namely, in the appropriation of the very next new product that they consume. Those not capable of such consumption, for whatever reason, moreover, are deemed a burden on the system. In resistance to this (very inhumane) ideology, then, asceticism—“earth-honouring”, and indeed “person-honouring”—is promoted as a way of living a more simple life in which true human fulfillment can be found. For one thing, it allows for the disciplining of the will and of the passions, recognizing the proper measure of “enough,” in order to detach oneself from a surplus of material desires—which in turn allows for the emphasis to be placed on activities and resources deemed more important for ultimate human happiness, such as the cultivation of spiritual practices<sup>36</sup> and involvement in a loving and sharing community. The highly individualist nature of the market, too, is rejected in favour of a more communalist approach, one in which small local communities work together to supply, as much as possible, their own needs, as well as providing a context in which deep relationality between persons can develop, and between persons, communities and their environment. Finally, minimal participation, or even non-participation, in a global

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of his own, in political life, in art, in spiritual life, in worship: man is then endowed with a *causality* of his own.” See, Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008), 125-126.

<sup>35</sup> Larry Rasmussen makes this distinction, between an “earth-honoring” and a “world-renouncing” asceticism. See, Larry Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially chapter 8.

<sup>36</sup> Actually, the system, it seems, knows very well how to counteract the ascetic approach: it commoditizes and markets everything, including precisely those things deemed resources for acts of resistance to the system. Just consider to what extent spirituality itself has been commoditized and marketed and is perpetually consumed by millions, in the form of spiritual books, yoga and meditation classes, and self-help gurus. Some spiritual paths even promise “liberation” in the form of material success—to those who have cultivated “positive thinking.”

economy monopolized by huge multinational corporations and based in highly exploitative import-export industries can be an act of resistance in solidarity with those most oppressed by the injustice of the system. Indeed, even when specifically ecological concerns are secondary to a concern for such solidarity and for global economic justice (though the two, of course, cannot be separated),<sup>37</sup> the practice of asceticism might help to slow somewhat the ecological crisis by encouraging moderation in consumption and control over one's material desires.<sup>38</sup>

### The Sacramental Approach

This approach emphasizes a view of the whole created world as a "sacrament." A sacrament is, literally, "a consecrating,"<sup>39</sup> a setting aside for holiness, a dedication of something formally to a divine purpose, a concrete sign reiterated (if not also established) by human power through which God's grace can be communicated. It is, as it has come to be succinctly defined by the tradition, "a visible form of invisible grace." The anthropology of the sacramental approach defines the human as that being through whom the whole of creation is set aside (from "profane" use) and consecrated, with this consecration being an offering up of all things to God as the vehicle through which God's redeeming grace may be received. But it is not *just* a vehicle, of course, for the creation itself. In its being so offered up, is also *itself* redeemed. This is, perhaps, most visible symbolically in the formal sacrament of the Eucharist,<sup>40</sup> in which the bread and the wine (that is, the humanly transformed and offered-up fruits of the earth) represent the (harvest-like) ingathering of the whole of the creation into the redemption effected by God.

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<sup>37</sup> This inseparability was discussed above in the eco-feminist approach, and will be discussed further below in the liberative justice approach.

<sup>38</sup> Many argue that we have now passed a threshold beyond which catastrophic global ecological disaster is unavoidable. We can perhaps slow it down a bit (for example, through widespread asceticism), but not stop it altogether. As the decades progress, the main focus will have to be on how to prepare for the realities of increasingly extreme weather phenomena, food shortages, disease outbreaks and mass movements of people as large parts of the world become uninhabitable. Decades from now, if not sooner, asceticism might no longer be a "response" one chooses, but a necessity forced upon many millions who have hitherto enjoyed relatively high levels of consumption in their lives.

<sup>39</sup> This is from the Latin *sacramentum*, derived from *sacrare* (to consecrate), which was the word used among the Latin Fathers to translate the Greek *mysterion* (mystery).

<sup>40</sup> From the Greek *eu* (well) + *kharistia* (favour/grace or gratitude).

Of course, a full appreciation of the sacramental approach requires some elaboration of the Christological doctrine of the Mystical Body. Traditionally, there are four distinct but overlapping senses in which the Mystical Body has been understood. Firstly, there is the personal/individual sense, referring to the resurrected and transformed human body of Christ—that is to say, glorified, incorrupt, and incorruptible body—which Christian teaching traditionally holds to have been taken up into heaven and to be seated since that time at the “right hand of the Father.” Secondly, there is the charismatic ecclesial sense, referring to the Church as the Body, of which all Christians are members, with Christ himself as its Head. This sense is generally understood to have been “activated” in the Pentecost event, with the sending of the Holy Spirit to the disciples of Christ and with their consequent initiation of others into that spiritual community. It largely refers, of course, to the inner, spiritual nature of the Church (rather than to its organizational, more outer, visible nature)—that is to say, to the *charismatic* nature of the Church, pertaining to the workings of invisible grace within the Christian community.<sup>41</sup> A large part of this invisible grace is mediated through the sacraments—especially the initiatory sacrament of baptism, and the liturgically central sacrament of the Eucharist. This, then, brings us to our third sense of the Mystical Body.

The third sense is the Eucharistic sense, which has itself three dimensions to it. First, there is the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist, with the ingestion of the “body and blood” of Christ mediating one’s reception of the invisible grace of the remission of sins as accomplished in Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross.<sup>42</sup> Second, there is the sacrament’s

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<sup>41</sup> In addition to the Pentecost event, as recorded in the Book of Acts, other scriptural passages that serve as the basis for this ecclesial sense of the Mystic Body are Romans 12:4–5, 1 Corinthians 12:13 & 27, Ephesians 4:3–4, Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18 and Colossians 1:24.

<sup>42</sup> There are basically four interpretations of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Catholic and Orthodox traditions teach the doctrine of “transubstantiation,” wherein the substance of the bread and wine actually *become* the substance of the body and blood of Christ. Those following Luther promote rather “consubstantiation,” the view that the substance of Christ’s body and blood do indeed enter *into* the sacrament, but that they subsist there merely alongside, or mingling with, the substance of the bread and the wine which themselves remain unchanged. Others, following Calvin (including the Anglican tradition), promote the view of the “dynamic presence” of the Spirit in the Eucharist, but not the presence of the actual substance of the body and blood of Christ. Nevertheless, in all three of these cases, the Eucharistic sacrament is deemed to be a means of the invisible grace of Christ’s sacrifice which atones for human sin. Some Protestants, however, hold the Eucharist to be little more than a memorial of Christ’s sacrifice, stressing Christ’s own request of his disciples to “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke

relation to the doctrine of the Resurrection, especially to what is called *theosis* in the Greek tradition and *deification* in the Latin. *Theosis/deification* is the process of the transformation of the human nature (body and rational soul) into the resurrection state in which, according to traditional Christian teaching, all persons shall be established in the general resurrection of the dead in the *eschaton* (End Time). This process is held to begin in this lifetime, through various means such as penances, prayer, the practice of virtues, the promotion and realization of core values in society and especially through participation in the Eucharist.<sup>43</sup> Finally, there is the communal thanksgiving dimension. The word “Eucharist” means literally “good grace”/“good thanks.” The sacrament is as much, therefore, about offering up thanks and gratitude as it is about receiving grace. The community offers up thanks to God for his grace (past, present and future) in the sacrament; it does this precisely by offering up *itself* to God to be incorporated into and as the eschatological fullness of the Body of Christ. Furthermore, the very “gifts” of the sacrament which are offered up (the bread and the wine), constitute two further offerings. First, these gifts (bread and wine) are themselves the fruits of the creation (i.e. wheat and grapes) which God himself has already offered to us through nature, and which now the community, in

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22:19); the act of remembrance is, in that case, not viewed sacramentally as a means of grace.

<sup>43</sup> Because of the emphasis on transubstantiation in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, the sacrament is there taken to have a deeply substantialist efficacy with reference to the doctrine of *theosis/deification*, or transformation into the resurrection state. Unlike other food, whose substance our body assimilates to its own when we eat it, it is held that the substance of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament rather assimilates us to *itself* when we eat it. That is to say, we are assimilated, bit by bit, into the glorious, incorrupt, incorruptible substance of the resurrection state. The Body of Christ is thus, in this sense, the general “Substance” of glorious, incorrupt, incorruptible existence in which all resurrected bodies, including Christ’s own personal resurrected and ascended body, participate. This view, furthermore, serves as a response to those who reject the doctrine of transubstantiation on the grounds that Christ’s body, seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, could not possibly be in two places at once, such that it is after all *not* present in the Eucharist. In other words, it responds to those who interpret the Body of Christ *only* in the first (the personal/individual) sense. Those who hold the Eucharistic sacrament to have only a spiritual presence, on the other hand, still hold the process of transformation to take place, but put less of an emphasis on the substantialist understanding of it, and more emphasis on the moral (virtues, core values) dimension; or they may emphasize a spiritual dimension as helping to build up the Church in the charismatic ecclesial sense of the Body. Finally, those who hold the sacrament to be merely a memorial would have difficulty thinking of it in transformational terms at all— except perhaps to insist that such acts of memorialization themselves support one in one’s growth in virtue, especially in the virtue of faith.

gratitude, offers back to him. This lends a certain cosmic dimension to the Eucharist; the community, that is to say, does not only offer up itself, but offers up all of the creation (symbolized by the wheat and grapes) to God. In other words, it *mediates* the incorporation of the entire creation into the Body of Christ. Second, these gifts (bread and wine) being originally wheat and grapes, are not offered to God by the community in the same form in which they were received, but as transformed through the work of its hands. The community, accordingly, offers up the *very work of its hands* in the Eucharist; that is to say, the community's mediation of the incorporation of the entire creation into the Body of Christ *constitutes an offering up to God of the very creative initiative and work of persons*. In this way, the human community, the human person, becomes a freely willing co-creator with God of the eschatological Kingdom.

The fourth sense of the Mystical Body of Christ is the cosmic sense, which overlaps with the community's thanks-filled offering up of the whole creation (that is, the third dimension of the Eucharistic sense of the Body). This sense is largely inspired by a turn in late Modernity away from a medieval understanding of an "other-worldly" Kingdom back towards its original "this-worldly" sense as inherited from the Jewish tradition. This turn, or "return", is supported especially by a key passage in Paul's Letter to the Romans (8:19–23):

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

In other words, as is traditionally taught, it is not just the human but the whole of the creation which is subjected to corruption in the "Fall" of humankind;<sup>44</sup> and though redemption of the creation, according to orthodox doctrine, is made possible in the death and resurrection of Christ, the human also participates in this act by "sacramentalizing" the creation (in the Eucharist), whereby the whole of it is, for inclusion in that

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<sup>44</sup> See, Genesis Chapter 3.

redemptive act, offered up to God. To that extent, the cosmic sense of the Mystical Body as the creation “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God,” and requiring the human sacramentalizing act for this deliverance, is precisely what is meant by human co-creation with God of the universal eschatological Kingdom. And, of course, such a sacramentalizing act by the human must reach well beyond just the formal liturgy taking place within the church’s walls; it must permeate every aspect of the Christian communal life. For the word “liturgy” means literally a “work of the people,” or “public work,”<sup>45</sup> and the work of the people in their communal offering up of the whole of the creation to God should be unceasing. Indeed, this constitutes, for the sacramental approach, the correct anthropology in terms of the human relation to God and the world: that all of creation must *at all times* by the human community, in its attitude towards the earth and in its treatment of the planet’s many creatures, be sacramentalized. The human is the mediator between Christ’s redemptive act and the deliverance into glorious liberty of the creation as a whole.

This extension of the sacramental/Eucharistic/liturgical context of redemption to include the whole of creation has been widely promoted in recent years as a significant Christian approach to environmentalism, especially among Catholic and Orthodox eco-theologians (for whom sacramentalism, and especially the sacrament of the Eucharist, is so central).<sup>46</sup> One particularly interesting—and somewhat more philosophical—Orthodox expression of this approach has been articulated by Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon. In Zizioulas’ interpretation of the above-quoted passage (Romans 8:19–23), the subjection of the creation to “futility” is not due to some original literal “Fall” of humankind—indeed, Zizioulas adopts an evolutionary perspective<sup>47</sup>—but to the basic ontological fact of the very finitude of creation, which necessitates the creation’s incapacity to exist in itself, upon its own foundation. To that extent, the creation, created *ex nihilo* as a finite being and having no ontological foundation in itself, is perpetually under the threat of non-existence. The scripturally elaborated consequences of the

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<sup>45</sup> From the Greek *leitourgia* (public duty, ministration, ministry), from *leitō-* (public) + *ergon* (work).

<sup>46</sup> One might also mention here Sallie McFague’s eco-feminist emphasis on the world as the Body of God (see footnote 21 above).

<sup>47</sup> Zizioulas himself does not unfold a comprehensive evolutionary theory in relation to Christian teaching, for that is not his main interest. What he does emphasize with reference to evolution, however, is a way for the doctrine of the “special creation” of the human being to be preserved. More will be said on this emphasis in the discussion of the evolutionary approach as discussed below.

“Fall,” most notably death, can be interpreted, from this perspective, as rather consequences of the ontological finitude which has not yet been “redeemed.” The special role that humans play within a finite creation, for Zizioulas, is to draw the whole of the creation forth from its “subjection” to finitude towards perfected, immortal life—that is, towards glorious, incorrupt, incorruptible existence—which finally can consist only in a *universal relational openness* of the finite creation to God as its true ground. And this is precisely, according to Zizioulas, what God wants. The “special creation” of the human, therefore, constitutes the human’s appointed role as *mediator* of this universal relational openness—or, as Zizioulas calls it, the role of “priest of creation.” In other words, the cosmic sense of the Mystical Body as the creation “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” requires just such a sacramental priesthood of the human person, who offers up the whole the creation into relation with God, to mediate this deliverance.<sup>48</sup>

### The Eschatological Approach

Similar to the sacramental approach, the eschatological approach has a very strong Christological dimension to it. Yet here a more (neo-)orthodox Protestant character dominates, with the emphasis being placed less on sacramentalism *per se*—including human participation in that sacrament—than on radical hope in the redemptive activity of a very personal savior, namely, Christ. The approach grew largely out of the

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<sup>48</sup> See, John Zizioulas, “Proprietors or Priests of Creation?” in *Towards an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, eds. John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 167-168: “This role of the human being, as the priest of creation, is absolutely necessary for creation itself, because without this reference of creation to God the whole created universe will die. It will die because it is a finite universe, as most scientists accept today. This is theologically a very fundamental belief: that the world was not always there but came into being at some point and, for this reason, will ‘naturally’ have an end and come into non-being one day. Therefore, the only way to protect the world from its finitude, which is inherent in its nature, is to bring it into relation with God. This is because God is the only infinite, immortal being, and it is only by relating to him that the world can overcome its natural finitude and its natural mortality. In other words, when God created the world finite and therefore subject by nature to death and mortality, he wanted this world to live forever and to be united with him—that is, to be in communion with him. It is precisely for this reason that God created the human being. This underlines the significance of man as the priest of creation who would unite the world and relate it to God so that it may live forever.”

work of Jürgen Moltmann in the 1970s and his articulation of a “theology of hope” as a (neo-)orthodox response to (and rejection of) liberal “post-millennialism.”<sup>49</sup> Protestant neo-orthodoxy refuses the watering-down of Christian soteriological doctrine in order to accommodate it, through liberal efforts, to a universal ethics based in Enlightenment principles of autonomy and human rights.<sup>50</sup> Neo-orthodoxy emphasizes especially the singular redeeming power of Christ through his suffering and atoning activity on the cross—an activity which, nevertheless, did not just take place once long ago in history, but is an ongoing work of Christ in the world down through history, in solidarity with that world. Christian hope, in this view, is hope in an eschatological future in which the work of Christ reaches its completion in the fullness of the Kingdom of God on earth. In an ecological context, that includes, of course, the redemption of the whole earth—so that Christ’s solidarity with the sufferings of the world necessarily includes solidarity with the sufferings of animals, of forests, of rivers, of soil, of entire ecosystems. To that extent, this approach also places emphasis on the cosmic Christ in whom the redemption of the whole of the creation is effected. But there is less overall emphasis on human participation in that redemption than in the

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<sup>49</sup> The terms “post-millennialism” and “pre-millennialism” refer to the Book of Revelation (the last book of the Christian scripture), in which the Second Coming of Christ in the *eschaton* (End Time) ushers in a 1,000 year period of peace on earth, at the end of which the final battle between good and evil will take place in which evil will be overthrown forever, this world will pass away, and the Kingdom of God will be established on a new earth. With the growth of liberal Protestantism in the nineteenth century, however, the idea emerged that the Kingdom of God on earth would be brought about not through some direct and apocalyptic intervention on God’s part, but by human initiative. The term “post-millennialism” came to be used to refer to this idea—namely, that if there *were* to be a Second Coming of Christ, it would not take place until *after* humans themselves established the 1,000 year period of peace on earth. “Pre-millennialism,” then, came to be used to refer to the view that the Kingdom of God cannot be ushered in by human power, and that Christ must come first. Today, the idea of “post-millennialism” is still promoted (though without necessarily an explicit reference to a 1,000 year period) by liberal Protestantism, as well as (to some extent) by the Catholic Church (post-Vatican II Catholicism placing enormous emphasis on the struggle for social justice and the promotion of human rights). The terms are also sometimes used in a Jewish context today, with highly liberal Jews promoting a form of “post-millennialism,” and many strictly Orthodox (or Ultra-Orthodox) Jews promoting a form of “pre-millennialism.” Of course, in the Jewish context, it is not the Second Coming of Christ that is said to take place, but the (first) coming of an unidentified Messiah, either before or after the “Messianic Age.”

<sup>50</sup> Karl Barth is generally considered to be the “father of Neo-orthodoxy.” Aghast at the liberal German Church’s cooperation with the Nazis in the 1930s, he emphasized a return to traditional faith in the singular redeeming power of Christ.

sacramental approach. The primary focus, for humans, will be on the cultivation of faith in Christ's redeeming power (this, then, defining the anthropology), social and political witness to that power, and sustained hope in an eschatological future.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Evolutionary Approach**

This approach was made popular in the 1980s by Thomas Berry, who himself drew extensively from the work of the Jesuit paleontologist and cosmologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Of course, an evolutionary approach is sometimes used, often even secularly, merely as a strategy to downplay the kind of anthropocentrism that has led to a strongly instrumentalist interpretation of human "specialness" and human "dominion" over the creation. For example, it is pointed out that, while human createdness "in the image of God" has traditionally been interpreted as humans being gifted with a "rational soul", modern research into the rational lives of the great apes, with whom we share 97% of our DNA, has shown that there is nothing really "specially exclusive" about the rational faculty of humans: it is really only a matter of evolutionary

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<sup>51</sup> For an interesting discussion of the tension in Moltmann's work between, on the one hand, his attempt to incorporate non-human creation into Christ's suffering and atoning activity of redemption, and, on the other, Neo-orthodoxy's traditional focus on exclusively human redemption (since humans alone can be guilty and thus requiring of "atonement"), see, Dee Carter, "Foregrounding the Environment: The Redemption of Nature and Jürgen Moltmann's Theology," *Ecotbeology* 10 (Jan. 2001), 70-84. This is actually a very interesting tension, for one must distinguish between two functions of Christ's redeeming power: 1) atonement for the guilt of sin; and, 2) the healing of the structural corruption which is the consequence of sin. In traditional (Catholic and Protestant) orthodox doctrine, though humans inherit both the guilt and the structural corruption of the Original Sin, the rest of the creation suffers only the structural corruption, not the guilt (and, in fact, in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, both non-human creation *and* humans suffer *only* the structural corruption, with no inherited guilt). The Protestant Neo-orthodox tradition in the twentieth century has, in fact, *strongly* stressed the atoning function of Christ's redeeming power, with the healing function, though not *entirely* postponed, nevertheless associated more with the fullness of the *eschaton*— which is precisely why there is so much emphasis here on Christ's suffering on the cross (as well as his ongoing suffering in solidarity with the sufferings of the world). But it is difficult, indeed, to think of Christ's suffering in solidarity with the sufferings of the non-human world as being a matter of atonement. Ultimately, any approach that makes use of the concept of the cosmic Christ in whom the whole of the creation is to be redeemed will have to stress not so much the atoning, but the *healing* function of Christ's redeeming power—and this is, in fact, exactly what the sacramental approach does. It is also what Moltmann finally does; his resolution of the tension, according to Carter, is based on the insight that, "unless nature is healed and saved, human beings cannot ultimately be healed and saved either, for human beings are natural beings and part of nature." See, Carter, 76.

degree (indeed, some great apes manifest more rationality and moral intelligence than some humans!). Another intention within the evolutionary approach has been to (re)awaken the consciousness to a deep sense of wonder at the enormous magnitudes of time and space involved in, and the incomprehensible odds against (from a purely natural perspective), the emergence of human life within the cosmos starting out from the Big Bang. Such wonder, it is held, should not only have the effect of radically humbling the human, but also of making us realize our deep evolutionary embeddedness in the cosmos and our interdependence with all life on earth. Indeed, a specifically Christian articulation of the evolutionary approach, in fact, rejects neither of the above intentions; yet at the same time it preserves the basic features of the Christian worldview, such as an *ex nihilo* creation, linear history progressing towards an ideal (or *eschaton*), and a privileged status for humans, attempting to reinterpret those features in light of modern science, especially evolutionary and Big Bang theory. Also, while the above two intentions look primarily to our evolutionary past, the Christian articulation places emphasis on our future—and ultimately, on the human role of mediating that future in terms of its evolutionary unfolding.

Of course, one of the main challenges of Darwinism for Christian thought has been its incompatibility with the traditional doctrine of “special creationism”—the idea that each species, but more importantly the human being, who is said to be created in the image of God, was created “specially” (and supernaturally) by God already fully complete. But far more problematic than this lack of immediate “completeness” in light of the evolutionary emergence of species is the fact that a wholly *natural* emergence precisely of the *human* species cannot safeguard its distinction as being created in the image of God. Generally, the argument that has been proposed to solve this problem, with versions of it dating back to the late nineteenth century, is that God, in creating the universe, always intended to bring human life forth from within the creation, and that the long evolutionary process, which has been all along guided by him (right from the moment of the Big Bang), is the precise means through which God has done so. Of course, the real difficulty in this argument—in “theistic evolution”, as it called—then, lies in articulating precisely what factors in the evolutionary process have been natural or chance factors, and what supernatural—and moreover, how such natural and supernatural factors relate to form a continuous unfolding.

However this is explained, the significant point is that the appearance of the human within the evolutionary process has not been a wholly *natural* process, that it *does* constitute a “special creation” as a

*supernaturally intended emergence* of the human, who is defined anthropologically as a being uniquely capable of four crucial orientations: first, an orientation towards the rest of the creation from which the human has succeeded in extricating itself (at least conceptually), and over which it has achieved a significant level of conceptual and practical mastery;<sup>52</sup> second, an orientation towards a transcendent power (namely, God) through which the human and all of creation has its being;<sup>53</sup> third, an orientation towards itself as playing a mediating role between the supernatural power and the rest of the creation; and fourth (though this, in fact, comes very late in human history), a mediating orientation through which the evolutionary process itself emerges, through the human, into explicit consciousness, so that from this point on the human anthropology

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<sup>52</sup> Though the difference between human rationality and that of the great apes, evolutionarily speaking, may only be a matter of degree, here it would be argued that this is a difference of degree that passes over into a difference in kind, thus constituting a new mode of existence—for the human, as Teilhard de Chardin himself argues, not only knows, but *knows* that he knows. It is largely this knowledge of its own knowledge that has allowed the human species to achieve such mastery over the rest of the creation.

<sup>53</sup> Another way of defining human “specialness,” making no reference to rationality explicitly, has a deeply personalist orientation, identifying the human as the being first capable within the evolutionary process of responding to the supernatural call of God and thus entering into personal relation with him—which call-response relation *constitutes* the “special creation” of the human as a “special emergence” of relationally unique *persons* (that is, spiritual or “ensouled” beings, as opposed to mere animal individualities) within the cosmos. A comment made on the creation of the human in relation to evolution by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger just before he became Pope Benedict XVI (though it was published only after his papacy began), speaks to just this point. In fact, the comment brilliantly and beautifully portrays his and his predecessor John Paul II’s deep personalist bias: “The clay became man at the moment in which a being for the first time was capable of forming, however dimly, the thought of ‘God’. The first Thou that—however stammeringly—was said by human lips to God marks the moment in which the spirit arose in the world. Here the Rubicon of anthropogenesis was crossed. For it is not the use of weapons or fire, not new methods of cruelty or of useful activity, that constitute man, but rather his ability to be immediately in relation to God. This holds fast to the doctrine of the special creation of man. ... [T]he moment of anthropogenesis cannot possibly be determined by paleontology: anthropogenesis is the rise of the spirit, which cannot be excavated with a shovel. The theory of evolution does not invalidate the faith, nor does it corroborate it. But it does challenge the faith to understand itself more profoundly and thus to help man to understand himself and to become increasingly what he is: the being who is supposed to say Thou to God in eternity[.]” See, Stephan Otto Horn and Siegfried Wiedenhofer, eds., *Creation and Evolution: A Conference with Pope Benedict XVI in Castel Gandolfo*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 15-16. In this understanding of the human anthropology, the “Fall,” and with that the “Original Sin,” would be defined as precisely the first *willful refusal* of that call to relationality with God—to be inherited by later generations not merely as a refusing willfulness, but as an *incapacity* (or a *lost* or *forgotten* capacity) for relation with God.

is defined in terms of co-creation or co-determination with God of the unfolding of the ultimate fulfillment of the evolutionary cosmos. The human, to that extent, is not so much *in* evolution, but *is* evolution itself. For though, indeed, God intended to and *did* bring forth the human from *out* of the evolutionary process, the human *as such* is not the ultimate fulfillment of it. Rather, the *final* intention of God for the entire cosmos, as a *unity*, remains unfulfilled, even *unknown*—and yet, with the human, it is first capable of being projected precisely as an *end*, speculated about, elected in desire, creatively worked towards, expected in hope. Though the Earth is not, astronomically speaking, at the centre of the cosmos (so far as we know), it has *become* a centre evolutionarily—for the human co-determines, along with God, the advancement of the cosmos towards its evolutionary goal.

Such a project, of course, gives a whole new level of meaning to the “Anthropocene.” The word designates, in geological terms, that epoch characterized by the significant global impact that the human species has had on Earth’s ecosystems. It may imply further that the human assumes the role of co-determiner with God of the goal of cosmic unity for the evolutionary cosmos as a whole. But it would also imply the radical consequences of a human *refusal* of this role, of a rejection of the anthropology that sets the human in the service of both a cosmic and a transcendental end.<sup>54</sup> Of course, it might be objected here that it is far too grandiose to speak of such a human refusal as having *cosmic* consequences. *Terrestrial* consequences, surely! Yet from the evolutionary perspective, the mediating role of the human in the evolutionary process can no more be separated from the future and ultimate fulfillment of the rest of the cosmos than can human life on earth

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<sup>54</sup> It is, admittedly, a little unclear here as to what is meant by the word “transcendental.” And, of course, this ambiguity is directly related to the ambiguity, as introduced above, as to the precise relation between the purely natural versus the supernatural factors involved in the evolutionary process and how they relate to one another. It is also related to the ambiguity in this approach between teleology and eschatology (indeed, such “theistic evolution” has also sometimes been called “teleological evolution”). That is, it might be asked to what extent the evolutionary process “unfolds” by way of a determining *telos*—and whether that *telos* has been embedded by God within the created universe (in which case, it would be at least partly natural) or whether it “pulls” the evolutionary process towards itself from a transcendent vantage point outside the creation (as one finds with the “Omega Point” of Teilhard de Chardin). Furthermore, if there *is* such a determining *telos*, what room is there for human creativity (including human refusal of the responsibility to co-direct with God our evolutionary future), or even divine creativity that responds to the human in time? And if it is to be said that the *telos* is only *partly* determining, thus making room for such creativity (human and divine), then how do the *telos* and that creativity relate to one another to form a continuous “unfolding”?

be separated from the original conditions of the universe in the Big Bang.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, at the present moment in the evolutionary process, the human can only really effectively address the evolutionary future of earth, unknowing of how it will, in some future time, enlarge itself into cosmic terms. Thomas Berry calls this task on earth, which is nevertheless open to both a cosmic past and a cosmic future, the “Great Work.”<sup>56</sup> The first step in this Work, for Berry, is the awakening of human consciousness *en masse* to the nature of our cosmic role. Not only will this provide the hope and the energy to avoid despair and to continue in the Work (in the face of the likely future ecological collapse of the earth’s ecosystems), but it will help to develop in us a vision of what needs to be done, or what *can* be done, in more concrete terms. As with some of the other approaches discussed above, from the cultivated vision of the correct anthropology, correct (possibilities of) action will naturally unfold.

### **The Liberative Justice Approach**

This approach is nourished by two main streams of influence: the scripturally-based prophetic tradition of justice (so that it is also

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<sup>55</sup> Actually, it is interesting here to refer back to Zizioulas’ sacramental approach (and to the long passage from him as quoted in footnote 48 above), which to a great extent, on this point, overlaps with the evolutionary approach. The role of the human as the “priest of creation” is necessary because, without it, the whole finite universe, which has no foundation for its being in itself, will die. In order to survive everlastingly, which is what God wants, it must be brought, *through* the human, into a state of relationality with God. The human refusal of this role, to that extent, once it has emerged in the evolutionary consciousness, is the “Original Sin”—or it is, perhaps, rather a subsequent development from the Original Sin. For, in fact, one does not even yet require the (scientific) consciousness of the evolutionary process itself for the “Original Sin” to occur (and in this we see Zizioulas’ own deeply personalist orientation). For all that is required, to return once more to the quotation from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (footnote 53 above), is for the human being to be conscious of being called into a personal relationality with a transcendent Being—namely, God—by whom all things were created and who still holds all things in being, and yet to refuse this call. The refusal of this call is precisely the refusal to admit that the foundation of all finite being is in God; it is the claiming of one’s own being and of the being of the Earth and all its creatures, indeed of the whole cosmos, for a foundational establishment within itself. It is, in other words, a form of idolatry.

<sup>56</sup> The phrase “the Great Work” comes originally from the alchemical tradition and was put into the service of the idea of a self-directed spiritual transformation of the human in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by writers such as Eliphas Levi and Aleister Crowley. Thomas Berry employs it for his own (partly human-directed, partly God-directed) evolutionary context.

sometimes called the “prophetic justice” approach), and the “eco-justice” emphasis of third wave feminism (so that certain expressions of it clearly overlap with the eco-feminist approach). In its scripturally-based prophetic justice expression, both Old Testament and New Testament calls for justice are promoted, with a particular focus on Christ as a prophetic exemplar who himself fought against injustice (especially as systematically oppressing those who were marginalized), and in so doing revealing God’s “option for the poor.” Part of what this approach does is to extend principles from various twentieth century Christian social justice movements and traditions—such as the Protestant “Social Gospel Movement” (the movement which coined the phrase “What would Jesus do?”),<sup>57</sup> the long tradition of Catholic Social Teaching,<sup>58</sup> and the Catholic-born “Liberation Theology”<sup>59</sup>—to include the environment, with nature

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<sup>57</sup> A major founder of this movement was the New York Baptist pastor and theologian Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918), who taught for many years at Rochester Theological Seminary, and whose major publication serving as the cornerstone of the movement was *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917). The phrase “What would Jesus do?” was not, however, originated by Rauschenbusch himself, but by Kansas Congregationalist minister Charles Sheldon (1857–1946), by whom Rauschenbusch had been influenced. Sheldon was famous for his sermons in which he would weekly sketch out a moral dilemma and then pose the question “What would Jesus do?” in order to teach by Jesus’ example core social values. Overall, the movement had a strong post-millennialist orientation (see footnote 49 above), pushing hard for the recognition of economic and social rights, and for the establishment of a form of Christian Socialism (not completely communist, but based in Christian love).

<sup>58</sup> Catholic Social Teaching is a body of Catholic literature made up primarily of papal encyclicals and addresses, as well as a few conciliar documents (from Vatican II). It is generally held to have begun with the 1891 encyclical from Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, which promotes human dignity and human rights—both “first generation” rights (civil and political) and “second generation” rights (economic and social)—and seeks a “Third Way” after rejecting both unrestricted capitalism and communism as violating those rights. The body of Catholic Social Teaching today has grown to over 20 documents, all of which still very much appeal to human rights and to the notion of a “Third Way,” the latest of which is the 2015 encyclical of Pope Francis on the environment, *Laudato Si’*. It is interesting to note that in the Islamic context, a similar approach is tied to the Islamic economic system as envisioned as a “Third Way” between capitalism and communism, and appeals especially to Qur’anic prohibitions of usury and surplus/inflated market values. See, Nawal H. Ammar, “The Ecological Crisis and Islamic Social Justice,” in *Visions of a New Earth: Religious Perspectives on Population, Consumption, and Ecology*, eds. Harold Coward and Daniel Maguire (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

<sup>59</sup> Liberation Theology originated in Latin America in the late 1960s and flourished in the 1970s as a grassroots social justice movement against the backdrop of political dictatorships, colonial regimes and extreme poverty. Peruvian-born priest Gustavo Gutiérrez (born in 1928) was a key founder of the movement, with his classic *A Theology of Liberation* published in 1971. The term “liberation” was used as an alternative to what

being identified as “the new poor.” However, the approach also emphasizes—as does third wave feminism—that the oppression of the environment is not an isolable (and thus directly resolvable) form of injustice; it is rather inseparable from a whole system of oppressive power relations and structures subordinating a vast array of marginalized “others” to a globally dominant cultural norm, a system constituting “Western patriarchy.”

The liberative justice approach refers to this oppressive system as “structural sin,” inseparable from global economic and political power structures which ultimately oppress those who are privileged by the system as much as those who are its most obvious victims (albeit in an entirely different way). Thus, in Liberation Theology, it is not just the poor and powerless that need to be liberated, but the materially powerful as well. God’s “option for the poor” is the option to begin the work of *universal* liberation directly with the poor (or otherwise oppressed), since they are the most damaged, and to make of their plight and their struggle the site of the revelation of God’s judgment upon not so much individuals but the prevailing structures of sin which are oppressive to all. It is held that the spiritual power that the oppressed realize in this revelation is an infinite power, inherently creative, and not tied to a “zero-sum” power struggle in which their only chance at power would be to rise up in revolt and to wrest it from the hands of the already powerful. But actually, here, the “already powerful” possess only a false, illusory power, an insecure power that is actually a spiritual weakness, since it itself is based in a zero-sum power struggle rather than in an infinitely creative spiritual source. The spiritual vision of Liberation Theology is that the revelation that comes, prophetically, through those who are oppressed by the system ruptures the entire zero-sum structure of power from within with a spiritual power incapable of being accounted for within the system. All who are in bondage within the system, albeit in very different ways, are thus liberated, and the falsely, insecurely powerful are themselves liberated from the system through a revelation which reveals to them the

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Gutiérrez called “developmentalism,” the imposition of Western-style industrial development on Latin America, which would only lead to a worsening of the already heavily oppressive situation. The movement was sharply curtailed in the 1980s under the papacy of John Paul II, who was highly critical of its (at times) Marxist leanings. Nevertheless, its principles—especially those of “God’s option for the poor” and the idea of “structural sin”—are still influential in Catholic Social Teaching today, and have been employed far afield from their original context, including in the liberative justice approach to the environment.

reality of their own weakness and bondage within it.<sup>60</sup>

Another sense of liberation in this approach—alongside the liberation from the overall structures of sin in society of both those oppressed and those privileged by the system—is liberation into the deep freedom of spiritual creativity and participation with God as a co-creator of the Kingdom on earth. The approach takes a strongly post-millennialist orientation, while yet preserving God’s own activity in the world through the prophetic revelation of (in)justice that comes through the oppressed. Human co-participation with God, then, in bringing about the Kingdom on earth generally focuses on the struggle for social, economic and political justice articulated in the now globally influential vocabulary of human rights. Of course, in a context of *conflicting* rights, it is the rights of the oppressed (and, indeed, of the *most* oppressed) that need to be protected first—and thus the approach places special emphasis on economic and social rights. A highly “neo-liberal”<sup>61</sup> emphasis on civil and political

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<sup>60</sup> In principle, this teaching is much the same as Gandhi’s teaching of *Satyagraha* (“grasping the Truth”) which sought, through non-violent social resistance, to build up “soul-power” which radiates tangibly as a spiritually liberating force, so as to awaken, in turn, the dormant soul-power lying hidden within those in (false) power in society. Martin Luther King Jr. also appealed to “soul-power” (which he identified with Christian *agape*) in his non-violent marches and demonstrations during the Civil Rights Movement.

<sup>61</sup> The term “neo-liberal” here refers the revival of the original meaning of the word “liberal” as articulated by John Locke in the 1600s. Locke’s “Social Contract” philosophy promoted the idea that all humans, because all were created equal and in the image of God, had inalienable natural rights. The three primary natural rights were life, liberty and property, while a secondary natural right was the execution of natural law (in the case of anyone’s transgression of the three primary rights). However, due to the difficulties in the “State of Nature” of adequately executing such law, all persons agreed to enter into a “Social Contract” in which the secondary natural right of executing natural law was handed over to a democratically elected, representative government whose sole legitimacy lies in the protection of the three primary natural rights (now known as “civil” rights). In turn, the people received the two new “political” rights of 1) participating in that representative government (whether by serving in it or voting) and 2) revolting and dissolving that government if it did not adequately serve the interests of the people. Such a government, then, was known as a “liberal” government—the idea being that people were at full liberty to pursue their own interests, providing only that they did not transgress anybody else’s natural rights. Today, these civil and political rights are, in the context of human rights discourse, known as “first generation” rights. “Second generation” rights (i.e. economic and social rights) arose later, in the context of the oppressive economic and social conditions of labourers during the Industrial Revolution. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, under the influence of (largely religious) social justice movements concerned primarily with economic and social oppression, the term “liberal” came to be used in connection with those who rejected unrestricted capitalism in favour of a mild (Christian) socialism (though not communism). Such movements were called “liberal” primarily in reference to the

rights above all else will generally end up serving only the economic interests of those already privileged by the system (such an emphasis being the foundation of unrestricted capitalism). Also problematic is that a highly neo-liberal interpretation of human rights tends to be fiercely individualistic in its core values; it lacks any vision of global community and citizenship in the Kingdom save as a participating consumer in the capitalist global economy—an economy in which rights language, especially of liberty and property rights, is often used to condemn real efforts for justice.<sup>62</sup> Not that the liberative justice approach itself has a perfectly clear vision of the Kingdom in all its glorious details! Of course, the Kingdom remains eschatological. Yet at the very least, a more communitarian and interdependent understanding of human fulfillment is central to the approach. On the basis of such an anthropology, the Kingdom can be (co-)built on earth.

## Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this essay, Christian responses to the environment have generally unfolded within a discourse of “worldviews,” placing a large part of their focus on articulating the correct anthropology (and a correct value system) to coincide with a traditional Christian cosmology (although some approaches, such as the evolutionary approach, radically reinterpret the cosmology as well). Due to this emphasis, some of the approaches here discussed seem to give little guidance for immediate practical activity, holding that the cultivation of the vision of the new

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character of their religious expression—which downplayed orthodox Christian doctrine in favour of an image of Jesus as a figure of prophetic justice. Thus the Social Gospel Movement’s persistent motto: “What would Jesus do?” This association of the word “liberal” with a concern for economic and social justice, and even a mild socialism, though stripped of its religious colouring, is still one of the core features of the word’s use today; while “neo-liberal” (referring to the word’s original meaning) is thus sometimes used today to refer to what is politically usually described as “conservative.” In short, a highly “neo-liberal” approach to human rights discourse would heavily privilege first generation (civil and political) rights over second generation (economic and social) ones. Indeed, some neo-liberals today would not even recognize second generation rights as “natural”—though they would certainly recognize civil and political rights as being so.

<sup>62</sup> Whereas a strong emphasis on economic and social rights, sometimes even at the expense of civil and political rights, seems to many as leading straight to communism! Indeed, Latin American Liberation Theology’s strong use of Marxist language—to promote economic and social rights—came under the criticism of John Paul II (a man who had lived long in communist Poland) for this very reason.

anthropology is first needed, and that guidance for more practical activity will unfold naturally from that. Other approaches, by contrast, jump headlong into practical activity—such as the liberative justice approach in its ongoing struggle for the universal recognition and realization of human rights (though it is no less beholden to a specific anthropology for doing so). What they all share, however, is the Christian hope that “the Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us.”<sup>63</sup> To that extent, each response to the ecological crisis is also a response to God.

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<sup>63</sup> *Laudato Si'*, §13.