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Beyond Stewardship: Toward an Agapeic Environmental Ethic

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BEYOND STEWARDSHIP: TOWARD AN *AGAPEIC*
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

by

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ABSTRACT
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One of the unfortunate implications of industrialization and the rapid expansion of global commerce is the magnification of the impact that humans have on their environment. Exponential population growth, along with growing technological capabilities, has allowed human societies to alter their terrain in unprecedented and destructive ways. The cumulative effect has been significant to the point that the blame for widespread environmental degradation must be pinned squarely on human shoulders. Because of our dependence on these systems for survival, the threat to the environment is a threat to human life.

The root of the ecological crisis is found in human attitudes and behaviors. In the late 1960's it was suggested that Christianity was a key source of the problem because it promoted the idea of human "dominion" over creation. This spurred a variety of responses designed to show that Christian faith was compatible with environmental care. A key theme emerging from this debate was the image of humans as Stewards of God's creation. Since then, environmental Stewardship has assumed a prominent place in the church and theology as a model of normative human behavior toward nature. And yet the crisis remains.

In recent years Stewardship has been subject to severe critique on a number of fronts. In this dissertation, I focus exclusively on the assumptions of human nature and responsibility implicit in the paradigm, particularly notions of separation from and control over non-human species. These assumptions are critically assessed in light of insights derived from contemporary ecological science and found wanting. The nature of ecosystems and human embeddedness within them renders managerial control impossible.

In light of this, I offer an alternative Christian response to environmental problems rooted in *agape* love, following Christ's command to love God and others. A robust interpretation of *agape* serves as a conceptual bridge between an ecologically sensible relational anthropology and a theologically faithful environmental ethic. My purpose is not to build a new environmental ethic, but to present a new and better theological understanding of Christian love, self, and *phronesis* in environmental ethics.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:
WHY LOVE MATTERS IN A PLANETARY ECOCRISIS

"I believe that the fundamental cause of our collective inability to confront the global environmental crisis is our deep-seated unwillingness to change our consumption-intensive habits and embrace greener lifestyles. *The problem is a matter of the heart, not the head.* The problem is not that we do not know how to avoid our current plight, but rather that we no longer experience our co-belonging with nature in such a way that we are willing to alter our lifestyles in order to build a more sustainable future….Moreover, insofar as the environmental crisis is a matter of the heart, the crisis at its core is a spiritual crisis."
--Mark I. Wallace[1]

The rhetoric surrounding Christian environmentalism, particularly amongst conservative Evangelical Christians, has typically focused on the issue of human generated global warming: whether the climate of the earth is actually warming and whether we should care if it is. Some conservative groups, represented by influential figures like the late Jerry Falwell and James Dobson, have argued that environmentalism has an inescapably leftwing political agenda and should not distract the church from carrying out its mandate to save souls. Others, like the Evangelical Climate Initiative, argue that care for the environment is a part of our God-given mandate to be His representatives on earth.

The problem with focusing exclusively on the topic of global warming is that it ignores a host of other ecological problems facing humanity. In and of itself, Global Warming presents itself at a scale difficult for most of us to comprehend. As a 'planetary' problem, it remains abstract and daunting. After all, what can you or I do to solve a planetary crisis? This creates a problem for environmentalists: how to make the problem personal so that anyone can be part of a real, tangible solution. As Wendell Berry so humorously states it, "the heroes of abstraction keep galloping in on their white horses to

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[1]Mark I. Wallace, *Finding God in the Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 27. Emphasis in text.

save the planet—and they keep falling off in front of the grandstand."[2] In other words, until people can understand what exactly the problem is and how they can be a part of the solution, they will not take the problem seriously. One way to avoid "falling off in front of the grandstand" is to provide the proper scale of human involvement, both in the problem and in the solution. This first requires us to accept that there is, in fact, a planetary problem that affects each of us in our particular places.

The Reality of a Problem

Humans occupy a unique and significant niche on the planet in that they are both embedded in and major modifiers of their ecological systems (hereafter ecosystems). Human societies and ecosystems form an intertwined social and physical context for human existence. It is precisely at this intersection of ecological and social systems that the reality of a degrading planet is most evident. Along with our increased capacity to measure the status of these systems is an increased awareness of the detrimental impact that human societal behavior has had on their health and sustainability. The problems are real, they are measurable, and they have significant consequences for future life on the planet.

Collectively referred to as the planetary ecocrisis, the distinct but related problems of the environment can be classified in a number of ways. Their interrelated nature, however, suggests that such classification is not as important as the recognition that these together constitute a threat to all—and not just human—life. What exactly is wrong with the planet? A sampling of problems involving human population, ecosystem imbalance, and pollution point to the role that human behavior plays in degrading environmental

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[2]Wendell Berry, "Word and Flesh," in *What are People for?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 197.

systems. The overview that follows is intended to establish the undeniable reality of a

human-generated ecological crisis.[3]

Ecosystem Imbalance

"Ecosystem" is the term used to describe the constituent entities and relationships

that exist within a given geographical area. It encompasses the biotic functioning of its

organisms within the confines of the physical factors of the environment.   A characteristic

feature of such systems is the interrelatedness and interdependence of the system's

organisms. They function together to form relationships of dependence. Threats to a

portion of a system, for example to a particular animal or plant species, can threaten the

proper functioning of the entire system. Systems link to other systems in ever expanding

scope to form the life-giving biosphere of planet Earth. If enough systems fail, the ensuing

threat would be to the planet's ability to sustain life.

A major environmental concern is the unbalancing of the relationships that form

these systems. As we humans become more aware of our connection with the organisms

within our ecosystems, we also become more aware of the threat to ourselves. Ecosystem

imbalance is evident in two related problems: loss of biodiversity and habitats, and

deforestation.

Biodiversity refers to the variety of kinds of organisms that make up an ecosystem.

This variety serves as one of the energy drives of life-systems. As the diversity of organic

species is reduced, so also is the stability of a system to continue to function properly.

Estimates suggest that up to three species of animal or plant life become extinct *every day*.

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[3] A good overview of issues and problems is Linda Starke, ed. *State of the World, 2004: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society,* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004).

Of the over 1,000 species lost each year, only one to ten can be attributed to natural causes, that is, the normally occurring rate evidenced in the geologic fossil record.[4] This suggests that the vast majority of extinctions occur as a direct result of human societal behaviors. A significant factor in the loss of biodiversity is the rapid growth of urban development, which results in the destruction of species habitats. Urban development is not the only culprit however. The expansion of agri-business, seen as a necessary measure to feed the world's expanding population, also contributes to the homogeneity of our geography.[5]

Deforestation is not only a problem of biodiversity loss through habitat destruction, but it also threatens to unbalance ecosystems through a loss of their regulatory roles. Forests play a vital role in the oxygen-carbon dioxide cycle that provides air for breathing. In addition, the forest habitats themselves service the purifying and regulation of water flow; decomposition of waste; nutrient-cycling; creation of soil; and provision of pollination to name a few.[6] Despite these important functions our forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate. Only half the forests that once covered the earth are still around. Most of the loss has occurred over the last 150 years. Tropical forests are hit particularly hard as expanding populations in developing countries seek land for sustenance farming, development, and natural resources.

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[4] John Tuxill, *Losing Strands in the Web of Life: Vertebrate Declines and the Conservation of Biological Diversity* (Washington, D.C.: Worldwatch Institute, 1998), 9.

[5] Peter De Vos, *Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1991), 26-27.

[6] Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 49.

Population and Consumption

The simple fact of the exponential increase in the earth's human population has begun to place stress on environmental systems and has increased our awareness of the limits of the earth's productivity. The world's population did not break one billion people until the early 1800's. By the 1960's it had reached three billion. In the forty-five plus years since then, it has doubled to over six billion. Along with this tremendous jump in people comes a greater demand on planetary systems to provide the necessities of life: food, air, water, and shelter. High resource consumption levels among the developed nations exacerbate the problem. Roughly 1.5 billion of the world's population consumes the majority of the earth's fossil fuels, metals, wood products and grains.[7] Although food-growing capacities have also greatly increased, they have struggled to keep up with population growth and show signs of leveling off. If population exceeds the capacity to grow food, the prospects of widespread hunger—already a problem—become even greater.

Another related problem is the increasing need to find land capable of agricultural production. Increased population and consumption patterns require the production of more food, which in turn requires more land to produce it. The problem is that available land is becoming scarce and often leads to deforestation practices in order to provide more. More and more agricultural land is being devoted to produce the animal feed necessary to support the meat industry, which means less and less is available for direct human consumption. To add insult to injury, poor farming practices have contributed to the loss of the land's capacity to produce food. Fertilizers and pesticides increase short-

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[7] Ibid., 42.

term production, but ultimately contribute to the depletion of nutrients in the soil faster than they can be replaced.

Pollution

The pollution of the earth's air, soil, and water has detrimental effects on humans and non-humans alike. All of life on earth requires a balance of O_2/CO_2 filtration and production. Gases from industry, automobiles, and residences pollute the atmosphere through the burning of fossil fuels. Burning these fuels releases carbons, sulphur, lead, and mercury into the atmosphere, which restricts the re-radiation of the sun's energy back into space (the greenhouse effect) which has the result of warming the atmosphere. This warming of the atmosphere has been attributed as a primary cause of climate change.

Furthermore, the gasses emitted by the burning of fossil fuels make their way back to earth in the form of acid rain. This has greatly increased the acidity of water habitats, often rendering them unable to support aquatic animal life. In the Adirondacks of upstate New York, more than a quarter of the 2750 lakes are either fishless or have significant reductions in fish populations.[8] The key contributor is a pH acidity that is ten times higher than normal due to acid rainfall. Groundwater pollution also occurs from industrial chemicals, seepage from dumps, and yard fertilizer run-off. High acid levels, oil spills, and water toxins degrade usable water and kill aquatic species.

Loss of Natural Resources

Another area of environmental concern is the loss of natural resources. Compounding the problem of available usable topsoil for agriculture is the loss of topsoil

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[8] Ibid., 58.

due to erosion, mismanagement, or development. Not only is available soil losing vital nutrients, the amount of usable soil is decreasing. In the U.S. alone, we have lost half the topsoil we had when agriculture first began.[9] Yearly, we remove 1-3 million acres of land from agricultural purposes through development and suburban sprawl. New croplands have been created through advanced irrigation techniques, but poor irrigation practices (rapid evaporation, distillation of salts) have rendered the soil useless after only a few years.

Water scarcity is perhaps the most unacknowledged ecological problem since most in the Unites States do not experience this reality. However, roughly a quarter of the world's population does not have an adequate supply of drinking water. This includes both a sufficient supply of water and access to uncontaminated water.[10] Greatly contributing to this scarcity is the tremendous amount of water lost to evaporation due to inefficient irrigation practices in agriculture. Demands on rivers, lakes, and reservoirs are greater than can be supplied by natural water cycles. Even where water supply is plentiful, the problem of water purity is increasingly problematic. Contaminated water is a major source of disease and other health-related problems.

The increased use of and dependence on the energy stored in fossil fuels (e.g., coal and oil) has served to increase our awareness of the limits of these energy resources. As long as the sun shines, there is no shortage of energy. The sun provides each day more energy than is stored in all the fossil fuel reserves.[11] However, our society is tied to these dwindling reserves because we have not found a way to harness the sun's energy

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[9] DeVos, *Earthkeeping in the Nineties*, 4.

[10] Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 50.

[11] DeVos, *Earthkeeping in the Nineties*, 74.

efficiently. This has created a dependence on a finite commodity that has resulted in

shortages and crises. As the population explodes, so too does the demand for energy.

Developing nations aspire to Western standards of energy use, and as those populations

"develop," energy demands upon the earth are increasing. Most energy being "spent" is

from the "inheritance" of fossil fuel reserves, and not from the "income" of solar energy.

This increased demand has led to two problems: supply and use. Since we are consuming

finite energy sources we are faced with the problem of finding alternate sources when—

not if—we run out of our current supply. How these resources are used is also a concern.

As noted above, the energy is released through the burning of fossil fuels, and this has led

to the unintended consequences of air and water pollution, climate change, and habitat

destruction (from resource extraction measures).

What is clear is that humans are now faced with a series of problems of our own

making. Overconsumption, overdevelopment, and technological hubris have all

contributed to the degradation of ecosystem health. Population explosion coupled with

an uncritical attitude of unbridled consumption has amplified the destructive force of

human behavior. Wendell Berry is right to point out that population alone is not the

issue:

> The "population problem," initially, should be examined as a problem, not of
> quantity, but of pattern. Before we conclude that we have too many people, we
> must ask if we have people who are misused, people who are misplaced, or people
> who are abusing the places they have….I would argue that it is not human
> fecundity that is overcrowding the world so much as technological multipliers of
> the power of individual humans. The worst disease of the world now is probably
> the ideology of technological heroism, according to which more and more people
> willingly cause large-scale effects that they do not foresee and that they cannot
> control.[12]

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[12] Wendell Berry, *Home Economics* (New York: North Point Press, 1987), 149-50.

Human behavior, individually and culturally, drives the ecological crises. And the consequences are deadly for our species as well as for others. As Daniel Maguire has so succinctly stated, "If current trends continue, we will not."[13] The ecological crisis is not an idle abstraction; it is a problem that ultimately affects all of humanity. While this generation of Americans may not feel the full affects, it does not negate the reality of human suffering today, and the future suffering of all humans regardless of geographic location. Perhaps it is hyperbole to say that the crisis threatens human species survival—perhaps not—but it certainly affects the quality of human life globally.

A Christian Perspective on the Problem

From a Christian perspective, environmental problems are problems concerning the physical structure of God's creation. The destruction of ecological systems is a marring of God's handiwork, a distortion of God's intent for the created order. The problem, at heart, is a spiritual one and environmental degradation can be cast in terms of sin. Sinful human behavior leads to the conditions that now face the human race. As St. Paul writes to the church in Rome, all creation "has been groaning" and lives in hope that "creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21-22). A spiritual problem requires a spiritual solution, even as it is manifested in physical reality. For Christians the solution to sin is redemption, and redemption means a redeemed way of living in the world.

In so far as humans are inescapably intertwined in and connected to the planetary life-cycle, environmental concerns are human concerns. We address these concerns not just for our sake, however, but for the sake of creation itself and for God who created it.

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[13] Daniel C. Maguire, *The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity: Reclaiming the Revolution* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 13.

For Christians an ethical approach to the ecocrisis must seek to overcome the sin that drives the problem. This crisis is the situation to which the dissertation responds.

Responses to the Problem

Response to these environmental problems has been both practical and theoretical. In recognizing the nature and extent of the crisis, humans have sought to find adequate solutions. Because the problem is largely behavioral, solutions strive to discover ways to change environmentally destructive behaviors. This involves understanding the nature of human-environmental relations, the causes of destructive behavior, and the mechanisms that can result in a changed way of acting in the world.

The related discourses of environmental concern (ecology, environmental philosophy, and environmental theology) are relative newcomers to the academic arena. While it is possible to trace the roots of these concerns back much further, "environmentalism" as a discipline of study did not come to fruition until the early 1970's. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, warning of the dangers to humans and to wildlife from toxic pesticide residues, is widely regarded as the spark which kindled the contemporary environmental movement, though significant books, articles, and conferences devoted to environmental topics did not arrive on the scene for another decade.[14] Rather, awareness of the existence of ecological problems impressed itself on the social consciousness of a nation in the midst of the great upheaval of social concerns (peace, justice, and equality) that marked the era. A new generation of thinkers began to address problems of deforestation, pollution, water scarcity, desertification, and a thinning ozone layer—all largely the result of human abuse and consumption—by

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[14] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

arguing for wide scale social and political changes. It was becoming clear that such measures were necessary to curb the societal behaviors that continue to threaten the health and sustainability of ecosystems.

In the early 1960's, few people, Christian or non-Christian, considered Christianity to have anything substantive or positive to contribute to these environmental issues or believed that concern for the environment was an essential ingredient in Christian commitment to justice and peace.[15] This all changed in 1967 when Lynn White, Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" exposed long-smoldering resentments about Christianity's perceived excessive anthropocentrism and failure to value the natural world. He specifically targeted late Medieval Western Christianity, with its biblical doctrine of "dominion," as the primary culprit in perpetuating environmental problems. The furor that erupted around his essay focused attention on the religious sources of environmental attitudes and spawned a swell of research by scholars on the links between Christian belief and the treatment of the environment. Particularly interesting was the emergence of Christian-based scholarship that both defended historic Christianity against White's claim and promoted Christianity as a solution to, rather than cause of, these problems.

This burgeoning scholarship took several approaches, each attempting to demonstrate Christianity's compatibility with environmental concerns. Protestant neo-Reformation theologians (e.g. Douglas John Hall, Jürgen Moltmann, and Calvin DeWitt) offered new understandings of God's sovereignty, human dominion, and stewardship

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[15] While this may be true of the early 1960's, St. Francis of Assisi is a notable illustration from Christian history that reflections on a Christian relation to nature are not foreign to the tradition.

while maintaining a strong theocentrism.[16] Process theologies (e.g. John Cobb, Jr. and Ian

Barbour) adopted Alfred North Whitehead's philosophical innovation to reconceive a God

deeply connected with the World.[17] Various liberation theologies shifted the focus of

theology from orthodoxy to orthopraxis, reflecting the needs of their primary community

of concern. The most prominent liberation voices in the discourse derived from feminist

(Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Carolyn Merchant)[18] and Latin American

(Leonardo Boff, Alberto Munera)[19] sources, though a growing number of theologians are

also beginning to call attention to what has been called environmental racism (Robert

Bullard, Bryan Massingale, and Laura Westra).[20]

In recent years there has been a growing awareness of the interconnection

between ecology and economics: those who are poorest suffer the greatest consequences

of environmental degradation. Many of the same economic practices that drive systemic

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[16] Calvin B. DeWitt, *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998); Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1986); and Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

[17]Ian G. Barbour, *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1973) and John B. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology, Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965).

[18] Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).; and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

[19] Leonardo Boff, *Ecology & Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995) and Alberto Munera, "New Theology on Population, Ecology, and Overconsumption from the Catholic Perspective," in *Visions of a New Earth: Religious Perspectives on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* (New York: SUNY Press, 2000).

[20] Robert D. Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres, *Sprawl City: Race, Politics, and Planning in Atlanta* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000); Bryan Massingale, "An Ethical Reflection upon 'Environmental Racism' in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching," in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997); and Laura Westra and Bill E. Lawson, *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice*, 2d ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

poverty are supported by activities that lead to the breakdown of eco-systems. When

considering the impact of the ecological crisis on human populations, environmentalists

and advocates for social justice find common ground. Scholars such as Holmes Rolston III

and Daniel Maguire explore how exploding population rates (especially in the poorest

countries), over-consumption (especially in the richest countries), and mismanagement of

natural resources have taxed eco-systems beyond the point of sustainability.[21] Any ethical

approach to the environment must have the capacity to address these corollary issues.

The central challenge shared by all environmental theologies is the challenge of

articulating an understanding of the interrelationship of human and non-human systems

that is contextually relevant, ecologically sensible, and theologically faithful. This

challenge is complicated by the complexity of these relations, as well as the lack of

consensus on the issue in other fields of inquiry. Environmental Stewardship is one such

Christian understanding of the human person in relation to nature. It presents an image

of humans as responsible caretakers of the natural resources given to us by God. As such,

it is a model of human relation to the environment and has come to hold a place of

prominence in Christian churches and Christian theology.

Hypothesis and Methodology

Hypothesis

I will argue in this work that environmental Stewardship, though popular, is an

inadequate response to ecological problems and may actually contribute to them. In

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[21] Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) and Daniel C. Maguire and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Ethics for a Small Planet: New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998).

particular I will focus my critique on the assumptions of human place and responsibility evident in the paradigm, and show how they fail to express the reality of how human and ecological systems are interconnected. This deficiency in turn misconstrues the possibilities of human responsibility in the natural world by perpetuating the illusion of human mastery over it. Despite some of the rather positive elements of a Stewardship ethic—a strong call for responsible human behavior for instance—its viability as a relevant Christian option is severely undermined. Insofar as it promotes the myth that humans can control nature, and thus "manage" it, Stewardship advocates for an ethical agency that is as likely to create new problems (through unintended consequences) than it is to solve old ones (through better management).

My purpose, then, is not to build a new environmental ethic, but to present a new and better theological understanding of Christian ethics, morality, and *phronesis* in environmental ethics. The goal is not to re-invent the wheel, but to reconnect environmental ethics with the longstanding Christian tradition of grounding ethics in love. This in and of itself is not a novel approach. What is new is the *way* that love is conceived in my work and the *way* love is manifested in the ecological realm.

Methodology

The method of the dissertation is primarily that of constructive systematic theology. This involves consultation with select Biblical sources, analysis and appropriation of a philosophical resource, and critique of contemporary positions that also are the platform from which to develop a more satisfactory theological understanding of eco-justice by way of an *Agapeic* model.

At the center of the ecological crises of our day are conflicting depictions of a proper understanding of the relationship between humans and everything not human. In order to develop an ethic to address these crises, there needs to be an explication of an ecologically informed anthropology, since an ontology of selfhood is fundamental to any ethic. What I am developing is a theological interpretation of a philosophical understanding of the human person that can serve as a foundation for environmental and social ethics.

Connecting Ethics and Anthropology

One suggestion for facilitating a change in human patterns of being is to adopt a new mode of perception,[22] a new way of viewing the world and ourselves. A first step recognizes the error in prevalent modernist ideas of the human person as a fundamentally individual and isolated entity. Accepting the reality of the interconnectedness of all things, so the argument goes, allows for a shift in this fundamental perspective. This, in turn, opens up new possibilities for understanding the self, and, on that basis, new possibilities for human agency.

While a new self-understanding is essential for real systemic change, by itself it does not suffice as a guide for practice. It must also be accompanied by a congruent ethical framework with norms. This is important as a means of guiding how individuals and communities decide which possibilities of human or cultural agency should be encouraged and enacted. A society's common ethical framework directs the trajectory of

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[22] Thomas P. Maxwell, "Integral Spirituality, Deep Science, and Ecological Awareness," *Zygon* 38, no. 2 (June 2003): 259. Maxwell attempts to do this via an integration of mysticism and deep ecology.

the new anthropological perspectives by providing the norms of behavior that give those trajectories concrete shape.

Within Christian theology, anthropology and ethics come together in the basic realization that Christianity itself is to be understood primarily as a meaning-filled way of life, rather than simply as a system of doctrines. In a helpful essay, Michael Scanlon suggests that

> Christian faith, then is not to be identified with beliefs. Rather, faith is a radical trust in the God of Jesus, a trust that manifests itself in what St. Paul names as the "obedience" of faith. Here obedience is to be taken in the etymological sense of "hearing," as the faithful person assumes an attitude of attentiveness and of listening for the call of God in deciding on courses of action in life. Christian faith implies an *ethos*, a certain style of living guided by the living memory of Jesus.[23]

A Christian understanding of the human person, then, already includes ethical parameters, and a Christian understanding of ethics already carries anthropological possibilities. Christian ethics includes within itself normative ways of human being and human agency, patterned after the life of Jesus.

Recent trends in philosophical and theological anthropology have contributed to an integrated Christian anthropology and ethics.[24] Christian ethics in the last few decades have begun to shift from an emphasis on personal *praxis* to the broader context wherein persons are formed by the social, political, economic, and religious institutions of public

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[23] Michael J. Scanlon, "Christian Anthropology and Ethics," in *Vision and Values* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 27.

[24] See e.g. Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Timothy E. O'Connell, *Making Disciples: A Handbook of Christian Moral Formation* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1998). However, there is a remarkable inattention to an explicit fleshing out the relationship between anthropology and ethics. Some notable exceptions are Anna Lisa Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and our Place in the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and E. M. Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

life.[25] In other words, personal ethics transitioned into social ethics, and along with it came an awareness of the need for communal *praxis* and communal *phronesis*.

Phronesis, which can be understood as practical wisdom, prudence, or ethical know-how, is an important theme in the history of Christian ethics. It is a kind of reasoning concerned with agency and connected to the notion of *judgment*. Practical reasoning involves forming judgments about how to apply general ethical principles to particular circumstances or contexts. The idea can be traced back at least as far as Aristotle, for whom the aim of ethics was ultimately practical: to act well has the purpose of realizing the good.[26] Aristotle describes *phronesis* as "a reasoned...capacity to act with regard to human goods."[27] As such, it refers not to a moral procedural method, but to a set of habitual dispositions or "virtues" that produce judgments concerning right actions. It is the ability to appropriately "fit" general principles to concrete circumstances.

Hans-Georg Gadamer extended Aristotle's *phronesis*—judgments about particulars—to the field of hermeneutics. For Gadamer, "understanding is...a special case of applying something universal to a particular situation."[28] More than that, the human condition itself is hermeneutical, and understanding—as well as right action—is governed by practical wisdom. Recently, Kevin Vanhoozer subsumed both of these perspectives in developing a "phronetic theology."[29] According to Vanhoozer the practical application of

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[25] Scanlon, "Christian Anthropology and Ethics," 44.

[26] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1101b26.

[27] Ibid, 1140b20.

[28] Hans Georg Gadamer, Joel Weinsheimer, and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004). He uses the analogy of judicial application of a Law to illustrate this.

[29] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 324-44.

theology and doctrine requires *phronesis*: "an ensemble of character traits and personal qualities that shape one's habits and come to expression in acts aimed at achieving the good."[30]

Contemporary ethicists connect *phronesis* to anthropology through a community-based grounding of moral formation.[31] It is our community affiliations and relational networks that form morality in people, not theories of morality. Who we are as humans is shaped and nourished by values communicated in our relationships. The traditions of our families, religion, and society show us what we value, and give opportunity for those values to be lived out in daily life. We learn *phronesis* in our communities of faith. It is important, then, to develop a framework for practical wisdom that correlates to our ecological perspectives on humanity's place in the natural world.

The reason the fundamental relationship between ethics and anthropology is important for this project is that ethics can only address environmental concerns through the portal of anthropology and its idea of human agency. Since human agency is identified as a primary source of ecological degradation, an ethical solution must provide a way of changing those patterns of action that create problems in the first place. This includes addressing the modes of perception that drive those problems, and challenging the social institutions that hold them in play. Ethicist Anna Peterson suggests that a change in perception alone, however, is not enough; nothing less than radical transformation will suffice. She argues that:

> Current ecological problems demand a radical transformation in human attitudes toward nature and not just a mitigation of the worst of present destruction...[W]hile a little change is better than no change, a little is still not

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[30] Ibid, 332.

[31] Scanlon, "Christian Anthropology and Ethics," 50. See also O'Connell, *Making Disciples*, 75-101.

> enough. If [conservation biologists] are right about the severity of the crisis, and I am right that ethics are intimately tied to claims about human nature, then reflections on Christian theological anthropology are not simply abstract musings. Rather, hope for an adequate Christian environmental ethic depends on the possibility of transformation, practical as well as theoretical, in Christian notions of what it means to be human and, particularly, to live as human beings in the created world.[32]

The development of an ecologically sensitive *phronesis* is helpful precisely because practical wisdom has action or agency as its object. An effective eco-praxis will be characterized by the ability to move from correct understanding (of ecology) into the realm of concrete environmental problems. The ability to do this will result in movements toward eco-justice. Therefore, an environmental ethic needs to harmonize the sensibilities of ecology and the principles of anthropology in the development of an ecological *phronesis*. Furthermore, effective ecological *phronesis* must extend beyond an individualistic focus to a communal and societal one. Real change can only come about when whole communities and societies transform their perspectives and practices toward environmental well-being and the integration of human and ecological systems. It is precisely on this area that I will focus my critique against Stewardship ecotheologies.

Models and Metaphors in Environmental Ethics

In environmental ethics, there is a growing practice of utilizing metaphors and models as a heuristic device to think about how humans ought to relate to the natural world. What is a model? Generally speaking, "a model is a conceptual or symbolic representation, system or framework by which a reality or a part of reality is both *grasped*

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[32] Peterson, *Being Human*, 49-50.

and *expressed.*[33] In this way, they facilitate the process of ordering experience into intelligible or meaningful constructs. As a linguistic device, a model serves as a mediator between language and reality: it is an image that bridges the epistemic gap between the two.[34] By design, models are constructed to be testable entities, a means of analyzing a particular aspect of human experience.[35]

Typically models begin as metaphors, and only become models as they demonstrate an ability to illuminate experience. Models become theories as they increase in scope, providing an explanation for a wider range of experiences. Theories in turn become paradigms, or overarching frameworks, with increased explanatory and exploratory success.

Models may illustrate a number of things: physical entities, theories, or relationships.[36] The models most pertinent to the topic of this dissertation can be called *ethical* models. Ethical models depict normative patterns of human agency and relationality. While they are similar to relational models in their illustration of relational dynamics, I see the latter as being more descriptive. The prescriptive nature of ethical

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[33] James Kroeger, "The Theological Model's Approach: Its Relevance Today," *AFER* 43, no. 3 (2004): 88.

[34] Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 24.

[35] David Klemm and William Klink, "Constructing and Testing Theological Models," *Zygon* 38, no. 3 (September 2003): 504; and Robert Scharlemann P., "Theological Models and Their Construction," *Journal of Religion* 53, no. 1 (January 1973): 69.

[36] For example of physical models, see John F. O'Grady, *Models of Jesus Revisited* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994); H. Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991); Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1987); and Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*. For theoretical models, see Ian Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997); Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristan, eds., *Models of Holiness* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979); Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002); and R. Collins, *Models of Theological Reflection* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984). For example of relational models see Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982): 126-129.

models is more exploratory (how we should relate) than explanatory (how we actually experience relations). The purpose of these is to provide a guide for human behavior in a particular context. Although they always presuppose a moral framework, ethical models give concrete possibilities for human agency to be carried out within the parameters of the abstract principles that make up the moral framework.[37] Models of this sort not only provide intelligibility to normative action, but allow for those patterns of action to be evaluated and critiqued.

The whole point of the models methodology is the analysis and evaluation of models. In most cases, this involves the evaluation of competing explanatory models. How can we determine if a model adequately depicts what it intends to? Are all the models equally good, or are some superior to others? To what extent are competing models compatible or incompatible with one another? These questions introduce the need for evaluative criteria. In order to construct and adjudicate between ethical models of human being and human agency, several criteria for doing so must be established.

While affirming the necessity of evaluative criteria for models, Dulles reminds us that the matter is complex and not without controversy. The selection of criteria implies a choice of values; values presuppose an understanding of reality. Each scholar therefore tends to form criteria that support his or her own preferred model.[38] To guard against

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[37] An example of this is Jame Schaefer, "The Virtuous Cooperator: Modeling the Human in an Ecologically Endangered Age," *Worldviews* 7, no. 1-2 (2003): 171-195. Schaefer's model of the human person could technically be categorized as a physical model, but she carefully incorporates an ethical dimension, rooted heavily in Thomistic moral categories.

[38] Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 190.

this, he suggests that we seek criteria that are acceptable to adherents of a number of different models.[39] I suggest that the four criteria offered below can do this.

The first criterion, especially for a theological ethical model, is *continuity with a tradition*, in this case Christianity. A model must show consonance with Christian teaching, and an ability to find a home in the narratives of faith. This is what makes a model *Christian.* The Christian scriptures contain a rich source of imagery from which to draw upon. Since they also form the authoritative basis for life and faith, a model's efficacy will be greatly enhanced by strong grounding there.

Another important factor in this criterion is the ability of a model to connect with the living tradition of the Church. Whether historically utilized or contemporary in origin, a metaphor must find a home in the imagination of the faith community if it is to be at all effective in governing behavior. If a historically adopted metaphor no longer has relevance to the community in their current historical context, then it has lost its power to redescribe reality and empower the enaction of possible ways of being in the world. Forced usage of a dead metaphor strains the credibility of the community and limits the kind of impact it can have. In the same way, new models may be dead on arrival if they cannot connect with the experience of the community. A continuity with the past is required, but one which allows sufficient openness to shifting contexts.

Another criterion for ethical models is that they be *consistent with interdisciplinary data*. This is particularly pertinent for a model's anthropological dimension. In dealing with a model of human agency, it is important that one's understanding of the human person be informed by widely embraced perspectives from a multiplicity of fields. This means listening to what philosophy and the natural and social sciences have discovered

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[39] Ibid., 191.

about different aspects of human existence. A picture of the human person that does not take these things into account runs the risk of irrelevance.

Thirdly, ethical models should possess *scope*. By this I mean an ability to speak to a wide range of human experience and contexts. In the case of ethical models, this will ideally encompass normative human agency within a large number of social contexts. The kind of behavior prescribed should be applicable to most, if not all, relational possibilities.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a model of human action needs to display *an ethical vision*. Not only should it lay out clearly norms for human behavior, but also the impetus for living out those norms. A successful model will have both of these elements bound up within its internal logic. In other words, a model should not have to "work" to persuade a reader of its fruitfulness. In living out a model of human agency, the moral "rightness" should be self-evident.

While this methodology is helpful in evaluating Stewardship and its alternatives in Chapter Three, it only plays a minor role, for reasons I will give later, in my own constructive proposal.

A Christian Solution

A distinctively Christian approach to these issues must build upon a concept of the self that is theologically faithful in addition to being philosophically sound and ecologically sensitive. For this I turn to ecologist James Kay, philosopher Paul Ricoeur, and theologian F. LeRon Shults. Kay's application of Open Systems theory to ecosystems provides a paradigm for understanding the various complexities that characterize the relation between human and ecological systems. Paul Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology and ethics serves as the substratum of what I call an "ethic of solicitude," a

fundamental openness to the Other. This ethic leads to an understanding of the human person that is situated within Ricoeur's dialectics of ethics and morality and love and justice. This fundamental openness to the Other is situated in a framework capable of facilitating just agency, which can now be brought to bear on a proper human-nature relation. Ricoeur's ethical anthropology provides the philosophical framework for characterizing both the human place in and responsibility to nature evidenced in ecological studies. From there I argue for a theological interpretation of the Ricoeurian model based on the constructive theology of Shults. While appropriating the general conceptual structure, an ethic of solicitude is superseded and extended by an ethic of Christian love (*agape*).

To this end, my *Agapeic* environmental ethic is both a philosophical and a theological ethic. It is philosophical in that the language and categories that give it shape, in particular the assumption of a relational anthropology, are derived from the reflections of late modern philosophy. It is theological in that it suggests that the philosophical categories are describing the spiritual reality of love for God and others commanded by Christ and applied in our lives by faith. The philosophical and theological dimensions together help to identify how and why this command to love can—and should—be extended within the sphere of ecological-social relationships. In this way, I am offering a theologically rich alternative to Stewardship that avoids the conceptual pitfalls to which the model is susceptible. My *agapeic* approach presents a new and better theological understanding of Christian ethics, morality, and *phronesis* in environmental ethics.

Organization of the Dissertation

My purpose throughout this project is twofold: to critically evaluate environmental Stewardship as a Christian response to ecological problems and to argue for a reframed *agape* as the thematic grounding of Christian environmental ethics and theology.

Chapter One serves to paint the landscape of academic environmental literature. It provides an overview of the plurality of responses to the ecocrisis in order to properly situate the Stewardship approach. The chapter divides the responses into three categories: ecology, environmental philosophy, and environmental theology. Even though there are secular versions of Stewardship, I place it in the environmental theology camp because of its widespread adoption in Christian theology and compare it to other theological approaches.

From there I move into a focused overview of the concept of Stewardship. The first part of Chapter Two investigates the way that Christian churches have adopted the image of the Steward as a model for human activity in the natural world. Attention is mostly focused on official documents of Protestant denominations that explicitly make use of it in their literature. The proliferation of the image in the literature of the churches speaks to Stewardship's ability to capture the religious imagination. It is a metaphor that is readily understood and easily applied. The second part of Chapter Two examines how four prominent scholars have developed the concept of Stewardship theologically: Bruce Reichenbach, Calvin DeWitt, Lawrence Osborne, and Douglas John Hall. Hall's treatment, which is the most extensive, closes the chapter and presents Stewardship at its best. From these scholars and the church documents, consistent and identifiable markers or themes emerge. One of the most significant characteristics of Stewardship is a range of assumptions about the nature of humanity and the role that we ought to play in creation.

Chapter Three begins with an evaluation and critique of the assumptions about human nature and responsibility inherent in the Stewardship paradigm. Particularly devastating is its inability to model actual ecological relations. Kay's description of ecosystems as Self Organizing Holarchic Open (SOHO) systems helps us to see the complexity of the interrelation of societies and ecosystems. The kind of agency in the world that Stewardship projects is simply incongruent with a contemporary ecological understanding of human embeddedness in the world.

The second part of the chapter deals with three potential theological alternatives to Stewardship: humanity as fundamentally *eschatological*, as *created co-creator*, and as *Servant*. Each attempts to provide a view of the human person that overcomes the perceived deficiencies of Stewardship. I ultimately reject all three as acceptable alternatives.

In Chapter Four I present the first stage in my constructive proposal by suggesting that Jesus' command to love God and others ought to serve as the foundation for all Christian ethics, including environmental ethics. In particular I argue that a theological appropriation of *agape*, the Greek term used most often in the New Testament to designate "love," can provide the necessary conceptual framework for guiding human behaviors at the intersection of social and ecological spheres. I look to the ways that two noted scholars on love, Thomas Jay Oord and Stephen Post, have furthered our understanding of the nature of *agapeic* love. The chapter concludes with a sampling of how love has been appropriated specifically within ecotheology and defends my own decision to appropriate *agape* as a basis for environmental ethics.

Chapter Five continues the constructive portion by exploring what an *Agapeic* environmental ethic looks like. I offer three principles for such an ethical approach:

human identity nested within ecosystems, a relational anthropology of love, and praxis governed by an eco-relational *phronesis* (practical wisdom). It is here that I look to the philosophical anthropology of Paul Ricoeur and the constructive theology of LeRon Shults. They provide the necessary conceptual resources for understanding humanity as a relationally constituted being whose ethico-moral agency flows from its dialectically-shaped identity within the world. *Agape* represents both the ideal character of such a being and the behaviors that flow from it. While Ricoeur provides the anthropological structure of this, Shults clarifies the relational dynamics by which an *agapeic* person manifests *agape*. I conclude by suggesting four ethical norms that can guide an ecological *phronesis*: locality, sustainability, sufficiency, and responsiveness. My argument is that an *agapeic* concept of the self, achieved through a dialectic, transformative working of the Spirit, will manifest love in a manner appropriate for ecological relations. To relate with people or within ecosystems in a way that promotes their health and well-being is to manifest *agapeic* love.

CHAPTER ONE:
A SURVEY OF PERSPECTIVES ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

"Ecology cannot escape making value judgments about nature. *Ecology entails ethics*."[1]
--David Keller and Frank Golley

With the growing awareness that our planet is facing intense ecological distress comes the equally alarming recognition that humans have been, and continue to be, the primary cause. This has led to the formation of an entirely new field of inquiry designed to assess and promote the role and responsibility of humans in the natural world. Environmental ethics, broadly speaking, has given rise to a plethora of answers to amost basic question: how should humanity relate to nature? In light of the reality of a human and planetary crisis in ecology, this chapter to surveys the broad range of responses that have been offered to address these problems. With that, I will have assembled and organized the perspectives under current discussion. This is the field of scholarly discourse into which subsequent chapters will introduce a critique of and an alternative to Environmental Stewardship, perhaps the most popular of available solutions generally and certainly in Christianity.

As environmental awareness has spread into public consciousness, it has generated a multitude of calls for action and responsibility. The concept of Stewardship has been dominant in the mainstream of both secular and religious Western consciousness. Still, leaders from many communities and thinkers from a variety of backgrounds have suggested a plurality of solutions, each in its own way tackling the problem of human

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[1] David R. Keller and Frank B. Golley, *The Philosophy of Ecology: From Science to Synthesis* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 18.

behavior toward the earth.[2] These myriad approaches can be roughly classified into three

often-overlapping fields: ecology, environmental philosophy, and environmental

theology.[3] The boundaries are not hard and fast because ideas and implications overlap.

In many cases, perspectives mutually inform one another in shared categories and

conceptions. In giving an overview of these fields, I am situating Stewardship on a

continuum of possible responses to environmental concerns. The following chapter will

focus on explicitly Christian uses of the Stewardship theme.[4] On one end of the

continuum are views that strongly uphold human uniqueness and dominance, whether

ontological or simply technological, over the natural world. At the other end are views

that seek to minimize human differentiation. All seek to frame the best way of thinking

about human beings, the natural world, and the ways in which they should exist in

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[2] See for example, Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, 2nd ed. (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (Denton, Tex.: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990); Leonardo Boff, *Ecology & Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995); Langdon Gilkey, *Nature, Reality, and the Sacred: The Nexus of Science and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); John Arthur Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (New York: Scribner, 1974); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992); Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

[3] For a guide to the literature, see Peter W. Bakken, Joan Gibb Engel, and J. Ronald Engel, *Ecology, Justice, and Christian Faith: A Critical Guide to the Literature* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995); Joseph Arthur Miller, *The Island Press Bibliography of Environmental Literature* (Washington: Island Press, 1993); Patricia D. Netzley, *Environmental Literature: An Encyclopedia of Works, Authors, and Themes* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Abc-Clio, 1999); J. Dumanski, World Bank, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, *Indicators of Land Quality and Sustainable Land Management* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1998).

[4] Representatives of the Stewardship view include Calvin B. DeWitt, *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998); Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990); Bruce R. Reichenbach and V. Elving Anderson, *On Behalf of God: A Christian Ethic for Biology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995); Peter De Vos, *Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991).

relation to one another. This survey has an encyclopedic quality that does not pre-judge

the positions presented. The reason for this is to set forth the range of alternatives as

fairly as possible before advancing into critical analysis and a new perspective.

1.1. Ecology

1.1.1. Types of ecology

Strictly speaking, "ecology" refers to the *science* of ecology, practiced by particular

scientists within a specific institutional context. It is used to designate both "the scientific

study of the interrelationships among organisms and between organisms, and between

them and all aspects, living and non-living, of their environment."[5] However, in the public

consciousness, ecology has become synonymous with "environmentalism" due to the close

association of the science with such social events as the conservation movement of the

early twentieth century and the environmental movement of the 1960's and 70's.[6] This

broad stream of ecological thinking should not be confused with the science of ecology,

even though there may be strong correlations.[7] In fact, the idea of ecology emphasized in

the literature of the humanities may or may not have anything to do with scientific

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[5] Michael Allaby, *A Dictionary of Ecology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 136.

[6] This era is marked in the United States by such events as the creation of the National Parks System, as well as the formation of groups like the Sierra Club, founded in 1892.

[7] David Keller and Frank Golley point out that there are hundreds of examples that illustrate the connection between ecology and environmentalism in the public consciousness. This confusion is even present in academic literature. For example, the journal *Environmental Ethics* published thirty papers between 1979 and 1996 "with *ecology, ecological,* or *ecosystem* in the title…but only about one-third of these even tangentially touched on the topic of *scientific* ecology. Most articles use *ecology* to refer to various interpretations of what the author or authors take to be metaphysical implications of ecological science." Keller and Golley, *The Philosophy of Ecology*, 18.

ecology. Very often it incorporates distinctly non-scientific religious or philosophical

themes. This is common in the "radical ecology" movements of deep ecology,

ecofeminism, and social ecology.

In light of this, it may be helpful to point out two common non-scientific uses of

the concept of "ecology" that contrast with a stricter scientific meaning. The first of these

could be called *romantic* or *literary* ecology, and derives from nineteenth century writers

who rejected the anthropocentric and mechanistic worldview of modernity and the

industrial revolution. Authors such as William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Ralph Waldo

Emerson (1803-1882), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), and Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

sought to reclaim a sense of the beauty and awe of nature against the modern view of the

environment as a resource or machine.[8] Another area informed by ecological thinking is

political ecology. Although many key figures in the founding of environmental activism

were scientists—such as Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson—their contributions to the

movement come from stepping beyond science into the realm of social commentary.[9]

From this has emerged such movements as deep ecology,[10] social ecology,[11] and

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[8] See William Wordsworth, *A Description of the Lakes* (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991); Ralph Waldo Emerson et al., *Selected Works: Essays, Poems, and Dispatches with Introduction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003); Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1983); Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The First, 1855 Edition*, 150th anniversary ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

[9] Keller and Golley, *The Philosophy of Ecology*, 5.

[10] See e.g. Arne Næss and David Rothenberg, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Shambhala, 1990), 380; Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild: Essays* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004).

[11] See e.g. Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism*, 2nd , rev.d ed. (New York: Black Rose Books, 1995); John Clark, "A Social Ecology,"

ecofeminism;[12] each addresses in its own ways what is considered to be the root of environmental problems.

In contrast there is *scientific* ecology. This field can be broken down into *protoecology* and *ecology*, which are differentiated based upon the emergence of "science" as an academic discipline. The former category includes thinkers that predate the emergence of the science of ecology—going back even as far as Theophrastus of Eresus (372-288 B.C.)—that nonetheless displayed ecologically compatible perspectives on the relationships between biota and environmental conditions. Examples include Pliny the Elder (23-79), Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), and Charles Darwin (1809-1882).[13]

The establishment of ecology as a formal science is usually traced back to zoologist Ernst Haeckel, who coined the term *ecology* in 1866.[14] The word combines the Greek *oikos* (house, dwelling place) and *logos* (reason, way of things). Since *logos* in contemporary language connotes scientific knowledge (bio-*logy*, cosmo-*logy*, etc.), *ecology* literally means "the scientific study of the dwelling place", that is, the Earth. Etymologically, it also

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Capitalism, Nature, Socialism 8, no. 3 (1997): 3-33; Andrew Light, ed. *Social Ecology After Bookchin* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998).

[12] See e.g. Ruether, *Gaia & God*; Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

[13] Keller and Golley, *The Philosophy of Ecology*, 7.

[14] Some of Haeckel's better known works include Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel, *Die Welträtsel: Gemeinverständliche Studien Über Monistische Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Verlag, 1899); Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel, *Systematische Phylogenie* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1894); Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel and E. Ray Lankester, *The History of Creation: Or, the Development of the Earth and its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes* (New York: D. Appleton, 1876).

has the sense of "knowledge concerning the economy of nature," or, in other words, the

relations that constitute the organic environment.[15]

Ecology as a science studies all forms of life in all environmental relationships. Its

main concerns are organisms, groups of organisms, interactions between organisms and

their environments, and complexes made up of the physical, chemical, and biological

components of ecosystems.[16] Foundational in scientific ecology are the fundamental

principles of *system* and *evolution*. The former refers to the structures and patterns in

which interconnected subsystems create a whole with distinct properties; the latter

involves the processes and dynamics that shape ecological systems.[17] So within the

scientific field of ecology there is a range of emphases, some focusing on the study of

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[15] Eugene P. Odum, *Ecology and our Endangered Life-Support Systems*, 2nd ed. (Sunderland, MA: Sinaeur Associates, 1993), 27.

[16] Keller and Golley, *The Philosophy of Ecology*, 10. For some scientific references, see Charles S. Elton, *Animal Ecology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Peter J. Jarvis, *Ecological Principles and Environmental Issues* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2000); Sven Erik Jørgensen, Robert Costanza, and Fu-Liu Xu, *Handbook of Ecological Indicators for Assessment of Ecosystem Health* (Boca Raton: Taylor & Francis, 2005); J. P. Kimmins, *Forest Ecology: A Foundation for Sustainable Forest Management and Environmental Ethics in Forestry*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2004); Ken Killham, *Soil Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); David Pimentel, Laura Westra, and Reed F. Noss, *Ecological Integrity: Integrating Environment, Conservation, and Health* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000); James J. Kay, "Ecosystems as Self-Organizing Holarchic Open Systems: Narratives and the Second Law of Thermodynamics," in *Handbook of Ecosystems Theories and Management* (Boca Raton: Lewis Publishers, 2000).

[17] Keller and Golley, *The Philosophy of Ecology*, 10.

parts, others focusing on the study of wholes. Population ecology[18] is an example of the former; ecosystem ecology an example of the latter.[19]

As one moves into the realm of the *philosophy* of ecology, there is an attempt to bring conceptual clarity to these disparate trajectories. Although it is difficult for philosophers to identify a conceptual unity in the field, they note that ecologists generally agree on three philosophical issues: naturalism, scientific realism, and the comprehensive scope of ecology.[20] Naturalism refers to the metaphysical and methodological presupposition that the natural, physical universe is the only reality under consideration in the process of scientific inquiry. Though its exponents often claim this, this position does not necessarily deny the existence of a divine or supernatural realm. Naturalism does deny, though, that an understanding of the functioning of the natural world depends upon or derives from an understanding of the supernatural. This is a standard presupposition in all the sciences, which proceed as if God were not a given. Scientific realism, on the other hand, refers to the epistemological commitment to the existence of a natural reality independent of human perception. This reality contains patterns or regularities that can be known objectively, to some extent, by humans. Again this belongs to the general scientific method. Finally, ecology is understood as having a

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[18] Population ecology operates under the assumption that ecological structures are largely determined by populations of organisms. For example see Eugene Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Co., 1959); and Frederick E. Smith, "Experimental Methods in Population Dynamics: a Critique," *Ecology* (Dec 1953) **33**: 441–450.

[19] Ecosystem ecology, on the other hand, presupposes that ecological structure is shaped by flows of materials and energy rather than populations. For example see T. F. Allen, B. L. Bandurski, and A. W. King, *The Ecosystem Approach: Theory and Ecosystem Integrity* (International Joint Commission, Report to the Great Lakes Science Advisory Board, 1993); and S.E. Jorgensen and F. Muller, eds. *Handbook of Ecosystem Theories and Management* (Boca Raton: CRC Press-Lewis Publishers, 2000).

[20] Keller and Golley, *The Philosophy of Ecology,* 11.

comprehensive scope; true to its name, it is the study of the "economy of nature," not only a focus on individual species in nature. Instead, it deals with the interconnections of the processes and dynamics of the physical world. The scope of the science can be said to encompass most physical systems studied separately by the many specialties in the natural sciences.

The relationship between philosophy and ecology can be a mutually enriching one. Philosophy can aid ecology in analyzing fundamental assumptions about reality and knowledge, particularly as they pertain to the natural world. It can offer ecology a clarification and critique of its first principles. Likewise, ecology contributes to philosophy, most notably in ethics. As Keller and Golley note,

> *Any ethic presupposes an ontology of selfhood*. Environmental ethics presupposes a conception of human and nonhuman beings, and the relationship of the two. Ecological science can help inform the philosopher about the relationships upon which environmental ethics rests.[21]

This point will become particularly important as we evaluate the role of anthropology in environmental ethics in chapter three.

1.1.2. Ecological insights

The science of ecology has implications about the nature and function of the world. These have been used to shape various ecologically-based worldviews. At its heart, an ecological worldview emphasizes interaction and connectedness, which can be

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[21] Ibid, 16. Emphasis added.

developed along several trajectories. These have proven to be influential in a number of

academic disciplines, but perhaps most so in the emerging field of environmental ethics.[22]

One of the key ideas of an ecological worldview is (1) ontological

interconnectedness. This is the concept that all living and nonliving things on earth are

integral parts of a biospherical web.[23] Individuals or parts do not exist in isolation from

one another. Another key idea is (2) a stress on internal relations. The essence or identity

of a living thing is an expression of its connections and context. What a thing is cannot be

understood apart from its relation to the whole environment of which it is a part.[24]

Related to this is an emphasis on (3) holism.[25] To understand the makeup of the

biosphere, connections and relations among parts must be considered, not just the parts

themselves. The natural connections among all things are emphasized metaphysically in

the idea of (4) naturalism.[26] All life-forms—including *Homo sapiens*—result from the

same processes in nature, and therefore can be understood by the same general scientific

methods. This insight leads to the realization of (5) non-anthropocentrism. Nonhuman

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[22] Mary Anglemyer, Eleanor R. Seagraves, and Catherine C. LeMaistre, *A Search for Environmental Ethics: An Initial Bibliography* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980).

[23] This theme is emphasized especially by deep ecology (see footnote 10 above).

[24] Here we have congruence between ecology and a renewed emphasis on relationality in philosophy. This is expressed, for example, in social ecology (see footnote 11 above). For a good overview of the development of relationality in philosophy, see "The Turn to Relationality in Philosophy and Science" in F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003).

[25] See Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); J. Baird Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999); J. E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[26] See Lisa H. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection* (Columbia University Press, 2003).

nature can be seen to have value above and beyond instrumental, resource utility for human beings.[27] Finally, (6) humans have caused serious negative impacts on the earth, leading to the need for environmental ethics.[28]

It is these six basic insights of scientific ecology that play out in the diverse conceptual schemes of environmental philosophy and theology. Both philosophy and theology try to make sense of these findings by creating system-supporting worldviews. They also seek to accommodate them into their existing frameworks, and include ecological concerns within their reflective inquiries. In most of the positions that will be surveyed, these concerns have attained fundamental importance.

1.2. Environmental Philosophy

1.2.1. Environmental Ethics: Issues[29]

Value Theory. A central concern of environmental ethics lies with what is called value theory. Value theory concerns the discerning of what is considered valuable, where value comes from, and to what degree value grounds moral considerability. The discussion of value is demarcated by a series of distinctions: between *instrumental* and

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[27] Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1977); Jay B. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*.

[28] One of the first published works to call attention to this is Richard Sylvan (Routley), *Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973).

[29] I am indebted to Clare Palmer's helpful essay as an introduction to these issues. See Clare Palmer, "An Overview of Environmental Ethics," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology,* ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 15-37.

non-instrumental value, and the related concerns of *intrinsic* and *non-intrinsic* value. These rightly treat the nature of the value things possess.[30]

A major issue in this discussion has to do with the *origin* of value, which is usually closely linked with discussion of intrinsic values. Typically, ethicists are either value *subjectivists* or value *objectivists* on this question.[31] The former camp argues that intrinsic value is something which humans create and attribute to things or states of affairs. The latter suggest that non-instrumental values are already present in the world, apart from human subjectivity. In this view, humans do not create or project value, they recognize or discover it in things. This, in turn, spurs a discussion on what kind of a thing such intrinsic value is. For instance, is "value" a quality possessed by objects, like color or disposition?

Value theory plays an underlying but pivotal role in the development of environmental ethics. How one defines and understands the nature and extension of value in nature will shape the way practical ethical solutions are constructed. Since value is foundational for moral considerability, the kinds of things that fall under the scope of

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[30] See Robin Attfield, *A Theory of Value and Obligation* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987); G. E. Moore and Thomas Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); John O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," *The Monist* 75 (1992); Jame Schaefer, "Valuing Earth Intrinsically and Instrumentally: A Theological Framework for Environmental Ethics," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 783-814; Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

[31] J. B. Callicott and Holmes Rolston are two dominant figures in this discussion. Callicott argues that while all values are subjective (anthropo*genic*), it does not follow then that they be human focused (anthropo*centric*). J. Baird Callicott, "Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1988): 299-309; and J. Baird Callicott, "Rolston on Intrinsic Values: A Deconstruction," *Environmental Ethics* 14 (1992): 129-43. Rolston, on the other hand, argues for objective value in the world. Such value exists apart from human valuation. Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); and Holmes Rolston, "Value in Nature and the Nature of Value," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 143-53.

moral consideration will be informed by how far we attribute or recognize value in the world.

One of the challenges of value theory is defining and defending what constitutes intrinsic value in the natural world. This is made more difficult by the fact that the term "intrinsic value" is used differently by different ethicists. John O'Neill suggests that there are at least four distinct senses of intrinsic value.[32] Very often it simply means value that is non-instrumental. At other times it is used in a Kantian sense to indicate that a thing has ethical standing deserving of deliberation. A third use contrasts intrinsic with extrinsic value, which is derived from external sources such as marketability. Finally intrinsic value can have the sense of "objective value." This last sense is used to argue that a thing has value independent of a "valuer."

Another area of debate concerns how humans should act in the natural world given the conclusions of value theory. In other words, how does one make ethical decisions where perceived values come into conflict?[33] Responses range from elevating human concerns above all others (anthropocentrism)[34] to equating them with all others (biocentrism).[35]

Ethical Monism/Pluralism. Another fundamental ethical consideration in environmental ethics is the difference between ethical *monism* and ethical *pluralism*. The

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[32] John O'Neill, "Meta-Ethics," in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy,* ed. Dale Jamieson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 164-65.

[33] Palmer, "An Overview of Environmental Ethics," 17.

[34] For example, Lloyd H. Steffen, "In Defense of Dominion," *Environmental Ethics* 14 (1992): 63-80.

[35] For example, Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movements: A Summary," in *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Naess and the Development of Ecophilosophy*, ed. Nina Witoszek and Andrew Brennan (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

driving question in these discussions is the possibility of arriving at a single governing

ethical principle or set of principles that applies to all ethical situations. The ethical

monist position, which argues for such a possibility, was predominant initially in

environmental ethics. However, influential environmentalists have recently suggested

that no one ethical principle or set of principles can carry out such a comprehensive

function. From this has emerged the advocacy of differing ethical frameworks, each

appropriate for differing ethical contexts.[36] Moral pluralism, it is argued, might provide a

way of accommodating so many different approaches and concerns.[37]

Scholars have suggested that the differences in this debate involve the relationship

between theory and practice.[38] Pluralists tend to be interested in environmental ethics as

practice, where theories are seen as tools to aid in analyzing and addressing specific

controversies. Monists tend to be theoretical purists, who start from theoretical ideas and

then apply them to particular situations. The strength of the pluralist position is its ability

to approach complex, context-sensitive issues. However, some defenders of ethical

monism deny that a plurality of frameworks is required for a multi-contextual approach to

environmental problems, and that moral pluralism carries with it its own share of ethical

dilemmas. For example, J. B. Callicott questions whether one can make moral decisions

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[36] See Andrew Brennan, *Thinking about Nature* (London: Routledge, 1988);.Andrew Brennan, "Moral Pluralism and the Environment," *Environmental Values* 1, no. 1 (1992); and Christopher D. Stone, *Earth and Other Ethics: The Case for Moral Pluralism*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987); Christopher Stone, "Moral Pluralism and the Course of Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 10 (1988): 193-202.

[37] Peter S. Wenz, "Minimal, Moderate, and Extreme Moral Pluralism," *Environmental Ethics* 15 (1993): 220-28.

[38] Andrew Light, "The Case for a Practical Pluralism," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology,* ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 229-47.

when two frameworks deliver conflicting ethical responses, or whether unscrupulous

moral agents might switch between frameworks in order to make personal gains.[39]

Wilderness and Restoration. An ecological debate that recurs frequently in the

public media is the discussion surrounding the nature of "wilderness." For instance, one

of the primary arguments against oil drilling in Alaska's national parks focuses on the

violation of the wilderness there.[40] The idea of wilderness in the popular consciousness is

that of untouched, pristine parts of the natural world, formed without human agency, and

in need of protection from permanent human presence.[41]

This idea of wilderness has been challenged over the last two decades for a number

of reasons. One such critique argues that wilderness preservation ideals may be harmful

in third world contexts, where the exclusion of people from land ignores the needs of local

peoples.[42] Others reject the concept on philosophical grounds. In a well known debate

with Rolston, Callicott, for example, argues that a wilderness ideal is based on the notion

that humans are separate from nature, which flies in the face of our evolutionary heritage.

It also suggests a denial of the ever-changing processes of evolutionary forces by trying to

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[39] J. Baird Callicott, "Moral Monism in Environmental Ethics Defended," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 19 (1994): 114-26.

[40] See for example John Vidal, "The Oil Under This Wilderness Will Last the U.S. Six Months" found at *Guardian Unlimited,* March 18, 2005, http://www.guardian.co.uk/oil/story/0,11319,1440750,00.html (accessed on May 14, 2007).

[41] Michael P. Nelson, "An Amalgamation of Wilderness Preservation Arguments," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate,* ed. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); and Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

[42] Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 71-83.

freeze-frame a locale in an unchanging state.[43] A third problem Callicott points out is a

European ethnocentricity: it assumes that when Europeans arrived in the New World it

was in a wilderness condition.[44] This, of course, either ignores or willfully rejects the

ability of aboriginal peoples to manage the ecosystem of which they were a part. Native

Americans, for example, set fires to keep some prairieland from being encroached on by

woodlands. In light of these things, Callicott urges that it is better to integrate

harmonious human living into the natural world, than to work with the idea of wild

nature as separate from human culture.[45] The central issue here is to what degree humans

are viewed as a part of nature.

A related issue has to do with restoration of "wild" nature. At issue is the idea that

humans can re-create the original conditions of wilderness. Some argue that this is

tantamount to "faking nature" and a further example of human attempts to dominate

nature.[46] While reparation is appropriate where nature has been damaged, this does not

entail a *restoration* of nature. Others see value in restoration projects, even if the result is

an "artifact," such as a clean river. Proponents often use the language of healing

relationships to categorize the kind of relationship humans can have with nature.[47] Even

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[43] J. Baird Callicott, "A Critique of and Alternative to the Wilderness Idea," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology,* ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 437-43.

[44] See Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 256.

[45] Callicott, "A Critique of and Alternative to the Wilderness Idea," 437-43.

[46] See Robert Elliot, "Faking Nature," *Inquiry* 25 (1982): 81-93; and Eric Katz, "The Big Lie: Human Restoration of Nature," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology,* ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 390-97.

[47] Andrew Light, "Ecological Restoration and the Culture of Nature: A Pragmatic Perspective," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology,* ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 398-410.

if the original conditions of an environment cannot be restored, the healing activity of humans can be of value.

1.2.2. Environmental Ethics: Approaches

Having surveyed some of the central questions before environmental ethics, we will now turn to a brief survey of the basic approaches to answers. These are the basic frameworks in which ethical practices are worked out. Each approach is characterized by a shared set of presuppositions and goals.

Anthropocentric Approaches. The predominant approach in popular discussions of the environment, and indeed in many philosophical approaches, views and evaluates the nonhuman natural world in terms of its instrumental value to human beings.[48] In this way the perspective is *human*-centered. Environmental literature commonly criticizes such approaches harshly, claiming that anthropocentrism is a primary cause for wanton abuse of natural resources. However, such instrumental perspectives do not necessarily lead to reckless exploitation, and in fact serve as the conceptual foundation for much international environmental policy making.[49]

A strong form of anthropocentrism is evidenced in the work of John Passmore, who argues that there is no need for a new environmental ethic. His position is based on a conviction that values are both human-generated and human-focused. Existing traditions

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[48] For example, E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997); John N. Black, *The Dominion of Man; the Search for Ecological Responsibility* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1970); Steffen, "In Defense of Dominion," 63-80.

[49] See Brian Barry, "Sustainability and Intergenerational Justice," *Theoria* 45 (June 1997): 43-65.

of environmental management—such as Stewardship—can be adequately applied to ecological problems.[50]

Bryan Norton embraces an alternate perspective sometimes called weak anthropocentrism.[51] Along with most other anthropocentric claims, he too sees great difficulty in ascribing intrinsic value to the non-human natural world. In his view, a perfectly adequate environmental ethic, capable of criticizing exploitative systems, can be based and justified on purely anthropocentric grounds. While such additional justifications as sustaining all kinds of life are central, they need not be the only concerns from an anthropocentric perspective.

Individualistic Approaches. Another set of theories can be called individualistic because in them moral judgments are aimed at individual units, not collective bodies.[52] These types of systems divide into two forms: consequentialist and deontological. The consequentialist forms operate within the spectrum of the utilitarian tradition of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. The norm for ethical behavior is the goal to achieve the best consequences for the greatest number. While they focus almost exclusively on individuals as the basic unit of ethical concern, it is not individuals who bear value. Rather, value is generated by the state of affairs or experience of an individual, not the individual itself. For example, an animal's value is given in its ability to experience pain or

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[50] Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature,* 213.

[51] Bryan G. Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984). See also Eugene Hargrove, "Weak Anthropocentric Intrinsic Value," *The Monist* 75 (1992); Bryan G. Norton, "Environmental Ethics and the Rights of Future Generations," *Environmental Ethics* 4 (1982): 319-37; Henryk Skolimowski, "The Dogma of Anti-Anthropocentrism and Ecophilosophy," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984): 283-88.

[52] Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*; Peter Singer, *Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Donald VanDeVeer and Christine Pierce, *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book: Philosophy, Ecology, Economics*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub., 1998).

pleasure (or any subjective experience). What is morally considerable is the subjective experience, not the organism *qua* organism.

Among consequentialists, Peter Singer develops a hedonistic utilitarianism toward the natural world. In it value is measured in terms of pleasure and pain; ethical behavior is directed toward the maximization of pleasure over pain in sentient, not only human organisms.[53] A well-known proponent of animal rights, Singer uses his system to extend moral rights to the animal realm.

Another consequentialist, Robin Attfield, offers a different take by denying the exclusive link between experience and value in environmental ethics. It is not simply the ability to experience, to feel pleasure and pain, which makes an organism morally considerable, but rather its ability to flourish.[54] Here, flourishing means an organism exercises its basic capacities. The ability to flourish constitutes an interest, and thus all organisms are morally considerable. This view moves beyond Singer in that ethical judgments extend beyond even the animal world, to the world of all living things. Still, as a consequentialist, it is the state of affairs of flourishing which is valuable, and not the organism in itself and as the one that flourishes. As the scope of moral considerability expands, so too does the possibility of conflict. When the interests of two or more species are at odds with one another, which interests get satisfied? Along with locating his criterion for value in flourishing, Attfield also offers a set of principles for establishing a

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[53] Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 297. An organism's moral considerability is measured in terms of its capacity to experience pleasure or pain. Only those organisms that can experience pain and pleasure are considered to have moral interests.

[54] Attfield, *A Theory of Value and Obligation*, 262.

hierarchy of priorities among diverse kinds of organisms.[55] These are ordered according to

such categories as psychological complexity and basic survival needs.[56] Those organisms

higher on the chain have priority in the event of conflicts.

Critics have argued that a consequentialist identification of value with experience

is in fact anthropocentric, since it selects a paradigmatically human quality and uses it as a

measure by which to judge other species.[57] Others point out the inherent difficulty of the

subjectivity involved.[58] For example, how does one differentiate psychological

sophistication in animals of similar complexity, or whether meat-eating is of basic or

peripheral importance?

In contrast to consequentialism, there are also deontological forms of

individualistic approaches. These views explicitly reject utilitarian ethics by arguing that

individual organisms have value in themselves not necessarily grounded in experience or

states of affairs. Kenneth Goodpaster, for instance, argues that an organism's being a

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[55] Ibid.

[56] See also, Robin Attfield, "Saving Nature, Feeding People and Ethics," *Environmental Values* 7 (1998): 99-114. Others with similar systems, such as Gary Varner, build their value hierarchies on categories like desires. Those organisms with greater desires (such as mammals) are given priority over those that do not (such as insects or plants). See Gary E. Varner, *In Nature's Interests? Interests, Animal Rights, and Environmental Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[57] This point is argued by John Rodman, "The Liberation of Nature," *Inquiry* 20 (1977): 99-114.

[58] Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

living thing is both necessary and sufficient for moral considerability.[59] Others have

suggested that all natural objects have inherent goodness whether living or not.[60]

Paul Taylor offers a more complex account which urges a respect for nature based

upon an Aristotelian notion of *telos*. In his view, all organisms are teleological centers of

life, and this gives each individual organism inherent worth.[61] This inherent worth is

possessed equally by all living things, since an organism's *telos* is equally vital to its being,

whether human or nonhuman. From this perspective Taylor develops a radically

biocentric approach to environmental ethics.[62] Louis Lombardi responds to what he sees

as a problematic tendency in a system of biocentric equality: overcoming conflicts of

interest among animal species. Instead of equality, Lombardi argues for a hierarchy of

values within a deontological framework.[63] He builds his hierarchy on the basis that an

organism's *telos* is a capacity, and inherent worth corresponds to the scope of that

capacity. Those with higher capacities, like humans, have a higher inherent value, and

thus receive priority in the event of conflicts.

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[59] Kenneth Goodpaster, "On being Morally Considerable," *Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978): 308-25.

[60]Tom Regan, "The Nature and Possibility of an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 3 (1981): 19-34. Regan later backs off this assertion in favor of rights that are possessed by those who are "subjects of a life," namely adult mammals. See Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*.

[61] Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 71.

[62] Biocentrism (typically synonymous with ecocentrism) refers to perspectives that want to expand the center of moral value away from a purely human focus (anthropocentrism) to the sphere of *all* life.

[63] Louis Lombardi, "Inherent Worth, Respect and Rights," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 257-70.

Several criticisms have been leveled at deontological individualist positions as well. Peter Wenz, like Lombardi, points out the impossibility of radical egalitarianism in the natural world, exposing inconsistencies in the works of those who attempt to promote it. He argues that ethicists like Paul Taylor employ unacknowledged hierarchies of value in their egalitarian systems, such as allowing for the death of millions of bacteria to save one human life in medical care.[64] Perhaps a more significant critique is the one offered by the holistic approaches explored below. These focus on the fact that individualist approaches are unable in principle to ascribe value to ecosystems or species as a whole, as opposed to each individual in it.

Holistic Environmental Ethics. The positions above, in both their consequentialist and deontological forms, focus on individuals. Holistic environmental ethics, however, offers a broader framework of moral judgment. These approaches focus ethical considerations on "ecological wholes," that may be ecosystems, species, or the biosphere as ethical units. They tend to be holistic versions of consequentialism, not deontologism, and emphasize the good of the whole instead of the individual organism.

The movement pivots around Aldo Leopold. His land ethic "enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land."[65] His guiding principle for action is whether or not it promotes the integrity and stability of the biotic community. The community, rather than the individual, plays the role of the primary good in shaping appropriate ethical responses to environmental

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[64] Peter S. Wenz, *Environmental Justice* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988), 368.

[65] Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac,* 204.

concerns. As a result, individual organisms may be allowed to suffer so long as their suffering contributes to the well-being of the biotic community.[66]

Holistic perspectives have gained momentum in recent years. J. Baird Callicott, who owes a debt to Leopold, explicitly rejects individualistic approaches. He even goes so far as to argue that some individuals—including humans—may have to be sacrificed for the whole in order to sustain the health of a biological community. This means, in theory, that the suffering and death of individual human beings that are the inevitable outcome of environmental degradation might be necessary for ecological health. At the very least, the consideration of the well-being of those individual humans should not take priority over— or come at the expense of—the community as a whole. James Lovelock extends the notion of communities to include the whole earth in his "Gaia hypothesis." He contends that the Earth behaves like a single living organism, in that the flora and fauna on the planet act together to regulate the climate and temperature of Earth to produce the best conditions for life.[67] Ethical decision making, in these philosophical systems, must always take into account the needs of the entire biotic communal unit as its highest priority.

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[66] Lisa Sideris notes several cases in which a land ethic approach was used to guide the actions of wildlife management officials at several National Parks. In some instances an individual animal—a bison that had fallen into a frozen river, a deer that had been mortally wounded by a wolverine—were allowed to suffer and eventually die. On the other hand, a mother bear and her cubs were rescued after becoming stranded on an island. The first cases involved allowing nature to take its course; the second involved justified intervention, since the bears were endangered. Rescuing them was deemed a service to the whole species. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection*, 179-83.

[67] Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, 157.

1.2.3. Political Environmentalism

Sometimes called radical ecology, political environmentalists of all kinds share the common presupposition that only a revolution or a cultural paradigm shift can save the planet from ecological devastation.[68] While they may disagree on what constitutes the root of ecological problems, they all point toward radical socio-political shifts as a means of overcoming destructive tendencies in human behavior. As the complexity and scope of today's ecological problems have become increasingly clear, agreement on the need for a political approach to them has gained momentum. The rise of environmental justice movements, for example, which draw widespread public attention to localized socio-political issues, are perhaps the most dramatic sign of this.[69] Three well known versions of political environmentalism are deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology.

Deep Ecology. The term "deep ecology" was coined by Arne Naess to contrast his vision of environmentalism with that of mainstream "shallow" versions concerned only with pollution and resource depletion.[70] He argues that deep ecology has three dimensions: the metaphysical, the ethical, and the political. Metaphysically, Naess claims that deep ecologists embrace the radical relatedness of all things, and deny the idea that humans are separate from their environment. Ethically, deep ecologists are committed to biocentric equality in principle and the equal right of all organisms to flourish. Politically,

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[68] Michael E. Zimmerman, "General Introduction," in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology,* ed. Michael E. Zimmerman (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998), 4.

[69] John Clark, "Introduction to Political Ecology," in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology,* ed. Michael E. Zimmerman (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998), 346.

[70] Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep."

deep ecologists favor maximum diversity of species and decentralization of the human. They are known for their political activity to carry out the deep ecology agenda. Political activities by groups influenced by deep ecology have included civil disobedience and sabotage in order to defend threatened environments.

Of these three, the metaphysical perspectives have been most influential, and most scrutinized. In many ways, the metaphysical commitments of deep ecology give the appearance that it is more of a consciousness movement aimed at education rather than an ethical one aimed at right behavior. At the heart of this thinking is a radical holism; nothing can be separated from the ecological whole. Things do not exist independently of one another, but in interweaving webs of relations.[71] This extended even to the notion of self-identity. Since all things are interconnected, it is argued, then any hard boundary between what is self and what is not-self dissolves. One's understanding of one's self can be extended to include connectedness to all things. If this is the case, then the realization of the interests of all organisms is necessary for one's own self-realization.

The academic community has subjected deep ecology to sharp criticism.[72] Ethically, it is open to the same critiques as more mainstream versions that espouse biocentric equality. For example, Peter Singer questions whether moral considerability can be granted to all living things, including the vegetal, and argues that sentience is a

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[71] Warwick Fox contends that a rejection of a firm ontological divide in the field of existence is the central intuition of deep ecology. Warwick Fox, "Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of our Time," *The Ecologist* 14 (1984).

[72] See especially Richard Sylvan, "A Critique of Deep Ecology," *Radical Philosophy* 40/41 (1986).

necessary attribute for moral considerability.[73]   Philosophers have also been highly

critical of Naess's fundamental metaphysical principles. The form of holism that grounds

his project has been widely criticized for years.[74] Particularly troubling is the embracing of

holism at the expense of particularity and human distinctiveness. If the foundational

concept of distinctiveness crumbles, so too does the notion of an extended self that

follows from it. As we shall see in the next section, the ecofeminist movement has placed

an especially heavy burden of criticism on deep ecology.

Ecofeminism. Although this category covers a variety of responses to

environmental issues, they all share a common theme in making a link between the

oppression of women and the oppression of nature, though that link has been understood

in different ways.[75] Ecofeminists have tended to reject what they deem are overly abstract,

rational, and universalist approaches to ethics proposed by mainstream environmental

theories—such as deontological egalitarianism or individualistic consequentialism. They

argue that these assume a singular dominant way of looking at the world. Instead of these

detached approaches, ecofeminists seek to build environmental ethics on ideas of

relationships of care, which imply intimate involvement and presence.[76] It is the

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[73] Peter Singer, "The Place of Nonhumans," in *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century,* ed. K. M. Sayre and K. M. Goodpaster (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 191-206. See also Wenz's critique of individualistic deontological approaches given above.

[74] D. C. Phillips, *Holistic Thought in Social Science* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976), 149.

[75] Carol J. Adams, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 1993); Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*; Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*; Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What it Is and Why it Matters* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

[76] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 207.

relationships, and not the individuals themselves, that display valuable qualities central to ethical decision making.

Ecofeminists have also been particularly critical of deep ecology for its notion of the extended self.[77] This, they argue, suggests that the whole world becomes a kind of extended individual male ego incorporating everything that is. The idea of the extended self fails to grant any space for difference; since everything is viewed as being part of oneself, it denies any real sense of the "otherness" of what is in the world. The language of relationship employed by ecofeminism resists the incorporation of the whole earth into the extended self of deep ecology.

Critiques of ecofeminism have questioned the highly contextual, non-universalist nature of ecofeminist ethics. It has been suggested that such a framework undercuts an ability to uphold what is right and denounce what is wrong, by denying generally applicable principles.[78] Others, like ethicist Lisa Sideris, have questioned the appropriateness of the language of care as a basis for environmental ethics, particularly in relation to non-living things.[79] She argues that the language of "love" and "care" employed by such ecofeminists as Rosemary Radford Reuther and Sallie McFague runs contrary to evolutionary sensibilities about the natural world. This dissertation, although not operating out of an ecofeminist perspective, will argue that the language of love is, in fact, appropriate.

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[77] See for example Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 239.

[78] See Palmer, "An Overview of Environmental Ethics," 32.

[79] Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection*, especially Chapter 2.

Social Ecology. This form of political environmentalism begins with the presupposition that the root of ecological problems lies in the intrahuman domination of social hierarchies. Authoritarian social structures allow some people to dominate others, as well as to degrade and exploit nonhuman beings.[80] By eliminating social and natural hierarchies, environmentally destructive behaviors can be curbed. What is proposed is "a reharmonization of nature and humanity through a reharmonization of human with human."[81]

The political goal of social ecology is the establishment of a free, communitarian society in harmony with the natural world.[82] Though there is disagreement as to how this goal may be brought about, there is a common affirmation that there must be a decentralization of political power away from the centralized state, and of economic power away from corporations. The desired outcome will be the emergence of a compassionate, cooperative, ecological culture.[83]

Environmental Pragmatism. Environmental pragmatism refers to an approach to environmental ethics that is concerned with developing strategies by which environmental ethics can contribute to the resolution of practical environmental problems. At the core of such approaches is the conviction that philosophical debates have had little impact on environmental policy. They are concerned with moving from

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[80] Zimmerman, "General Introduction," 4.

[81] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 11 (quoted in Peter Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113).

[82] Clark, "Introduction to Political Ecology," 355.

[83] Ibid.

abstract ideals to concrete praxis; in other words, putting ideas to work, or letting work be a type of praxis in reciprocal relation with theories.[84]

Andrew Light and Anthony Weston represent strands of environmental pragmatism characterized by a general, methodological approach to ethics.[85] These strands stress the adoption of practical strategies to deal with specific situations. Others borrow more directly from the philosophical work of classical American pragmatists such as John Dewey.[86] This typically plays out in an endorsement of moral pluralism and a multi-contextual approach to solving ecological problems. Since environmental ethics emerge out of the complexity of particular situations and concerns, appropriate responses must be able to respond to those varied contexts. Pragmatists contend that searching for a single overarching moral theory gets in the way of particular, concrete action.

Critiques against environmental pragmatism have tended to focus on these last items. Moral monists reject its position of moral pluralism on grounds of consistency. Pragmatism's stance on contextualism has opened it up to many of the same critiques leveled at ecofeminists on this point. Others have even suggested that policy convergence between those with very different ethical frameworks might not be possible. In other words, incommensurable frameworks will lead to incompatible and conflicting environmental policies.

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[84] The most complete gathering of essays on the matter is Andrew Light and Eric Katz, *Environmental Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[85] Andrew Light, "Materialists, Ontologists, and Environmental Pragmatists," *Social Theory and Practice* 21 (1995): 315-33; and Anthony Weston, "Beyond Intrinsic Value: Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 7 (1985): 99-114.

[86] Ben A. Minteer and Robert E. Manning, "Pragmatism in Environmental Ethics: Democracy, Pluralism and the Management of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999).

1.3. Environmental Theology

The distinction between environmental philosophy and environmental theology is a matter of fundamental assumptions: unlike environmental philosophies environmental theologies take up the task of addressing environmental problems within a faith context and in light of religious beliefs. Christian environmentalism seeks to find answers within its religious tradition, arguing that a faith-based praxis can mobilize people toward a common goal.[87] By bringing ecological concerns under the rubric of Christian ethics, those concerns can be brought (back) within the scope of traditional ethical concerns.

However, the two fields are not mutually exclusive. In fact, ethicists and philosophers who are also Christians employ many of the same methods and categories as their secular counterparts, but do so within an ultimate framework of faith. For example, prominent ecofeminists Rosemary Radford Ruether and Sallie McFague are also confessing Christians. James Gustafson utilizes the perspectives and language of environmental ethics, offering a theocentric environmentalism as an alternative to anthropocentric or biocentric approaches.[88] And theologian Peter Scott draws upon the insights of deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology to construct a political theology

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[87] The literature on Christian environmentalism is extensive and diverse. For an overview of the literature and approaches, see Roger S. Gottlieb, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); John Hart, *What Are They Saying About Environmental Theology?* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2004); Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*.

[88] James M. Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1994). Another ethicist, Lisa Sideris, attempts to draw together Gustafson's theocentrism with Aldo Leopold's land ethic. See Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection*.

of nature, whereby Christ's resurrection is presented as the liberation and renewal of ecological relations in nature and society.[89]

One of the fundamental Christian perspectives is framing nature within the theological category of creation. In environmental theology "nature" becomes "creation." This connotes a divine source and destiny for the natural world. Likewise, there is a divine source and destiny for the human part of that world, and in many cases a vocational responsibility to care for the whole. While the specifics of these themes are variously interpreted by different Christian traditions, they share the common conviction that God created and plays a role in the operation of the universe. Understanding this correctly gives insight into how humans are to understand their own existence, and that of nature.

The categories of ecotheology and eco-justice cover the range of theologically-driven, environmentally-oriented approaches to ecological concerns.

1.3.1. Ecotheology

Almost all attempts at ecological theologies and theologies of nature in general rest on and build from the ecological motif which directs theological imagination toward interrelatedness, diversity, inclusivity, embodiment, and wholeness.[90] Ecologically oriented theologies commonly reject the idea of a self-contained God, an exaltation of humanity over nature, and a mechanistic attitude toward nonhuman beings. What unites them together is an attempt to show how Christian faith relates to an ecological context.

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[89] Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, 275.

[90] Sally Noland MacNichol, "Reclaiming, Revisioning, Recreating in Theo-Ecological Discourse," in *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide,* ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), 69.

There is a desire to let ecological perspectives speak to the shape of Christian theology, and in turn to let theology bolster our ecological sensibilities. Within the broad category of ecotheology, there are several schools of thought.[91]

Liberation theology in general has been described not so much as a theme in theology, but as a method for doing theology in a new way.[92] Turning traditional methods on their heads, liberation movements have argued that praxis has priority over theology or doctrine. Theology emerges secondarily as a reflection on what is primary, discipleship as liberating praxis. Earlier forms of liberation theology focused on the liberation of particular communities and interests, such as the Latin American poor or African Americans. In the last two decades, however, there has been an increasing emphasis on solidarity across a diversity of oppressed communities. There was also a shift from solely human liberation to environmental or life liberation, recognizing that the dynamics that lead to human oppression are in play in environmental exploitation.[93]

Leonardo Boff is an example of a liberationist who addresses ecological issues from a Latino perspective.[94] George Tinker, a Native American theologian, argues that an

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[91] David G. Hallman, *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 316.

[92] Gustavo Gutierrez (1973), 12 (cited in Janet Parker and Roberta Richards, "Christian Ethics and the Environmental Challenge," in *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide,* ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), 117.). For a survey of the literature on liberation theology, see Christopher Rowland, *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Roger S. Gottlieb, *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

[93] Birch and Cobb, *The Liberation of Life;* Art Meyer and Jocele Meyer, *Earthkeepers: Environmental Perspectives on Hunger, Poverty, and Injustice* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), Owen D. Owens, "Salvation and Ecology: Missionary Imperatives in Light of a New Cosmology," *Foundations* 17 (1974): 106-23.

[94] Leonardo Boff, *Ecology & Liberation : A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 187.

adequate theology of creation is the basis for any progress toward justice and peace.[95] He

represents Native American Christians who are struggling to integrate traditional tribal

spirituality with Christian theology.

Christian ecofeminism is another liberation-oriented theology. Like their secular

counterparts, Christian ecofeminists often emphasize the relatedness of gender inequity

and environmental oppression. Some contemporary ecofeminists, however, have moved

away from specifically gender-focused forms of oppression to the more general "logic of

domination" that shapes all human oppression and exploitation of nature.[96]

Ecowomanists in particular have been outspoken about "environmental racism" and the

connection between the despoilment of nature and the exploitation of black women.[97]

Process theologians suggest that process metaphysics presents a better ground for

environmental ethics than traditional metaphysics can. With its understanding of God

and the universe as an interconnected, ongoing process, process theology provides a

plausible foundation for ecological ethics.[98] This tradition also maintains that all

creatures are of value for their own sakes as subjects of experience, and encourages

humans to exercise their creative freedom to promote the flourishing of all life.

While the philosophy of process thought is often criticized for being abstruse,

thinkers such as John Cobb and Jay McDaniel have bridged the gap between the

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[95] George Tinker, "The Integrity of Creation: Restoring Trinitarian Balance," *The Ecumenical Review* 41, no. 4 (1989): 527.

[96] Parker and Richards, "Christian Ethics and the Environmental Challenge," 118.

[97] See articles by Delores Williams and Shamara Shantu Riley in Adams, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*.

[98] Parker and Richards, "Christian Ethics and the Environmental Challenge," 119.

theoretical and practical by developing compelling ethics of life.[99] The recognition of the

interconnectedness of all life—often termed as an ecological worldview—is the basis for

ethical perspectives. It serves as a non-anthropocentric ethic which aims at the

enhancement of the subjective experience of all things.

Many ecotheologians choose to operate out of the confessional traditions from

which they emerge, rather than from a particular theological system (liberation theology,

process theology, etc.). These *confessional theologies* draw upon the ethical and

theological resources of those traditions when addressing environmental issues. Writers

such as Larry Rasmussen (Lutheran) and James Nash (Methodist) seek to reinterpret

traditional doctrines in ecologically informed ways, which in turn provide their

confessional communities with resources for developing environmental policies.[100]

Stewardship theologies are also common among confessional theologians.

Stewardship theology argues that the best way to understand human responsibility toward

the natural world is in terms of a household management metaphor. Rooted in a

functional interpretation of the *imago Dei*, stewardship of the environment is seen as a

fundamental part of who God created humans to be. This position has been particularly

emphasized within more conservative streams of Protestantism.[101]

Many theologians have been actively involved in science and religion dialogues in

an attempt to integrate ecological science with Christian faith. The fruit of this dialogue is

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[99] See Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (Denton, Tex.: Environmental Ethics Books, 1990); and McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life*.

[100] See Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*; and James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

[101] See Hall, *The Steward*; DeWitt, *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork*; and Lawrence Osborn, *Stewards of Creation: Environmentalism in the Light of Biblical Teaching* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1990).

displayed in developing *theologies of nature.* They attempt to articulate scientific insights

in theological terms. In this way, the two disciplines are not antithetical toward one

another, but mutually enrich a comprehensive picture of the world. Wolfhart Pannenberg,

for example, challenges both theology and science to attain new levels of interchange with

and accountability to one another.[102] Langdon Gilkey argues that neither science nor

religion by itself can give us the deeper understanding of nature necessary for confronting

the ecological crisis.[103]

     As its name would suggest, *eschatological theology* focuses on the temporal end of

natural history. Theologically, this is understood as the consummation of all things

to/in/through God. Within this framework, the goal of environmental ethics is often

understood in terms of healing and redemption. The salvation that has long been

reserved for humans alone, despite some biblical understandings, is extended to include

the whole of creation. Perhaps the most well-known and influential of these

eschatological theologians is Jürgen Moltmann, who argues that Christ's resurrection

implies that nature is open to a new creation. The redemption of all life will be

manifested in the removal of conflict and suffering.[104]

     A movement with growing popularity is the mystically oriented *"green" spirituality*.

This term represents a wide range of positions that seek to unite ecological and spiritual

themes. It tends to focus more on the mystical, rather than the doctrinal, theological

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[102] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Towards a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith*, ed. Ted Peters (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

[103] Gilkey, *Nature, Reality, and the Sacred: The Nexus of Science and Religion*, 266.

[104] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

aspects of lived faith.[105] Sometimes called creation theology, there is an emphasis on the

ongoing nature of creation—reflecting the scientific theory of evolution—as the central

reality of the universe.[106] Ecological insights are blended with mystical themes in a radical

embrace of holism. In light of this, thinkers such as Matthew Fox suggest that concepts

like creation and salvation cannot be separated; redemption includes the entire creation.[107]

He ties these ideas into Christian faith by recovering themes of creation-centered

theologians and mystics, as well as Eastern theologies. Others like Thomas Berry embrace

the powerfully creative spirit of the universe.[108] Green spirituality tends to lean on a

biological egalitarianism that serves as a basis for environmental ethics. Recognizing the

oneness of humans and nature is a consciousness shift, and one that should lead people

toward greater ecological sensitivity.

1.3.2. Eco-justice

Because various ethics are paradigm-dependent for their context and meaning, it is

important to explore the kind of framework that can support systems of environmental

praxis that are both ecologically and theologically informed. The ecological aspect is

important because we are dealing with human interaction with the life processes of the

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[105] See e.g. Thomas Hughson, S.J., "Theology: Also (Green) Religious Experience Seeking Undertsanding," in Lieven Boeve, Hans Geybels, and Stijn Van den Bossche, eds. *Encountering Transcendence: Contributions to a Theology of Christian Religious Experience* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005): 93-119.

[106] Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 100-01.

[107] MacNichol, "Reclaiming, Revisioning, Recreating in Theo-Ecological Discourse," 71. See also Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Bear, 1983).

[108] Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought*, 102. See Thomas Mary Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books pbk. ed. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990).

planet. An ecological model of human agency must reflect the way that humans fit into those life processes. The theological aspect is essential in approaching the topic from a particularly Christian point of view.

Adding greatly to the complexity is the inseparability of ecological from socio-economic problems. Environmental degradation typically has gone hand in hand with social injustice, with the poor and powerless bearing the full weight of its impact. With this in mind, it is difficult to envisage a sufficient moral framework that is not in some sense broadly religious in nature; that is, having a sufficiently comprehensive picture of the cosmos and the place and role of humans within it.[109]

The concept of eco-justice has been presented as just such a paradigmatic framework by a number of Protestant theologians. At heart, eco-justice is "the moral claim that ecology and justice belong together, that there is an overarching moral imperative for human beings to pursue what is ecologically fitting and socially just, and to do so in such a way that each is supportive of the other."[110]

The concept also has the important function of bringing environmental discussion into explicitly theological parameters. Eco-justice not only intertwines the concerns of ecology and social justice, but intentionally integrates the perspective of Christian faith into the fabric of the framework. Ecology and justice are driven forward by Christian faith, and seen as integral parts of a Christian life. Each of the three aspects plays a role in

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[109] Herman E. Daly, John B. Cobb, and Clifford W. Cobb, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Norman J. Faramilli, "Ecological Responsibility and Economic Justice," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 11 (1970): 81-93; Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Rich Nations/Poor Nations and the Exploitation of the Earth," *Dialog* 13 (1974): 201-07; Yamano Shigeko, "Restoring Right Relationship Between Nature and People: Biblico-Theological Reflection II," *Tugon* 14 (1992): 379-81.

[110] Bakken, Engel, and Engel, *Ecology, Justice, and Christian Faith*, xvi.

providing a comprehensive framework for a model of human agency. Ecology contributes a sufficient scope: the whole of life processes. Justice contributes a trajectory governing human activity, a normative *telos* for human relationality. Theology in turn contributes the reason for following this trajectory, as well as brings to the table its own comprehensive picture of humanity and its place within the whole of creation.

"Justice" as a concept entails fairness as the touchstone of social relations. But it cannot function by itself as the foundation for ethics; justice needs to be balanced and fulfilled by love. Justice "divorced from love easily deteriorates into a mere calculation of interests...without love inspiring justice, societies lack the push and pull of care and compassion to move them to higher levels of fairness."[111] Justice, then, may be understood as love worked out in the social arena.

James Martin-Schramm suggests that justice as a theme is rooted in the whole of scripture. The biblical basis for justice begins with God's liberation of the oppressed slaves from Egypt (Exodus 22:21-24) and emphasizes a special sensitivity for the poor and the marginalized.[112] Jason Ripley argues that the biblical understanding of justice is inherently covenantal and relational:

> [W]hen used in forensic situations, righteousness and justice must be understood not as impartial decisions purely based on an abstract legal norm but, rather, as protective and restorative actions that fulfill communal demands and repair the community by helping those who have had their rights taken from them by others. This emphasis on social justice is the overwhelming refrain of nearly every prophet and is a repeated point in Wisdom literature as well, especially Proverbs.[113]

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[111] James B. Martin-Schramm and Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), 37.

[112] See also Jason Ripley, "Covenantal Concepts of Justice and Righteousness, and Catholic-Protestant Reconciliation: Theological Implications and Explorations," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38 (2001): 95-108.

[113] Ibid, 97.

Micah 6:8, for example, summarizes the law: to do justice, love kindness, and to walk

humbly with your God. In the New Testament, Jesus' emphasis on concern for the poor

and Paul's emphasis on equality intensify the dynamics of justice even as the theme itself

plays a peripheral role. In short, "justice in Christian thought is the social and ecological

expression of love."[114]

The general orientation to eco-justice is manifested in four specific norms:

sustainability, sufficiency, solidarity, and participation.[115] As we saw earlier, sustainability

refers to the long-range supply of sufficient resources to meet the basic needs of humans

and the biotic communities of which they are a part. This means establishing

environmentally fitting habits of living and working that enable ecosystems to flourish.

Sufficiency addresses the problem of overconsumption by repudiating wastefulness and

establishing a standard of organized sharing. All forms of life are entitled to share in the

goods of creation.

The norm of solidarity emphasizes the kinship and interdependence of all life-

forms. In displaying solidarity with people and other creatures, we reflect a deep respect

for creation. Finally, justice is made possible through the empowerment of participation.

Participation speaks to the inclusion of the weak and marginalized in decisions that affect

their well-being. When these four norms are operative, justice is lived.

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[114] Martin-Schramm and Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics*, 38.

[115] Ibid., 37-45. These norms are also established in Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans*, xxxvi.

Conclusion: Toward a theological solution

As we have seen, the problems that threaten our planet are severe, and the responses to these problems are diverse and varied. So what have churches and Christian theology to offer in response? I believe that both can make significant contributions by addressing the very heart of the problem: human behavior and the self-understanding that drives it. Ecological problems exist because humans exercise their free agency in environmentally destructive ways. More importantly, human cultures have a way of concretizing destructive patterns of behavior and unjust ways of being.[116] Ecological degradation and social justice will not be halted unless these patterns are changed. Furthermore, unless human cultures conform to ecologically respectful ways of being, they will always be susceptible to becoming vehicles of injustice.

Larry Rasmussen points out that faith contributes to the solution by envisioning possibilities of transformation.[117] Not only that, but the Church as a social institution has the potential to facilitate individual and community changes on a systemic scale. By placing a vision of transformed life-patterns within a faith context, the Church offers a powerful motivator for change. The ecological issues that face us demand a social and religious re-formation of human cultures.[118] They require new ways of thinking about human relationality, as well as our place in the world, and Christianity has the potential of carrying out this re-formation. In reframing an understanding of the human person in

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[116] Larry Rasmussen calls this a crisis of culture, rather than a crisis of the environment. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, 4. Also Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

[117] Ibid., 12.

[118] Ibid., 13.

relation to one another and to nature, the Church serves as a catalyst for eco-just praxis among its followers.[119]

Lisa Sideris offers an important warning, however.[120] A Christian vision of ecological transformation cannot take any form it pleases. An ecologically sensible Christian approach to environmental problems must take into account the full picture of what we know about the natural world. In particular, she is critical of ecotheologies—such as those presented by Ruether, McFague, Charles Birch and John Cobb, and Moltmann—that ignore in practice the implications of evolutionary theory. These views tend to give priority to a particular interpretation of ecology, one that is sometimes at odds with evolutionary perspectives.[121] Her insightful critique reminds us that any theological appropriation of scientific findings must not be done uncritically. An environmental ethic should be informed by both ecology and evolutionary biology, since they speak most directly to the physical and relational particularities that constitute the natural world.

On the other hand, Christian environmental ethics will be much more compelling to followers of Christ if they are able to find conceptual resources from within their own traditions. If a person of faith senses that what is being asked is already supported by one's own tradition, then that person is more likely to embrace a new vision of relating to the world. What is needed is faith taking on an earth-consciousness, an expanding of traditional values to encompass all of life. This in turn must lead to a transformation of

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[119] Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, xxxvii.

[120] See Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection*.

[121] Ibid., 12. She is highly critical of ecotheologies that emphasize redemption or new creation in which suffering and conflict are eliminated. This, she argues, ignores the realities of biological life (see chapters 1 and 5). Utopian visions of the absence of *all* suffering and death fail to respect the natural order of things.

the relational patterns of our cultures through eco-just praxis. Without this

transformation, the root of the problem will remain unchanged.

Ecotheologies have attempted to bring about social and cultural change in various

ways, including the endorsement of Stewardship theologies. Because the idea of

Stewardship is so dominant in Christian theology and ethics, I have sought first to locate it

on a spectrum of responses to environmental problems. In the following chapter, I will

continue to analyze theological solutions to environmental problems by exploring the

concept of Stewardship and identifying the central role that it plays in both the Church

and Christian theology.

CHAPTER TWO:
STEWARDSHIP IN THE CHURCH AND THEOLOGY

"Stewardship must be understood first as descriptive of the being—the very life—of God's people. Deeds of stewardship arise out of the being of the steward."[1]
--Douglas John Hall

While the idea of Stewardship is not unique to Christian conceptions of human ecological responsibility, it is a prominent theme in both church and theology. People of faith, churches, and theology have assimilated the broad outlines of thought on the ecological crisis. Stewardship is the central theme in Christian responses. Because I am writing as a theologian on behalf of a theological position directed particularly to a Christian public, this chapter will focus exclusively on Christian usage of the term. The first part of the chapter will survey the way that church denominations and traditions in the Unites States have employed the imagery of Stewardship in their official ecclesiological documents. The second part shifts to a more academic venue and traces the use of Stewardship in contemporary theology. Ecotheology thinks from and for the churches. Both demonstrate the wide-spread adoption of the theme. By bringing ideas of Stewardship to the fore, chapter two will isolate the key conceptual components that constitute the metaphor of the environmental Steward. These will later be subjected to critique. Exposition is for the sake of a critique and the constructive proposal which follows.

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[1] Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 242.

2.1. Stewardship in the Church

2.1.1. The Church and the Environment

A growing number of churches have recognized the environmental crisis and the role that human beings have played in bringing about current planetary conditions. There is also a growing awareness that the causes of the problems are spiritual as well as political. Churches have more than a social responsibility as good neighbors; environmental concern is an outflowing—or should be—of Christian faith, a central category of Christian discipleship. The root of the human source of the ecological crisis is, after all, human sinfulness, manifested in patterns of living that denigrate the planet and human dignity. If these patterns of sinfulness are to change, then churches have to revise their usual idea of conversion. Only then can they be major players in bringing about changes—at least in the West—in how humans relate to the natural world.

One way churches may do this is through reprioritizing the norms of acceptable behavior. Do this, don't do that. In the realm of environmental ethics, it may be expressed in such directives as to recycle and reduce consumption. While these kinds of directives may be initially helpful, many churches recognize that they do not address the foundations of the problem: human sinfulness and the way it manifests in environmental degradation.

Conversion and changing patterns of behavior, then, become a matter of re-imagining the nature of the human in the world. It could be argued that specific patterns of sinfulness derive from a specific, flawed understanding of the relation of the self to others, of the place one holds in the social order. If I act greedily by habit, I might justify

this by believing that it is acceptable to acquire without limit, or that self-satisfaction is of a higher priority than the welfare of others.

Many—perhaps most—people do not consciously reflect upon their place in the world or in the social sphere. They just live, moving through life driven by varied uncritical aims or purposes. The Church can serve a great purpose by helping the members of their community to align their life-goals within a common vision of the place and destiny of humanity. By providing a comprehensive picture of what it means to be a human being, they give believers a set of categories by which they can interpret their lives. The life of a person of faith will look like this or that with respect to one's relationship with God, with other people, with society, etc. With regards to the environment, this will entail a vision of what it means to be a human being in the world: how humans are related to the environment and what responsibility they have toward it.

One dominant image emerges in official and popular church statements: human beings are stewards of the planet.[2] The Earth is depicted as the property of God, and we are its stewards, responsible for managing the property while we live on it. Environmental problems have come about as a result of poor management; our sin has been "unfaithfulness as Stewards" (ELCA).[3] The way to rectify matters is to return to our proper role of earth-keeping. By faithfully engaging in our stewarding responsibilities, we may

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[2] See for example United Methodist Church, "Environmental Stewardship," in *General Board of Church and Society*, adopted 1984, http://www.umc-gbcs.org/issues/resolutions.php?resolutionid=23 (accessed June 18, 2003), and American Baptist Churches, USA, "Policy Statement on Ecology: an Ecological Situational Analysis," in *Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty*, adopted June 1989, http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/environment/theology/baptist.html (accessed October 10, 2003).

[3] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice," adopted August 28, 1993 by the third Churchwide Assembly at Kansas City, MO, in *Division for Church and Society,* http://www.elca.org/dcs/environment.pf.html (accessed September 20, 2002).

work to overcome the damage that has been done, to serve as partners with God in healing the Earth. In "becoming better Stewards" (RCA),[4] we can avoid the destructive tendencies of our Christian past and move forward in carrying out our role as preservers and sustainers of Creation.

2.1.2. Etymology of Stewardship

"Steward" is the English term used to translate several Hebrew and Greek social roles, all roughly equivalent. More recently in the history of language, "steward" is derived from the 11th Century English *stigweard*. The compound word, from *stig* ("house" or part of a house, from which we also get "sty") and *weard* ("ward" or "keeper"), together already have the connotation of the manager of the household when it appears in the literature of the time.[5]

Most often in the Old Testament the word translated is *haishasher al* ("man who is over") or *asher al bayit* ("who is over a house"), as seen in Genesis 43 and 44. Joseph, for instance, serves as Potiphar's steward, and in turn is served by stewards once he is governor in Egypt. Sometimes *benmesheq* ("son of acquisition," i.e. Gen. 15:2) is used or even *sar*("prince, head, chief, captain," i.e. 1 Chron. 28:1) to designate these roles.[6] Interestingly, the English "steward" does not translate any term from the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2.

In the New Testament, the Greek *epitropos* (Luke 8:3; Gal 4:2) sometimes refers to the head servant of a household. The most common term, however, is *oikonomos*. The

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[4] Reformed Church of America, "Care for the Earth: Theology and Practice," adopted 1982, http://www.nccecojustice.org/RCA%20Land.pdf (accessed April 15, 2006).

[5] Ibid., 40.

[6] Ibid., 41.

roots of this word are *oikos* ("household") and *nomos*("[to put in] order"), or "one who orders a household." Closely related to *oikonomos* is the abstraction *oikonomia*, usually translated as "stewardship," though it is also the root of our English "economics." Another related cognate, *oikumene*, is the source of the English "ecumenics."[7] At the heart of all of these is the root word *oikos*. As the term is metaphorically extended in the New Testament to include the whole world, so too are its cognates. If the world is God's household, then we are called metaphorically to be managers in that household. It is not surprising then to recognize that *oikos* also forms the etymological root of our English "ecology." Linguistically, then, we see a connection between stewardship, economics, and ecology.[8]

2.1.3. Stewardship in Official Church Documents

No fewer than eight of the largest Protestant traditions reference the idea of environmental Stewardship in their official denominational statements.[9] This reflects a widespread adoption of the metaphor to depict human responsibility in the natural world. The image is also common in the literature of both Roman Catholicism and Eastern

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[7] Ibid.

[8] UMC, "Environmental Stewardship."

[9] UMC, "Environmental Stewardship;" American Baptist Churches, USA, "Policy Statement on Ecology;" ELCA, "Caring for Creation;" RCA, "Care for the Earth;" Episcopal Church, "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation," Report to the 1997 General Convention, from the Executive Council, in *Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty*, http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/enviornment/theology/episcopal.html (accessed October 10, 2003); Wesleyan Church, "The Environment," in *Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty*, http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/environment/theology/wesleyan.html (accessed October 10, 2003); Presbyterian Church, USA, "Call to Restore the Creation," 202nd General Assembly (1990), in *Social Justice PC(USA)*, http://www.pcusa.org/environment/restore.htm (accessed February 24, 2006); and Evangelical Climate Initiative, "Climate Change: an Evangelical Call to Action," http://www.christiansandclimate.org/statement (accessed March 15, 2006).

Orthodoxy, serving as further evidence that the concept of Stewardship enjoys wide and common usage in Christian communities.[10]

In the following section I incorporate lengthy quotes from several predominant Protestant denominations on the concept of environmental Stewardship and identify how each sees it. I do this to demonstrate just how entrenched and influential the metaphor is in the consciousness of modern churches. Documenting the presence of Stewardship themes in the church sets the stage for a subsequent critique and alternative. The second section of this chapter traces the scholarly development of Stewardship themes in Protestant theology. The breadth and coherence of the statements, plus the fact that each church text represents a community, and not only the ideas of an individual, compel extensive quotation.

American Baptist. Of all the documents considered here, the American Baptist statement has one of the most complete visions of human ecological responsibility. In a very well developed statement, the American Baptist Church juxtaposes Christian responsibility to the environment against the realities of an Earth in crisis. Because these problems—such as a thinning ozone layer, the "greenhouse effect," a rise in sea level, deforestation, and population explosion—are the result of sinful human activities, believers have a responsibility to change their complicity with those activities.

> Christians believe that the whole creation is God's handiwork and belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). The creation has value in itself because God created and values it

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[10] See for example: Orthodox Churches of America, "Speeches of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew," at the Environmental Symposium, Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, Santa Barbara, CA, November 8, 1997, in *Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty*, http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/environment/theology/orthadox.html (accessed October 4, 2002); and United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, "Renewing the Earth: an Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching," A Pastoral Statement of the United States Catholic Conference, November 14, 1991, in *Social Development and World Peace*, http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.htm (accessed April 28, 2004).

(Proverbs 8:29-31). God delights in the creation and desires its wholeness and well-being.

God created the earth, affirmed that it was good, and established an everlasting covenant with humanity to take responsibility for the whole of creation. God declares all of creation good. Our proper perspective on all activity on the earth flows directly from our affirmation of God as Creator.

The earth belongs to God, as affirmed in Psalm 24:1. We are caretakers or stewards. Thus we are each related to God as one appointed to take care of someone else's possessions entrusted to us-our life, our home, the earth. The vast resources of the earth can provide for all its inhabitants, or they can be greedily swallowed up or poisoned by a few without regard for the impact of their actions.

The best understanding of the Biblical attitude of humanity's relationship with the Creation can be gained by a study of the Greek words which are the foundation of the New Testament. The word "stewardship" comes from the Greek words for house and management. The Greek word which is commonly translated "stewardship" is the root word for economics and ecology. The literal translation of steward is manager of the household. As such, we are all called to be managers of God's household, the earth and all that is in it.

Our responsibility as stewards is one of the most basic relationships we have with God. It implies a great degree of caring for God's creation and all God's creatures. The right relationship is embodied in the everlasting covenant to which Isaiah refers. There can be no justice without right relationships of creatures with one another and with all of creation. Eco-justice is the vision of the garden in Genesis—the realm and the reality of right relationship.[11]

To describe this responsibility, the document presents the imagery of the Earth as God's property. As Creator, God is the "owner" of everything that exists; it belongs to Him. Humans serve as His caretakers or stewards, entrusted with the responsibility to care for the Earth. We are responsible for the upkeep of God's property, and we are accountable to Him for it.

The document goes on to explain further that this responsibility is more than simply a particular role, but it is rather a basic characteristic of our relationship to the Creator. Not only do we take care of the Earth, but in doing so we are to relate to God as those who are called to serve responsibly. In addition, it is the responsibility of the

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[11] American Baptist Churches, USA, "Policy Statement on Ecology: an Ecological Situational Analysis."

believer to teach Stewardship as an aspect of discipleship. The redemption of the person

must also include learning how we participate, with God, in the redemption of the planet.

> The image of God within us makes it possible for people to be aware and responsive to God's self-revelation in the creation. We have the gift of God which enables us to perceive and reflect upon the life within us and around us. The distinctive human vocation is to bring creation's beauty and order to consciousness and to express God's image within us by caring for the creation.
> In the ability God has given us to make choices also lies inherent danger. We can choose to disobey, to be irresponsible, to disrupt and disturb the peaceable relationship of creature and creation. We can choose to use nature's resources only for what we perceive is our own immediate interest. Such action is sin. It is a violation of the basic covenant wherein we are called to stewardship. It is an unfaithful refusal of the responsibility entrusted to us. Often we tend to think of sin in terms of individual actions. Yet decisions and actions which we make as groups, communities and societies constitute corporate sin. These corporate decisions and actions reflect values and interests which conflict with the vision of shalom and eco-justice consistent with created order. Our task is to discern the conflict and to choose ways of living which build an eco-just community and world.[12]

Here the imagery of Stewardship has been expanded into a full-fledged model of

human being; caretaking is not just something we do, it is who we are, characteristic of

our relationship to God. The model also spells out a clear-cut goal of Stewardship:

sustainability. Humans, as stewards, are to "relate to nature in ways that sustain life on

the planet, provide for the essential material and physical needs of all humankind, and

increase justice and well-being for all life in a peaceful world."[13]

United Methodist Church (UMC). The UMC has several strong statements of

environmental concern, but two deal with the issues of Stewardship and sustainability,

respectively. In a document entitled "Environmental Stewardship," a strong and

developed image of the Christian as steward of God's household is presented. The whole

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

earth is God's household, and humans—especially Christians—have a responsibility to

care for it.

> In the Bible, a steward is one given responsibility for what belongs to another. The Greek word we translate as steward is *oikonomos*, one who cares for the household or acts as its trustee. The word *oikos*, meaning household, is used to describe the world as God's household. Christians, then, are to be stewards of the whole household (creation) of God...The Old Testament relates these concepts in the vision as shalom...In the Old Testament, shalom is used to characterize the wholeness of a faithful life lived in relationship to God. Shalom is best understood when we experience wholeness and harmony as human beings with God, with others, and with creation itself. The task of the steward is to seek shalom.
> *Stewards of God's Creation.*
> The concept of stewardship is first introduced in the Creation story. In Genesis 1:26, the Bible affirms that every person is created in God's image. But this gift brings with it a unique responsibility. Being created in God's image brings with it the responsibility to care for God's creation....To have dominion over the earth is a trusteeship, a sign that God cares for creation and has entrusted it to our stewardship....That all should participate in creation's goodness is a fundamental of stewardship.
> ...Stewardship has to do with how we bring all of the resources at our disposal into efficient use in our participation in the saving activity of God. Environmental stewardship is one part of our work as God's stewards. As stewards of the natural environment, we are called to preserve and restore the very air, water, and land on which life depends.[14]

While the document links our Stewardship role with the Creation narrative of

Genesis 1, it also poses a deeper connecting theme upon which Stewardship is built. The

Hebraic vision of *shalom* (translated as "peace" or "wholeness") serves as the foundational

motif in God's relation to the world. Even though sin has disrupted God's *shalom*, He has

provided a path of redemption, and, as God's stewards, humans have a part to play in it.

"Stewardship, then, is to become involved wherever wholeness is lacking and to work in

harmony with God's saving activity to reconcile, to reunite, to heal, to make whole."[15]

Environmental Stewardship forms "one part of our work as God's stewards,"

demonstrating that stewardship forms a structural model for all of human responsibility.

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[14] UMC, "Environmental Stewardship."

[15] Ibid.

In the context of the environment, Creation can be healed "with more obedient living as stewards of the earth."[16]

A related document, "Environmental Justice for a Sustainable Future," does not give attention to the concept of "stewardship" directly, though it deals with many of the same concerns.

> *Principles for a Sustainable Future*
> The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church remind us that "all creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it" (¶ 160). Development must be centered in the concept of sustainability as defined by the World Commission of Environment and Development: "to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The Christian understanding of sustainability encompasses this concept. Fundamental to our call as faithful witnesses is the meeting of human needs within the capacity of ecosystems. This ensures the security of creation and a just relationship between all people. Sustainable development, therefore, looks toward a healthy future in three vital areas: the social community, the economy, and the environment].[17]

Utilizing the vision of *shalom* as a unifying motif, the document encourages Christians to "a new lifestyle rooted in justice and peace" and calls them to "establish new priorities" as a means of overcoming environmental and social problems.[18] The statement makes a strong connection between environmental problems and social injustices, and it argues that following the guidance of a vision of *shalom* can bring about a sustainable future for the planet. Furthermore, the goal of discipleship in this realm is the "conversion to sustainable practices"[19] that represents a fundamental shift in the way that believers live their lives.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] UMC, "Environmental Justice for a Sustainable Future," in *General Board of Church and Society*, adopted 1992, http://www.umc-gbcs.org/issues/resolutions.php?resolutionid=17 (accessed June 18, 2003).

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The ELCA document "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice" emphasizes early on the relatedness of humanity to the rest of Creation:

> *Our Place in Creation*
> Humanity is intimately related to the rest of creation...
>   Humans, in service to God, have special roles on behalf of the whole of creation. Made in the image of God, we are called to care for the earth as God cares for the earth. God's command to have dominion and subdue the earth is not a license to dominate and exploit. Human dominion (Gen 1:28; Psa 8), a special responsibility, should reflect God's way of ruling as a shepherd king who takes the form of a servant (Phil 2:7), wearing a crown of thorns.
>   According to Gen 2:15, our role within creation is to serve and to keep God's garden, the earth. "To serve," often translated "to till," invites us again to envision ourselves as servants, while "to keep" invites us to take care of the earth as God keeps and cares for us (Num 6:24-26).
>   ...We are to love the earth as God loves us.
>   We are called to live according to God's wisdom in creation (Prov 8), which brings together God's truth and goodness...
>   Such caring, serving, keeping, loving, and living by wisdom sum up what is meant by acting as God's stewards of the earth. God's gift of responsibility for the earth dignifies humanity without debasing the rest of creation. We depend upon God, who places us in a web of life with one another and with all creation.[20]

This intimate connection is established as the context for our service to God, in that God has given humans special roles "on behalf of the whole of creation." Our role is "to serve and to keep God's garden, the earth" and even "love the earth as God loves us." A clearly definable model of human being is not presented here, though an emphasis on service is apparent. However, sin has contributed to the disruption of nature, which is a judgment on our "unfaithfulness as stewards." Stewardship as a consistent theme is not explicitly developed, although it may be deduced that Stewardship is the *way* humans are to care for and serve the planet.[21]

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[20] ELCA, "Caring for Creation."

[21] While it is true that the term "stewardship" is used rarely in this ELCA document, its presence is alluded to in the Church's programming. For instance, the Second Sunday after Pentecost is designated Stewardship of Creation Sunday. In addition, the ELCA maintains a

The awareness of human connectedness to Creation yields a call to justice:

> Caring, serving, keeping, loving, and living by wisdom--these translate into justice in political, economic, social, and environmental relationships. Justice in these relationships means honoring the integrity of creation, and striving for fairness within the human family.
>
> It is in hope of God's promised fulfillment that we hear the call to justice; it is in hope that we take action. When we act interdependently and in solidarity with creation, we do justice. We serve and keep the earth, trusting its bounty can be sufficient for all, and sustainable.[22]

Justice in this framework is carried out through the principles of participation, solidarity, sufficiency, and sustainability. Each theme is intended to be a guide for the believing community to a proper relationship with the environment.

Reformed Church of America (RCA). One of the primary RCA documents on the environment utilizes a "land" motif, borrowing from Hebraic imagery, to illuminate a way of relating to the earth.

> A central theme of the Old Testament is God's promised gift of land. Through the experience of the people of Israel with the land, we are taught much about the promise and the peril of humanity's relationship to God's creation. Land is the domain of the Lord, entrusted to the people not because of their power but because of God's faithfulness to them.
>
> Most of the kings of Israel tried to accumulate land by grasping and controlling it. The human temptation is to cling to land, trying to manage it, rule over it, and own it. The prophets warned against the seductive potential of land and of the human tendency to treat land as one's own domain, rather than as a gift from the Lord to be cherished and held only with the *humility of a steward*.[23]

The land (earth) is depicted as a conditional gift; it could be blessed or taken away, depending on the state of Israel's obedience and faithfulness to God. This relationship is then presented as a parallel of our current situation: we are to treat the land as a gift from God.

Department for Environmental Stewardship within the Division for Church in Society as a structure for educating Church members.

[22] ELCA, "Caring for Creation."

[23] RCA, "Care for the Earth."

As North American Christians, what can we do to become better *stewards* of the land for which we share responsibility? How can we best witness to the biblical conviction that "the earth is the Lord's and not our own"'?

One major concern is that we are losing our inheritance, the farmlands of the United States and Canada. According to the federal government's National Agricultural Lands Study completed in early 1981, the United States is losing agricultural land at the rate of three million acres per year....

...Farmlands across North America are being converted into housing developments and shopping centers, and are being used in other non-agricultural ways...

...We are not only losing land as a resource for food: we are also losing our relationship to the land as its *caretakers* and *stewards*. Increasingly land is becoming a mere commodity to be bought and sold, rather than a treasure to be cared for and used justly to meet the needs of all God's beloved children...Many small and moderate sized farms are being bought out and consolidated into larger and larger farms...As larger, well established farmers and non-farming investors compete for the limited amount of land available, land prices rise and prospective farmers are priced out of the market.[24]

"Stewardship" imagery is again brought in to characterize how humans are to treat the land. We are to "become better stewards" lest we completely lose our "relationship to the land as its caretakers and stewards." Church members are called to "be mindful of their responsibilities as stewards of God's earth" and to be advocates for the way our society uses the land.[25]

Episcopal. The Episcopal Church has incorporated the concept of Stewardship as part of its Ministry structure, developing an Environmental Stewardship Team commissioned to address ecological issues. This was done in response to the call of the World Council of Churches 1991 Convocation of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation "for building a culture that lives in harmony with Creation's integrity."[26] The

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[24] RCA, "Care for the Earth," emphasis added.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Episcopal Church, "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation." Report to the 1997 General Convention, from the Executive Council, in *Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty*, http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/enviornment/theology/episcopal.html (accessed October 10, 2003).

purpose of the Team is to educate congregational members on environmental issues, as

well as help develop denominational goals and resolutions for environmental living. Basic

theological attitudes of the denomination toward environmental issues are evident in the

following section:

> For the past two triennia, the Episcopal Church, through the work of the *Environmental Stewardship Committee*, has become exemplary in moving toward an understanding of the great need to preserve and nurture Creation...
> Our church has begun to live into the call of the World Council of Churches 1991 Convocation on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation "for building a culture that lives in harmony with Creation's integrity." We are deepening our biblical understanding and perspective with regard to Creation and our relationship to the wisdom of the ages. However, the liturgy of the Episcopal Church must come to reflect and teach our interconnection to God through loving relationships with all things. In Romans 1:20, it is declared that the invisible things of God, even in his eternal power and Godhead, can be clearly seen and understood in Creation.[27]

Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches of America. While the documents

considered have been primarily from Protestant traditions, the idea of Stewardship can

also be found in the literature of both Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. For

example, at a 1997 Environmental Symposium, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

reaffirmed the long standing Orthodox "commitment to healing the environment."

> [Through various programs] we have sought to discover the measures that may be implemented by Orthodox Christians worldwide, as leaders desiring to contribute to the solution of this global problem. We believe that through our particular and unique liturgical and ascetic ethos, Orthodox Spirituality may provide significant moral and ethical direction toward a new generation of awareness about the planet.
> We believe that Orthodox liturgy and life hold tangible answers to the ultimate questions concerning salvation from corruptibility and death...
> We envision a new awareness that is not mere philosophical posturing, but a tangible experience of a mystical nature....As individuals, we live not only in vertical relationships to God, and horizontal relationships to one another, but also in a complex web of relationships that extend throughout our lives, our cultures and the material world. Human beings and the environment form a seamless garment of existence; a complex fabric that we believe is fashioned by God.
> ...Moreover, there is also an ascetic element in our responsibility toward God's creation. This asceticism requires from us a voluntary restraint, in order for us to

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[27] Ibid.

> live in harmony with our environment. Asceticism offers practical examples of conservation...
>
> Asceticism is not a flight from society and the world, but a communal attitude of mind and way of life that leads to the respectful use, and not the abuse of material goods.[28]

This task of healing the environment, he observed, calls for a "new awareness that is not mere philosophical posturing, but a tangible experience of a mystical nature."[29] This awareness can be brought about through various means, one of which is to remember that "we are called to *bestewards*, and reflections of God's love by example."[30] At the core of an Orthodox ecological ethic is the affirmation that God has appointed humanity as stewards of creation.

> We are urging a different and, we believe, a more satisfactory ecological ethic. This ethic is shared with many of the religious traditions represented here. All of us hold the earth to be the creation of God, where He placed the newly created human "in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to guard it" (Genesis 2:15). *He imposed on humanity a stewardship role in relationship to the earth*. How we treat the earth and all of creation defines the relationship that each of us has with God.[31]

Likewise, in a 1991 Pastoral Statement, the Unites States Catholic Bishops sought to "explore the links between concern for the person and for the earth, between natural ecology and social ecology."[32] Recognizing a link between social injustice and environmental degradation, one of the causes is identified as an abuse of dominion.

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[28] Orthodox Churches of America, "Speeches of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew" at the Environmental Symposium, Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, Santa Barbara, CA, November 8, 1997, in *Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty*, http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/environment/theology/orthadox.html (accessed October 4, 2002).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., emphasis added.

[31] Ibid., emphasis added.

[32] United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, "Renewing the Earth," A Pastoral Statement of the United States Catholic Conference, November 14, 1991, in *Social Development and World Peace*, http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.htm (accessed April 28, 2004).

But in most countries today, including our own, it is the poor and the powerless who most directly bear the burden of current environmental carelessness. Their lands and neighborhoods are more likely to be polluted or to host toxic waste dumps, their water to be undrinkable, their children to be harmed. Too often, the structure of sacrifice involved in environmental remedies seems to exact a high price from the poor and from workers. Small farmers, industrial workers, lumberjacks, watermen, rubber-tappers, for example, shoulder much of the weight of economic adjustment. Caught in a spiral of poverty and environmental degradation, poor people suffer acutely from the loss of soil fertility, pollution of rivers and urban streets, and the destruction of forest resources. Overcrowding and unequal land distribution often force them to overwork the soil, clear the forests, or migrate to marginal land.[33]

The response is a reminder that:

Nature is not, in Catholic teaching, merely a field to exploit at will or a museum piece to be preserved at all costs. We are not gods, but *stewards* of the earth.[34]

The image of Stewardship here, as in other documents, is utilized to talk about the way

humans interact with nature, and also about the way we are to understand God's role in

the ongoing activity of creation.

The whole universe is God's dwelling. Earth, a very small, uniquely blessed corner of that universe, gifted with unique natural blessings, is humanity's home, and humans are never so much at home as when God dwells with them. In the beginning, the first man and woman walked with God in the cool of the day. Throughout history, people have continued to meet the Creator on mountaintops, in vast deserts, and alongside waterfalls and gently flowing springs. In storms and earthquakes, they found expressions of divine power. In the cycle of the seasons and the courses of the stars, they have discerned signs of God's fidelity and wisdom...
...Reverence for the Creator present and active in nature, moreover, may serve as ground for environmental responsibility...It is to the Creator of the universe, then, that we are accountable for what we do or fail to do to preserve and care for the earth and all its creatures. For "[t]he LORD'S are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it" (Ps 24:1). Dwelling in the presence of God, we begin to experience ourselves as part of creation, as *stewards* within it, not separate from it. As faithful *stewards*, fullness of life comes from living responsibly within God's creation.[35]

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., emphasis added.

[35] Ibid.

The recognition of our role in nature, given by God, and in light of growing ecological problems, leads us to the need for a new kind of conversion.

> [Environmental issues] are matters of powerful urgency and major consequence. They constitute an exceptional call to conversion. As individuals, as institutions, as a people we need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn.[36]

Such a conversion or change of heart is the necessary condition of facilitating any real change in the attitudes and behavior that are the source of environmental problems.[37]

Other Examples. Many other documents reference the idea of Stewardship without explicitly developing a model of Stewardship. For instance, a brief statement on the environment by the Wesleyan Church notes that:

> We believe that even as God's care extends beyond humans to include other objects of His creation, the Christian's fulfillment of the "take dominion" charge includes active concern for protection of the environment.
> We believe that we do have responsibilities to the non-human organisms that share God's earth with us. We also believe that we have responsibilities to humans of future generations, should there be such. We recognize that some environmental problems are difficult, perhaps even impossible to solve, but note that sin, in general, has no human solution, either, but that does not excuse us from trying to fight it in various ways. There are examples of environmental awareness having had positive results.
> There should be more positive results. We believe that bringing them about is part of our mission. We call on Wesleyans, and others who will listen, to do the following:
> Realize that the earth, as God created it, was good, but that it is less good as a result of human activity.
> Accept our responsibility, individually and collectively, as *stewards* of the environment...[38]

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[36] Ibid.

[37] See also Pope John Paul II, "The Ecological Crisis: a Common Responsibility," Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990, in *Land: a Call to Stewardship*, http://www.ncrlc.com/ecological_crisis.html (accessed April 28, 2006). Here, the Pope indicates that the ecological crisis is a moral problem requiring a change in the way humans relate to the natural world. Humans are called to align their management of nature with the Creator's plan.

[38] Wesleyan Church, "The Environment," in *Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty*, http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/environment/theology/wesleyan.html (accessed October 10, 2003), emphasis added.

This is presented as part of our duty to take dominion and protect God's Creation.

Likewise, the Presbyterian Church, USA urges its members to heed God's call to care for the earth. In doing so, human beings are required to practice Earth-keeping.

> Earth-keeping today means insisting on sustainability—the ongoing capacity of natural and social systems to thrive together—which requires human beings to practice wise, humble, responsible *stewardship*, after the model of servanthood that we have in Jesus.[39]

A recent initiative by leading Evangelical church leaders calls for curbing human impact on the environment as an expression of loving one's neighbors, recognizing the role that Western consumption has played in manifestations of social injustice and environmental degradation around the world.

> Love of God, love of neighbor...are more than enough reason for evangelical Christians to respond to the climate change problem with moral passion and concrete action. [40]

Because these problems are related to human action, Christians are reminded that:

> when God made humanity he commissioned us to exercise *stewardship* over the earth and its creatures. Climate change is the latest evidence of our failure to exercise proper stewardship, and constitutes a critical opportunity for us to do better (Gen. 1:26-28).[41]

Human agency in general, and improper Stewardship in particular, have created the conditions for injustice. It is our responsibility to reverse those trends and re-establish the proper human role in nature.

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[39] Presbyterian Church, USA, "Call to Restore the Creation," 202nd General Assembly (1990), in *Social Justice PC(USA)*, http://www.pcusa.org/environment/restore.htm (accessed February 24, 2006), emphasis added.

[40] Evangelical Climate Initiative, "Climate Change: an Evangelical Call to Action."

[41] Ibid., emphasis added.

2.1.4. Document Analysis

What is clear in all of these accounts is that humans have a unique relationship and responsibility to all things non-human. For most, the image of the Steward serves as a way of characterizing this. Whether directly or indirectly, each document in some way affirms that humans *are* stewards. We may be poor or unfaithful stewards—and thus responsible for the mismanagement of God's property—but we are stewards nonetheless. Some documents develop the concept of Stewardship into fairly sophisticated anthropological models (i.e. American Baptist, UMC), while others operate with an undeveloped assumption. That the language of Stewardship is common currency in all of them reflects the pervasive and dominant place that the concept has in contemporary religious thought. Indeed, there are very few other images employed to characterize human responsibility to the natural world in the literature of the Christian churches.

2.2. Stewardship Theologies

The concept of Stewardship has also received systematic treatment by a number of theologians. It has been frequently adopted by environmentally-focused projects as a unifying theme in a Christian ecological ethic. The following section looks at the way that four leading academicians present environmental Stewardship in their theological writings.[42] The first three—Bruce Reichenbach, Calvin DeWitt, and Lawrence Osborn—

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[42] The authors considered here are representative and not exhaustive. Other examples include Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1970); Peter De Vos, *Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991); David N. Field, "Stewards of Shalom: Toward a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic," *Qarterly Review* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 383-396; John N. Black, *The Dominion of Man: the Search for Ecological Responsibility* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1970); Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (San Francisco: North

represent a more typical range of perspectives, and they provide a contrast to Douglas

John Hall, whom I will touch upon last. His work on the topic is extensive and

conceptually rich, representing one of the most developed treatments of the theme.

Reichenbach ("dominion"), DeWitt ("creation care"), and Osborn ("Covenant

responsibility") display some of the varied emphases in the larger academic discussion,

and reflect mainline and evangelical scholarship. Each has treated the topic at book-

length and seeks to build bridges. Reichenbach and DeWitt seek reconcile Christian

perspectives with insights from the natural sciences, including ecology. Osborn desires to

close the gap between Christian and secular environmental ethics.

2.2.1. Bruce Reichenbach

Bruce Reichenbach sees the development of a Christian Ethic of Stewardship as a

paradigm capable of addressing, from a Christian perspective, moral issues that arise in

the biological sciences.[43] Stewardship for him is a model of ethics, rooted in the Creation

narratives of Genesis 1 and 2, and reflective of the character of God's relationship to

humanity.

From the Creation narratives, Reichenbach derives three divine injunctions for

humanity: fill the earth, rule over the earth, and tend the earth. The Steward motif comes

from linking these injunctions with the reference to the creation of humans in the image

and likeness of God. Noting that the idea of an image in the narrative's Near Eastern

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Point Press, 1981); Mary Evelyn Jegen and Bruno V. Manno, eds. *The Earth is the Lord's: Essays on Stewardship* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); T. A. Kantonen, *A Theology for Christian Stewardship* (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1956); Theodore S. Horvath, *Focus on our Identity as Stewards* (New York: United Church of Christ Stewardship Council, 1987).

[43] Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Boulders, Native Prairie and a Theistic Stewardship Ethic," *Worldviews* 7 (2003): 95ff.

context concentrates on an image's function, the idea of humans as *imago Dei* is

concerned primarily with their functionality, as opposed to particular traits or structures

in the human body or human nature. Stewardship, then, is the *form* of the function of

human beings. As God's representatives in His realm, we have specific responsibilities to

carry out, and our being created in His image is the source of our authority to carry out

those responsibilities.[44] By linking Stewardship with the *imago Dei*, Reichenbach's model

is no longer just a model of ethics but adds to it an anthropological dimension. It is also

an image of being human.

The first injunction, to fill the earth, is quickly identified as a qualitative, rather

than quantitative, measure. The command is not so much about the multiplication of the

human population but the obligation to change Creation for the better.[45] The scope of

this obligation is noteworthy:

> The environment should be tamed and transformed to be more inhabitable and
> hospitable: rivers should be dammed to prevent life-threatening floods and to
> generate electricity; mountains should be moved to facilitate transportation; lakes
> should be created to provide adequate water resources; forests should be harvested
> to furnish lumber for human habitations and daily use. The Green Revolution is
> legitimate because it prevents malnutrition and starvation. It would seem, then,
> that we are obligated to change that which either does not benefit us or has a
> potential to harm us, in order to make our planet a better place for us to live.[46]

In the second injunction to rule over or have dominion, Reichenbach argues that the

functionality of being created in the image of God is laid out. Dominion is the

relationship that we are to have over all other created things. Dominion here is not an

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[44] Bruce R. Reichenbach and V. Elving Anderson, *On Behalf of God: A Christian Ethic for Biology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 48-49.

[45] Ibid., 51. Reichenbach allows that at one time an injunction to populate the land would have been important, but that current population pressures suggest the advantage of an alternative interpretation.

[46] Ibid., 57.

unbridled domination, but it rather takes the form of a servant, of acting with responsibilities and the authority to carry them out.[47]

The final injunction to tend the garden, expressed in the second Creation narrative, is the hermeneutical key to understanding all three. In effect it sets limits on the first two commands, preventing the destructive exercise of their prescriptions.[48] Looking at all three commands, the first can be seen as an *obligation* to change for the better; the second as setting forth the *extent* of human power; and the third as guiding the *way* our power is to be used.[49] Reichenbach makes it clear that "the issue is not so much whether we use nature, but *why* and *how* we use it."[50] For Reichenbach, then, Stewardship is the form that our dominion takes in the world. We are responsible to God for carrying out His purposes on the planet, and that includes an obligation to care for the earth—even to the point of changing it for the better.

2.2.2. Calvin DeWitt

Environmental scientist Calvin DeWitt offers one of the most coherent, thoughtful Evangelical perspectives on environmental ethics. Emphasizing the primacy of Scripture, he notes that the Evangelical conviction and perspective that God owns all things serves as the model for understanding our own relation to the world. This model "defines our

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[47] Ibid., 54.

[48] Reichenbach, "Boulders, Native Prairie and a Theistic Stewardship Ethic," 97.

[49] Reichenbach, *On Behalf of God*, 56.

[50] Reichenbach, "Boulders, Native Prairie and a Theistic Stewardship Ethic," 106.

relationship to the world as one of stewardship, or caring for something (the creation) on behalf of another (God)."[51]

Noting the linguistic connection between "ecology" and "economy," DeWitt argues that one of our tasks is to align the economy of humanity with the economy of God. Here "economy" has the meaning of a way of governing, so that "God's economy" refers to the way that God runs the world, His plan or system of governing it. The concept of Stewardship (from *oikonomia*, meaning "management of the household") circumscribes the relationship between human economies and God's economy of Creation.[52] The household in question is the cosmos, understood as the household of life. The human sphere is part of this larger household, and our relationship to it is described by *oikonomia*. "Stewardship is our use and caring for the household on behalf of the Creator. Thus, our economy is necessarily part of God's economy."[53]

DeWitt goes on to argue that this relationship obliges Christians to live a certain way, and that Jesus Christ modeled this way. Christ then becomes the hermeneutical lens for interpreting the "dominion" passages of scripture, particularly the Creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2. A Christian understanding of our relationship to the world must be informed by embracing the attitude and mind of Christ (Philippians 2:1-10). Dominion, then, must be understood and exercised in terms of service, and this service is understood as a way of life.[54]

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[51] Calvin B. DeWitt, *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 30.

[52] Ibid., 33.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., 47.

This qualification is necessary because of the range of possible meanings for "dominion." DeWitt identifies two poles of the spectrum: dominion as domination and dominion as stewardship.[55] The former, which operates on behalf of oneself, is forbidden. The latter, which operates on behalf of Creation, follows the pattern of other-centered relationality modeled by Christ. In fact, Genesis 1-11 can be seen as a rejection of the human tendency to domination, in favor of a calling to Stewardship.[56] DeWitt believes this calling to care for Creation on God's behalf, understood as a way of life, can guide Christians in addressing the source of ecological problems, and not just attend to their symptoms.

2.2.3. Lawrence Osborn

Lawrence Osborn is concerned with how Christianity can relate to secular Environmentalist movements.[57] In his view, part of the problem that concerned Christians face is the general lack of an environmentally sound theology of nature. Forced to adopt secular ethical systems as the foundation of their environmentalism, Green-minded Christians run the risk of remaining at the periphery of social action. Yet Osborn sees a clear mandate for environmental concern in Scripture and seeks to provide a theologically informed ethical system that can serve as the foundation for a Christian environmental ethic. Within this search, Osborn proposes a Covenantal interpretation of the Creation narratives, as opposed to mythological or scientific accounts. What is revealed by the Creation story is a relational identity for human beings, an identity bound

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[55] Ibid., 43.

[56] Ibid., 44.

[57] Lawrence Osborn, *Stewards of Creation: Environmentalism in the Light of Biblical Teaching* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1990), 33.

up in responsibility to God and to the Creation. He then offers the doctrine of the Trinity as a theologically-oriented hermeneutical key to understanding God and Creation: the triune relationships serve as a basis for understanding created relationships.[58]

The status of human beings in this scheme is linked to human creation in the image of God in Genesis 1. Osborn rejects the *imago Dei* theme alone as that which separates humanity from nature—that which makes us different—in favor of a more relational approach. Only a Trinitarian perspective, he suggests, points to the human capacity for relationships as the meaning of the *imago Dei*. This alone renders humans capable of reciprocating divine love. Creation itself is seen as a gift of love, and dominion over it is the appropriate human response to that gift.[59] Disobedience leads to alienation and domination, in other words, to an improper relationship between humans and nature.

While Osborn is careful to deny any ontological distinction between humans and Creation, he does emphasize a *functional* distinction linked to human creation in the image of God.[60] As *imago Dei*, humans represent God to Creation, and this entails responsibility, namely to have dominion. However, the dominion here must be modeled upon divine sovereignty. Because God's rule is characterized by self-sacrificial service, "it is thus more appropriate to see [dominion] in terms of stewardship and priesthood than of absolute monarchy."[61] Human dominion should have the self-same characteristics of love and humility.

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[58] Ibid., 39.

[59] Ibid., 45.

[60] Ibid., 48.

[61] Ibid., 48-49.

Stewardship, then, is the form that human dominion takes. According to Osborn, this has two aspects. On the one hand, humans have a responsibility to maintain the present diversity of nature and repair the damage already done by us. This aligns well with secular environmentalist groups that seek the preservation of the environment in its natural state. On the otherhand, there is a responsibility to cultivate and be creative with the garden.[62] "The freedom to act in God-like ways is our warrant for engaging in scientific research and technological innovation...[these involve] the dangerous freedom and responsibility to alter our environment."[63] Osborn argues that this justification of technological intervention in nature, though counter to the conservationist approaches of many secular environmental groups, is actually less anthropocentric than it might seem, since it derives from a fuller, theocentric framework. For Osborn, Stewardship is humankind's ethical response to God, who has entrusted the care of Creation—our fellow creatures—to us. "Nature is our responsibility: we are called to manage it."[64]

2.2.4. Douglas John Hall

Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall offers one of the most complex and comprehensive systematic treatment of Stewardship available. For Hall, the crisis of the planet is a crisis of humanity: "The only adequate response to the great physical and spiritual problems of our historical moment is for the human inhabitants of the planet to

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[62] Lawrence Osborn, *Guardians of Creation: Nature in Theology and the Christian Life* (Leicester: Apollos, 1993), 142.

[63] Osborn, *Stewards of Creation: Environmentalism in the Light of Biblical Teaching*, 49.

[64] Osborn, *Guardians of Creation: Nature in Theology and the Christian Life*, 144.

acquire, somehow, *a new way of imagining themselves.*"[65] This is not just about what we

do, but who we are as human beings in the world. Methodologically, this change can

occur, he argues, by adopting Stewardship as praxis thinking. By this he means allowing

our thoughts on a subject to emerge out of involved participation, rather than the other

way around. Thinking does not occur in a vacuum, and ethical thinking must be thought

in line with ethical doing. For too long, Hall laments, Christians have operated in a

theory-practice model, where doing follows knowing.[66] As a result, much emphasis can—

and has—been spent on "thinking" and not enough on "doing." A new way of imaging

human being will require that right action and right thinking be done together. It is the

concept of Stewardship, Hall urges, that will facilitate the necessary re-imagining.

Hall begins his study by laying out the biblical foundations for adopting the

concept of Stewardship as an image of Christian vocation, tracing the usage of the term in

both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, "steward" always refers to a

specific social role. He is a servant who has the responsibility of managing the owner's

property and household affairs. Although still a subordinate, the servant who fulfills this

duty has been elevated to a special status among the other servants. There is a kind of

mediating quality to the role so that the steward's status lies somewhere between the

master and the other servants. On the one hand he is the representative of the owner,

making decisions on his behalf, exercising authority in his name. Yet on the other he is

accountable to the owner. He cannot do just whatever he wishes; if the household is not

maintained, the steward will be replaced by someone else.

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[65] Hall, *The Steward,* 9. Emphasis added.

[66] Ibid., 18.

In the New Testament, there begins to emerge a shift toward a more metaphorical meaning of Stewardship. The servant who manages the master's household becomes the image through which Christian vocation is to be understood. Christians are stewards of the kingdom or stewards of the mysteries of God.[67] According to Hall, the metaphor becomes nearly doctrinal in Paul's writings. In I Corinthians 4, for example, Christians are characterized as stewards of God's household, that is, all of humanity. Christians have a responsibility to all people that mirrors in some way the kind of responsibility that a steward had toward the household he manages. The well-being of humanity is the concern of the Christian steward.[68] Paul here uses a familiar social relationship and applies it to the living of the Christian life. We are not necessarily called to be stewards occupationally, but we are to view our responsibility to one another in the same kind of light. Furthermore, Hall sees here a participatory dimension. This stresses the fact that all of our lives are bound up with one another, that we all have a place in the household of God: "Although the steward of God (or Christ), like the stewards of earthly lords, can claim nothing for him- or herself, that steward is not merely an outsider—hired help, so to speak. Rather, the steward participates in the very 'household of God.'"[69]

Hall goes on to argue that the full meaning of Christian Stewardship cannot simply be read off the pages of Scripture, but it must be intuited by exploring the implications of a variety of viewpoints. In other words, the idea of Stewardship that emerges out of the biblical literature is complex, varied, and nuanced. The theological, christological,

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[67] Ibid., 37.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

ecclesiastical, anthropological, and eschatological dimensions of the idea reflect a plurality

of aspects of human life to which Stewardship can be applied.

The socio-economic role of the steward enters the conceptual realm through its

theological dimension. The shift from practical to metaphorical is made possible by

means of the royal metaphors for God (Lord, King, etc.) already widely adopted in

scripture. Everything belongs to God; He is the Master of all that is. It is a short jump

then to characterize the relationship of humans to the Heavenly King in terms of

Stewardship. We relate to God's realm as would a steward. The fruitfulness of the royal

metaphors applied to God, and the subsequent subordination metaphors for humans,

adopted from common socio-economic relations, represent well the hierarchical

relationship that exists between the Creator and the created.

Stewardship's *christological* dimension is made explicit in the recognition of Jesus

Christ as the preeminent steward: "all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's"

(1 Cor. 3:22-23). His life is the primary model of what a steward should be; he definitively

defines the office. But Jesus is not just a model for us to imitate:

> The Christological assumption of Christian stewardship is that those who are (to
> use Paul's constant expression) "in Christ" are taken up into his stewardship. It is
> not that we achieve the stewardly status through our works, our imitation of him.
> We are graciously brought into a stewarding of God's grace that has already been
> enacted by God's chief steward.[70]

In other words, Jesus Christ is both the initiator of a pattern of Stewardship in our lives

and the enabling agent that makes it possible. By becoming stewards, we participate in

Christ's Stewardship.

Linked to this is an *anthropological* dimension. Jesus is not only the preeminent

steward, but he is a model of true humanity as well. As such we called to a life of

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[70] Ibid., 44.

Stewardship, and in doing so find the true way of being human. A call to Stewardship is a call to true humanity.

The task of Stewardship is not just for individual Christians, but for the entire community of believers. The community itself exists not for itself but for the benefit of all humanity. This reflects Stewardship's *ecclesiastical* dimension. The task of being for all humanity, the foundational task of the Church, remains the same regardless of the historical or cultural context within which it finds itself. Stewardship is one way of characterizing this outward-focused relationality.

The *eschatological* dimension, illustrated in 1 Peter 4:7-11, utilizes the ever-present specter of an impending end to draw out the importance of accountability. "Whatever else the eschatological context of the Christian life implies, one thing that appears prominently in this passage is the way consciousness of the end reinforces the gift character of life."[71] There will come a day when the owner returns and the steward must give a record of how the household resources were allocated. The provisionality of the situation also reinforces the sense of solidarity with all other members of the household. In other words, we are all in the same boat together.

In reflecting on these varied dimensions, Hall is attempting to root Stewardship in the very heart of the Christian tradition. It is not an idea loosely extrapolated from a few verses, then applied to moral duty, but characteristic of the very core of Christian self-understanding. Hall's use of these multiple dimensions is a highly nuanced way of bringing to light the complexity which characterizes human-Divine relationships. Being a steward is not simply compatible with Christian life, it *is* the Christian life.

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[71] Ibid., 39.

Yet this is not the reality of our Church communities today. According to Hall, the biblical concept of Stewardship has been truncated to a purely functional image, concerned almost entirely with fiscal matters. It is often seen as the material means by which a more "spiritual" end is achieved.[72] Stewardship Sundays are little more than church fundraisers, and books on Stewardship give believers guidance on tithing and resource management. This has greatly undermined the power of the biblical metaphor, laments Hall, and presents a challenge that must be overcome.

Hall moves from the biblical sources of the concept of Stewardship to a historical and cultural evaluation of its neglect in contemporary times.[73] He sees the shift of the Church from a primarily Hebraic thought-matrix toward Hellenized conceptual categories as the first step toward that neglect. Whereas Hebraic thought is highly relationally oriented, he argues that the Greek conceptual scheme is dominated by a dualistic ontology of substance and spirit.[74] Along with the adoption of Greek categories of thinking came a spiritualization of the concept. This manifested itself in an emphasis upon spiritual realities and a denigration of the material world. The priorities of a life of faith centered upon the condition of one's soul, as well as one's status in the Church. This interiorized focus began to eat away at the other-centered relational dynamic that Stewardship, by necessity, is built upon.

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[72] Ibid., 12.

[73] Ibid., see especially chapters 2 and 3.

[74] There is growing doubt about the validity of such a dichotomy. Some have argued that these categories are inherently Platonic and do not exist in pure form anywhere. See e.g. Dale B. Martin, "Paul and the Judaism/Hellenism Dichotomy: Toward a Social History of the Question" in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 29-62.

Further undermining Stewardship as a way of characterizing the Christian life was the Constantinian elevation of Christianity from obscure sect to state religion. For the first time in its history, the Church found itself in a position of power and influence. At least in this world, she was no longer the servant; she was now associated with the master, the Emperor. By adopting the form of the governmental power structures of the age, the Church became something she had never been before. Once this metamorphosis took place, the image of Steward no longer seemed quite as applicable.

Hall goes on to argue that another important shift in human history was the desacralization of nature that accompanied the scientific revolution in the modern West. Once the "mystery" was removed from the natural world, the way was opened for humans to dominate it through technology. Mastery of all things and the attempt to expand human knowledge trumped concerns to care for the environment. As humans unlocked the secrets of nature, they became resources to be used.

Each of these played important roles in changing the perspectives of the Church regarding its place and purpose in the natural world. Even today, Hall argues, we are left with two predominant ways of ordering Christian priorities.[75] The first he identifies as a theocentrism that emphasizes conversion, and it is often anti-worldly and escapist. The latter he deems a liberal Christian humanism that emphasizes ethics and human priorities. The conservative theocentrism is problematic because it fails to take seriously the plight of the planet or the presence of injustice in human social institutions. The liberal position fails too because of a naïve anthropology that fails to take seriously human sin and depravity. The challenge, says Hall, is to maintain a concern for the whole world, not just human souls. This means taking the problems of humans and the planet seriously

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[75] Ibid., 103.

but without the naiveté that so often marked the social gospel movements at the turn of the century.

While these have been some of the factors that have led to the neglect of Stewardship, Hall points to our contemporary context as bringing it back to the fore. The growing awareness of a planet in peril has brought to the fore the negative impact that human ways of being have had on the environment. We need to change the way we live. What is needed, though, is not simply a change in the patterns of our agency, but a new image of the human that will address the fundamental orientation of our being. For Hall, the recovery of the Stewardship tradition of the Church is demanded by this need. The concept of Stewardship, in the face of our contemporary global context, emerges as a symbol for articulating the gospel today.[76]

In order to address the current needs of the planet, Hall proposes that Stewardship be characterized by a set of principles.[77] In fleshing these out, he is attempting to provide a constructive theological statement about the meaning of Stewardship today. These principles are not derived from mere abstractions, but they emerge out of our experience of participation in the actual life of the world. Yet they are also Christian principles, derived from the teachings of Jesus Christ. Hall sees these as "implicit in the stewardship motif as it is contemplated in the light of contemporary problems."[78]

The first principle is *globalization*. By this Hall means that the responsibility of the Steward is toward the whole earth, not just to a part of it. A Stewardship characterized by

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[76] Ibid., 75.

[77] Ibid., see especially chapter 5.

[78] Ibid., 125.

global concern can free the Church from localism. In other words, the scope of our focus must extend beyond local concerns.

Another principle is *communalization*. Stewardship is not commanded first and foremost for the individual but for the community of believers. The real power of Stewardship is made possible through the actions of whole, when the Church functions as a Stewarding community. This does not deny the place of the individual; it only situates its importance in a broader context. Hall is here trying to free contemporary thinking from its tendency toward individualism and privatism. The individual alone cannot accomplish what can be done so corporately, because a part of what Stewardship requires is the creation of *koinonia*, or fellowship. A healthy *koinonia* fosters the kind of love necessary for true Stewardship.

That the scope of Christian love extends beyond the human sphere to all of creation is the principle of *ecologization*. The care of the Steward is for all of creation, not just for human needs. This idea is given greater credence when we realize that redemption itself extends to all of creation. Human redemption is caught up in this movement where all of creation will be healed.

The principle of *politicization* calls for freeing the concept of Stewardship from its subordination to capitalist economics. While the management of fiscal resources is an important dimension of Stewardship, it is not its foundation. Because Stewardship is concerned with the whole earth—and carried out corporately—there is necessarily a public quality about it. It involves that place in the public sphere where policy and action merge: politics. As such, Stewardship will work toward the creation and maintenance of just political forms, which in turn bolster patterns of just agency for all those who participate in those structures.

Finally, Stewardship does not focus solely on immediate needs, but it keeps an eye on the needs of future generations. This principle of *futurization* seeks long-term solutions to contemporary problems and recognizes the need to insure that the implications of present actions do not bring about their own set of issues at a later date.

For Hall, these principles form the conceptual parameters of a contemporary revival of the Stewardship tradition in Christian faith. In accordance with his stated preference for a methodology of praxis thinking, Hall then moves into what amounts to an anthropological model of Stewardship. He discusses first how Stewardship principles may come into play regarding the three global issues brought to the fore by the World Council of Churches (WCC): justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.[79] In so doing, he paints a picture of the human being in light of our call to be Stewards of creation, for it is in carrying out the praxis of Stewardship that these issues are addressed.

Hall's anthropological model of Stewardship can be seen in how he answers the twin questions of (1) the place and (2) the role of humanity in the natural world. He addresses the first question by laying out three ways of depicting the relationship of humans to the environment.

The first perspective speaks of humanity as being *above* nature.[80] This, Hall argues, is the legacy and perspective of modernity. Ontologically speaking, humans are situated higher up in the chain of being, standing somewhere between angels and animals. Humans are seen as superior to nature in every way, due in particular to our unique

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[79] These themes were brought to the fore at the VIth Assembly of the WCC held in Vancouver, BC in 1983. The call to address issues related to justice, peace, and creation developed into a formalized conciliar process at a world convocation in Seoul, South Korea in 1990. From this the WCC developed a number of study and action programs such as the Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society (JPSS). www.oikoumene.org

[80] Hall, *The Steward,* 191.

rational capacities. These capacities give us the ability to have a growing knowledge of the world; this knowledge in turn gives us great power over it. One of the most important implications of this hierarchical understanding of the human-nature relation is the ingrained perspective that nature is simply a material resource to be used for human benefit. It is this kind of mentality that has led to abuse of the environment and the accusation that Christian faith condones unbridled domination of nature.

Hall points out, though, that Scripture contradicts manipulation and mastery by power. In fact, "nature suffers, not when human beings are willing to do what, in God's intention, they are meant to do, but when they sin!"[81] The ideal of human power over nature is not a Christian ideal, but rather it has its roots in the rise of modernism and humanism.

A second perspective views humanity *in* nature.[82] Instead of holding a place of ontological superiority, humans in this view are seen as just one of many creatures. Their importance in the world is no more or no less than any other species. Hall identifies this as a romanticist reaction to the "humans above nature" perspective, yet equally rooted in modernism. The "above" position demands human mastery of nature through knowledge, which entails the elimination of the natural in humans. In effect, it reduces the human to an efficient machine. In order to counteract this, the Romantic perspective emphasizes the inseparability of the natural from the rational, and it blurs the distinction between humans and other creatures.

Hall's approach attempts to situate a proper relationship between humans and the environment somewhere in between. He proposes that we think of the relationship as

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[81] Ibid., 196.

[82] Ibid., 201.

humanity *with* nature, not just above or identical to it.[83] The "with" quality has the

capability of expressing our solidarity with the rest of creation, while maintaining a sense

of distinction displayed by our unique rational capacities. The most distinctive feature of

"humanity with nature" according to Hall is the return to an ontology of Jerusalem. By

this he means a shift away from the static ontology of the Greeks in favor of the

relationally structured Hebraic thought forms. Not only does it represent a return to the

foundations of Christian thought, but it allows for the interconnectedness and the

uniqueness of humans to be held in tension.

The "with" preposition is right at home within the dynamics of biblical love. The

language of love in the Bible incorporates both qualities of unity and difference, a uniting

of diverse elements that subordinates neither the unity nor the diversity. It is

fundamentally relational, necessarily involving the drawing close of two or more persons.

The Hebraic vision goes even further by identifying the nature of ultimate reality in such

terms ("God is love"). Being itself is relational, and we have our being by participating in

God's being. Being in this sense is never static or isolated, but is always a "being-with."

Within this kind of framework, the uniqueness of humanity can never mean

superiority. It does, however, entail responsibility. Hall argues that this responsibility

may be characterized by a qualified notion of "dominion."[84] Far from an abusive sense of

domination, dominion in the Bible is given hermeneutical parameters: it must always be

understood in relation to the God of Israel, and later to Jesus Christ. Biblical dominion

will itself be characterized by love and speaks specifically to the responsibility implicit in

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[83] Ibid., 205.

[84] Hall treats this idea in greater detail in Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986).

our uniqueness. The biblical parameters should always safeguard the idea of dominion so it does not collapse into domination.

Having established a way of understanding the place of humanity *with* nature, Hall once again employs the symbol of the Steward to illustrate this relationship. While the Steward does have authority and responsibility in the household (a mirror of our uniqueness), he or she also is still a servant (mirroring our solidarity). The Steward is one of the members of the household, albeit one with unique responsibilities.

For Hall, though, Stewardship is more than a symbol; it is a model of the Christian life. "Stewardship does not describe any one dimension of the Christian life; it describes the whole posture called 'Christian'."[85] His point is that Stewardship, as a model of the Christian, moves from an emphasis on doing to an emphasis on being. We are called not just to do Steward-like things, but to *be* Stewards. Reforming the way that we act begins with reforming who we are. "Stewardship must be understood first as descriptive of the being—the very life—of God's people. Deeds of stewardship arise out of the being of the steward."[86]

Part of the reason that Stewardship has been abused or neglected is that too many people view it as something that you do, as a norm for action, an ethic. If that is the case, it is something that we just need to do better. Hall argues that the issue is much deeper; real, genuine Stewardship must flow out of the core of who we are. Genuine change in relating to the natural world only results when we change who we are. When the Christian life is conformed to the model of the steward, we find a way of expressing our

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[85] Hall, *The Steward*, 232.

[86] Ibid., 242.

Christian vocation that is meaningful and relevant to the context within which we find ourselves. In other words, Stewardship is a way of being Christian.

2.3. Conclusion

Several recurrent themes emerge from this overview of Stewardship in Church documents and contemporary theology. While the concept is utilized and emphasized in differently nuanced ways by different Churches and theologians, a thread of commonality unites them. First, Stewardship-themed presentations are almost universally grounded in the Creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2. It is in the divine injunctions to fill the earth, to have dominion over it, and to tend the garden that the shape of human responsibility to the environment is found. Stewardship provides an illustrative model for the way that responsibility should be carried out.

Another common theme is the effective domestication of the divine injunction to "have dominion" (Gen. 1: 26-28). In our contemporary context, the notion of dominion carries heavy negative baggage. This is compounded by the fact that the Hebrew terms translated as "dominion" are used elsewhere to depict military dominance or violent subjugation. These verses are at the center of Lynn White's famous critique leveled at Christianity; it is the domination taught in Scripture, the accusation runs, that has led to Christianity's role in environmental degradation.[87] Naturally, defenders of Christianity must reconcile these verses with environmental concerns. Dominion as Stewardship is one way to do this, and each Stewardship-themed presentation must demonstrate how the "dominion" of Genesis 1 does not entail the "domination" that White critiques.

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[87] See Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 1967): 1203-1207.

A third theme is the linking of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* with the injunction to dominion of Genesis 1. This provides a functional view of what it means to be created in the image of God and stands in contrast to substantive or structural views that seek to place the definitive marker in our cognitive capacities or physical form. Stewardship is offered as a way of characterizing our dominion: we have dominion as a steward has dominion in a household. The economic metaphor is thus extended to the environmental realm, and our economic responsibilities are structurally equated with our ecological ones.

What is clear in all these cases is that Stewardship functions as a model or organizing metaphor of human behavior. We should behave toward the earth as if we are dealing with someone else's property. We have a God-given responsibility and task to care for what He has created. Stewardship, as a metaphor, helps humans to envision their place in Creation, as well as facilitate their responsibility within it. In doing so, Stewardship assumes a particular vision of what it means to be a human being and how we are to relate to the non-human world. In the next chapter, we will explore some of these assumptions in greater detail.

CHAPTER THREE:
STEWARDSHIP: CRITIQUE AND ALTERNATIVES

"It is this very destruction [of other organisms] that brings me to question another, associated belief: that man actually is ultimately in control of the natural world—or, to phrase it another way, that man is *able* to be a steward."[1]
--Clare Palmer

The last chapter showed that Stewardship has become the most common way churches and ecotheologies have been speaking about the human relation to the natural world in theological terms. Because human agency is the primary culprit in ecological degradation, humans are conceived as Stewards or caretakers of the earth's natural resources as a corrective against abusive behaviors. This chapter will examine the widely-used concept of Stewardship, along with several alternatives, to see whether or not it can adequately address the fundamental concerns arising from ecological problems. I will conclude that it cannot. I will argue that Stewardship involves core anthropological assumptions that are incongruent with current ecological paradigms. In particular, the degree to which human beings are capable of managing environmental systems—a foundational assumption of environmental Stewardship—is challenged.

At the very heart of the Stewardship model is a consistent picture of the human person. Here, as in all ethical models, a concept of humanity informs what is considered normative behavior. This chapter will examine the concept of humanity built into Stewardship, and will explain how this drives the ethical thrust of the metaphor. How we are to relate *to* nature flows out of an understanding of humanity *in* nature. The functioning of any environmental ethic contains an ecologically-informed account of the place and role of humanity in the natural world. If the anthropology implied by the

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[1] Clare Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," in *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology* (London: SPCK, 1992), 80.

Stewardship metaphor cannot accommodate an ecological picture of humanity, then it might be necessary to move beyond this metaphor to more fruitful concepts, rather than accept Stewardship as a last word.

3.1. Challenges to Environmental Stewardship

Admittedly, Stewardship brings into ecotheology an anthropology capable of addressing—at least in part—environmental concerns. Its picture of the place of humanity is sufficiently humble to turn away the notion that Christianity supports wanton exploitation of the earth in the name of biblical "dominion." Stewardship also provides a groundwork for environmental ethics in so far as it emphasizes human responsibility in this sphere no less than in other relationships. It also provides the motivation of obedience to God as a means of carrying out that responsibility.

However, in recent years a growing number of critiques have pointed out limits and shortcomings in Stewardship-based ecotheologies.[2] However, the issue mainly has been the use of the metaphor of Stewardship precisely *as metaphor*. I want to go further and evaluate the anthropological shortcomings of Stewardship, especially the limits in the notion of the human place in creation as caretaker or manager. Before that, however, I want to note three other kinds of critiques of Stewardship: the theological, methodological, and conceptual.

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[2] See Ernst Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993); Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005); Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," 67-87; Anna Lisa Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and our Place in the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

3.1.1. Theological Critique

One kind of critical approach to Stewardship ecotheology targets the way that the schema represents God. The concept of Stewardship seems to imply a distant, absentee God.[3] The landlord (God) has entrusted his property to his Stewards (humans) and has vacated the premises. Such a model cannot incorporate the theological affirmation of God's creative immanence, which upholds the notion that every moment of existence is a gift from and dependent on God. God's creative act is not, as Deism has it, a punctiliar moment in some distant past but an ongoing creativity. If, indeed, God's very presence sustains the universe,[4] then a real absence of divine immanence would spell the end of created being. Since a Steward acts in the owner's stead, the metaphor excludes the possibility of depicting an active immanence on God's part.[5] It could be argued that a Stewardship ecotheology requires something like a deistic God—or at least one who is absent from time to time. Because this critique is so closely related to the anthropological one, I will treat this issue more fully later under a discussion of divine and human agency.

3.1.2. Methodological Critique

Another kind of critique focuses on the way that Scripture is used to develop the metaphor of Stewardship. While the biblical narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 contain basic

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[3] See Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, 214.

[4] Without getting into too much of a debate on the ontology of Scripture, see Heb. 1:3, Col. 1:16-17, and Acts 17:28.

[5] A full-fledged critique of this sort must first establish the biblical and theological warrants for divine active immanence in the natural world. Once this is accomplished it becomes increasingly difficult to conceptualize human agency wholly independent from divine agency. Although Conradie does not attempt this, authors such as Sallie McFague and Jürgen Motlmann make divine immanence a central feature of their ecotheologies. See McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature*, 207; Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 365.

commands as to how the first humans ought to relate to Creation, this critique insists that those commands need to be understood in context. Most importantly, when the literary context of the narrative itself is examined, we can begin to question whether it is about the human-nature relationship at all. If the creation narratives are primarily theological texts, then Genesis's first concern is the revelation of the One who creates and the proper relationship of humanity to the Creator, not how creation took place. This view sees the creation accounts as patterned after the socio-political structures of Hebraic culture and serves to justify the Hebrew place in the intentionality of the Creator.[6]

If this is the case, then it is entirely unclear that the purpose of the Genesis narrative is to mandate a normative relationship between humans and the environment. In fact, to focus on this runs a risk, in this view, of missing other biblical imagery on the matter, or of being blind to contemporary perspectives on the nature of things. While a proponent of Stewardship like Hall will often use other biblical imagery to temper dominating dominion, he still, like many others, grounds his entire conceptual scheme in a dominion-based Stewardship.[7]

David Field's primary critique of most Stewardship theologies is closely related to this.[8] He argues that the traditional Stewardship image is not comprehensive enough to include the multifaceted relationship between humanity and the rest of creation reflected

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[6] See for example Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996) and Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

[7] Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 258.

[8] David N. Field, "Stewards of Shalom: Toward a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic," *Quarterly Review* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 383-396.

in the biblical traditions.[9] These diverse biblical images reflect a multiplicity of ways that

humans may relate to the rest of creation.[10] Field also argues that the Genesis 1 narrative

must be read in its proper context as a post-exilic Priestly polemic against Israel's foes. As

such, the purpose of humanity being created in the image of God is a calling to participate

in God's action of establishing a global Sabbath. Another predominant image is found in

the Prophets, many of whom make a connection between human sin—particularly social

injustice—and environmental disasters. Several Psalms, including Psalms 104 and 148, and

Job 38-41 depict a contrasting motif to this connection between sin and environment.

These passages, Field notes, describe a direct relationship between all creation and God

that does not require, nor is necessarily hindered by, human mediation. Both of these

Psalms speak to the utter dependence of all things on the provision of God. Job

underscores the insignificance of humans in the created order as a contrast to God's

majesty and meticulous governance. Still another image, pertinent to human/nature

relationships found throughout the New Testament, presents Christ as the mediator and

redeemer of creation.

Field argues that since there does not exist one universal, uniform way that

humans relate to creation, there is not a comprehensive biblical model of that

relationship, nor a single biblical source for grounding one.[11] Clearly, then, a biblically

grounded ecological ethic ought to take into account the many different ways that

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[9] Ibid., 384. See also Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," 67-87.

[10] Field, "Stewards of Shalom,"388-391.

[11] Field suggests a Trinitarian theology of creation as a way of integrating these diverse images, yet still holds on to a good deal of Stewardship language. See Field, "Stewards of Shalom: Toward a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic," 392-394.

Scripture speaks about the relation. To be sure, it should also be wary of over-emphasizing a single image to the detriment of all others. The next chapter will look at some of these biblical themes in greater detail and will seek the appropriate biblical motif for relating and integrating these images for an ecological ethic.

It is important to note here also that the terms "Steward" (*oikonomos*) and "Stewardship" (*oikonomia*) do not appear in the creation narratives themselves. The first humans are told to fill and subdue and rule the earth and its inhabitants. The idea of humans as Stewards is an external characterization of those commands, a clarification or qualification of what it means to have dominion in this arena. As such it is appropriate to ask: why *this* characterization?

3.1.3. *Conceptual Critique*

A third critique deals with conceptual issues. Norman Wirzba, for example, sees fundamental flaws in the very concept of Stewardship. In *The Paradise of God*, he lays out several reasons to move away from its usage.[12] For one, it has not been widely used in the history of theological reflection in regards to the human relation to creation, so it does not bear the weight of tradition. In fact, many identify the concept primarily with fiscal responsibility, which is not surprising considering its lexical source. Secondly, it is susceptible to misuse, such as the promotion of an economic agenda or the glorification of wealth. The economic imagery of Stewardship draws initial focus onto the realm of commerce that obscures the underlying relational dynamic it intends to model.

For Wirzba, another reason for letting go of Stewardship would be a susceptibility to misunderstanding, since the term contains no explication of the character of human

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[12] Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 129-132.

dominion over non-human nature. These last two aspects are closely related and result from the Stewardship metaphor's source in a socio-economic context. As economic contexts shift, so too does the meaning or importance of Stewardship. For example, an economy that promotes individualism and the accumulation of wealth may give the idea of Stewardship and its responsibilities a particularly isolated and individualistic character.

The root of the problem, according to Wirzba, is that there is no internal logic to Stewardship that can govern the character of its function as relationship. The nature of Stewardship is inherently vague: it only focuses on the ends (maintenance of property or wealth) without recourse to detail on the means to that end (how it is maintained). True, it is possible to illustrate this relationship in positive terms, but such a meaning is extrinsic (applied from without). It is not built into the concept itself, thus it has a vulnerability to misuse or misunderstanding. Even carefully articulated versions of the Stewardship model that consciously promote care and nurture cannot escape the inherent neutrality and ambiguity of the term. The idea of Stewardship simply has no internal logic preventing misuse or distortion.[13]

3.1.4. Anthropological Critique

While these other critiques weaken the credibility of the Stewardship metaphor, a fourth kind renders it ultimately incompatible with a genuinely ecological theology. Each of the previous critiques converge in identifying inadequacies in Stewardship in the area of humanity and its relation to the natural world, but they do not directly confront the issues surrounding human identity and vocation. The next section will flesh out this fourth critique in a more detailed manner.

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[13] Such as Hall's, discussed in chapter 2.

3.2. An Ecological Anthropological Critique of Stewardship

One reason an anthropological critique of Stewardship is so important is because of the close link between anthropology and ethics. If Stewardship is presented as a way of modeling the human relationship to the natural world, then it is, by nature, an ethical endeavor because it presents a norm. In order to have a proper sense of what human ethical responsibility to the environment is, it makes sense to have a handle on what human nature is. That is, it is important to understand the parameters and possibilities of human being and action. For this reason, I want to look at how the two are related and then see whether Stewardship can, in fact, adequately represent how humans do and should relate to the natural world.

3.2.1. Ethics and Human Nature

The following sections will discuss how one's understanding of human nature plays a formative role in the formulation of ethical systems. This is no less true for environmental ethics than social ethics. The discussion is important in setting up my anthropologically-based critique of Stewardship and will clarify the relevant dimensions of human nature that need to be addressed. A central assumption of this dissertation is that anthropology plays a governing role in the formation of an environmental ethic. This is because at the core, an ethic is about human agency. Ethics is about governing and prescribing human action in relationship to other actors, to self, to environment. How we understand the nature of human being shapes from within an understanding of the possibilities of human action. The prescriptive element of an ethic is about negotiating and fulfilling some of these possibilities: which possibilities are to be actuated and which are to be avoided. In the environmental realm, we too, must understand the potential for

evil as well as good, and for what we are capable of creating and destroying. That logically implies and substantively depends on some prior idea of what human beings are in the first place.

There is also an operational idea of the human person manifested in the patterns of life displayed within a culture or society. People choose to act or not act in certain ways based upon fundamental values held in common or out of commonly preferred hierarchies of relationships. While people sometimes reflect on how their values and choices affect those relationships immediately around them, they often fail to see beyond interpersonal reality to the systemic effects of participating in societal institutions or trajectories—both good and bad. One's deficient awareness of the implications, however, does not dilute the impact that these common systemic trajectories in fact make upon natural and social systems.

Since, the consensus holds, wide-spread environmental degradation has come about as the result of destructive patterns of human being and human acting, then changing those patterns becomes the highest priority in environmental ethics. The task, however, involves more than simply changing external behavior by improving the normative rules of engagement. Change of behavior begins with a paradigm shift in the understanding of the human being's relation to the natural world. Not only are human patterns of living problematic, but internal to and steering them there is a fundamental flaw: a myopic conception of the human person at the core of the reigning worldview. Stable, new eco-praxis depends on a revised idea of the human person.

3.2.2. Human Being and Human Agency

As a precursor to addressing the intersection of theological anthropology and environmental ethics in Stewardship theologies, I want to highlight two aspects of the first of these disciplines. The study of human nature in light of faithcan be seen as dealing with two dimensions of human existence: human being and human agency. These are not distinct entities but rather are integral dimensions in the structure of our lives. Human *being* has to do with who we are; human *agency* with what we do or how we act. These dimensions correlate with two important questions that must be addressed by ecotheology: what is the place of humans in the scheme of creation, and what is our role, if any, to play in it? They are important questions because they strike at the heart of the ecological crisis. Humans have acted in ways that harm the environment, and they have done so in part because of a misconception of our place in it.

The question of our place is essentially one of identity: who are we in relation to creation? How do humans fit in the big picture? Research in the fields of ecology and biology—among other disciplines—points to our radical interconnectedness and interrelatedness with the entire natural world.[14] We are irrevocably embedded into the web of life processes that constitute our environment, not as something foreign to it, but as an integral part. We *are* nature. On the other hand, developments in neuroscience point toward the conclusion that humans possess unique cognitive capacities: no other

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[14] For resources, see Joseph Arthur Miller, *The Island Press Bibliography of Environmental Literature* (Washington: Island Press, 1993) and Patricia D. Netzley, ed. *Environmental Literature: an Encyclopedia of Works, Authors, and Themes* (Santa Barbara, CA: Abc-Clio, 1999).

species has attained the same level of reflexive self-consciousness.[15] This yields the added implication of a unique moral agency. Humans have the capacity to experience, reflect, and evaluate all necessary components of moral cognition.

The second question has a more prescriptive bent: in light of our interconnectedness with all things and unique moral capacities, how *should* we relate to nature? We are responsible for our actions and responsible to those with whom we have relations. What is clear is that we have an obligation to act within our capacities for good within the contexts of our relationships. What the character of such a relation to the natural world looks like will be examined in the following chapters.

By viewing Christianity as a *way of life*, it is possible to evaluate these dual dimensions of existence in both anthropological and ethical terms. Paul Ricoeur offers an important insight in this matter by pointing out the hermeneutical dimension of meaningful action. This opens up not only the possibility of interpreting human action but also the *necessity* of doing so.[16] The crux of his argument is that the shape of human action resembles discourse that has been committed to writing and as such shares characteristics of a written text. The principles of interpreting a text are therefore appropriate for interpreting meaningful human action. Ricoeur's concern is to provide a methodology for the social sciences derived not so much from the natural sciences but from hermeneutic theory. By drawing comparisons between the object of the social sciences and the object of hermeneutical inquiry, he draws attention to the

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[15] See for example the essays by Warren Brown and Malcolm Jeeves in Warren S. Brown, Nancey C. Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, eds. *Whatever Happened to the Soul?: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 252.

[16] Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 144-167.

interpretability of human action. Indeed, this hermeneutical dimension is fundamental for the recognition of meaningful action *as* meaningful.

An implication of this perspective is that human lives can be analyzed and interpreted in terms of patterns. Instead of evaluating human actions individually, we may evaluate them as they form a pattern, a "particular and personal self-enactment in a lifetime."[17] As individual actions form patterns over time, the moral character of a person is created and revealed within those patterns. Extended patterns demonstrate a way of life, and moral trajectories can be charted based upon repeated episodes of behavior. The same would be the case for groups, or communities, of people. For Christians, Jesus serves as the normative pattern of existence, and all lives may be measured against this criterion. Indeed, moral formation is the transformation of our sinful patterns of life into a way of life that images the Christ. Communally speaking, our communities of faith must also display Christomorphic patterns.

The ability to see and analyze patterns of human action is helpful in environmental ethics, for it gives us a means of addressing the source of environmental concerns. By analyzing in more detail the dynamics of current cultural patterns of living, one will be in a better position to assess the kinds of wholesale changes that are required to correct the current problems. It also provides a means to evaluate the Christian response to ecological degradation, particularly as it does so in the form of Stewardship. Can a Stewardship ecotheology present a viable alternative to unhealthy but socially prevalent patterns of living?

The following section will identify the core assumptions about human identity and vocation endemic in Stewardship paradigms. The concept, as an orienting metaphor,

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[17] Michael J. Scanlon, "Christian Anthropology and Ethics," in *Vision and Values* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 43.

helps to shape recognizable patterns of human behavior in regards to the environment. If, as some have suggested, ecological degradation is driven by a misunderstanding or misconception of humanity's place in the world, it will be important to evaluate whether Stewardship's anthropology not only fails to correct but actually may contribute to this misunderstanding.

3.3. Analysis of Anthropological Assumptions in Stewardship

Stewardship as a paradigm is itself an attempt at transforming the way humans understand their place and role in the world. As we saw in the last chapter, a primary impetus for the development of the metaphor was a response to charges of exploitation and despotism associated with the language of "dominion." In contrast to the idea that humans can have absolute mastery over nature through unbridled consumption, Stewardship offers a much more tempered and humble approach, deferring to the mastery of God and the needs of future generations. With this contrasting approach comes a new set of assumptions about human identity and vocation in the world. The following analysis explores and critiques these assumptions as a first step toward my eventual proposal, which depends on and flows from this deeper consideration of Stewardship.

3.3.1. Place of the Human (identity)

Theistic versions of environmental Stewardship have as their basic structure a tripartite relationality between God, humans, and nature(all non-human creation). Within the relational triad, humans occupy a kind of middle ground between God and Nature. In Stewardship's imagery of the household, we are both one of the servants, subject to God's rule, yet more than a servant because of our delegated responsibilities.

God, not humanity, is the owner, but humans have been given special responsibilities, including authority over the other members of the household, in the management of the household. Yet, because humans are not owners, they are still accountable, like the other servants, to the one who owns the property.

Being created in the *imago Dei*, according to many interpretations of Genesis 1, results in a functional separation of humanity from the rest of creation, just as the Steward is functionally separated from the other servants. This has led to the often unspoken assumption that humans occupy an ontologically elevated place in the order of creation, and thus that humans are superior to all other created things. Related to this separation is the assumption that nature is an entity that exists to be used by human beings. This is especially evident in the very language used to describe these entities: as natural *resources* and as *environment*. Nature in this perspective is primarily passive, waiting to be used and manipulated for human wants and needs. As a collective, it forms the backdrop of the human story, the physical context for human existence to play itself out.

The vision of the human place in the world, depicted in the metaphor of the Steward, gives shape to human identity by modeling the contours of the relationship between God, humans, and the natural world. Humans are in the world as Stewards are in a household. The Stewardship model provides a means for interpreting human existence, as well as our experiences of both creatureliness and mastery. While we are subordinate to God, humans also display an ever-increasing capacity to alter and impact the environment around us. It is a way of explaining the place of humanity in creation as under the Creator yet above non-human creation, and it does so in a way that points toward a divinely mandated responsibility.

3.3.2. Role of the Human (vocation)

The role of the human as Steward of creation logically depends on an elevated place in creation. Just as a manager of a household or business must operate out of an elevated sense of authority to accomplish his or her task, so too must the Steward of the environment. There are tasks to which humans have been assigned that must be carried out in order for the household of creation to flourish. According to the first two chapters of Genesis, these tasks include filling the earth, exercising dominion, and caring for the garden. By filling the earth, exercising dominion over it, and tending the garden, humans fulfill the task assigned to them by God. In addition, God the owner has conveyed the necessary authority for these tasks to be carried out by creating humans in the image of God.

Not only is nature a passive entity existing for human usage, there is also the assumption that nature requires human tending. In some capacity, an untended, unmanaged environment has value only as potential capital for the household. Because it has been created for the purpose of human usage, humans as Stewards are compelled to undertake the task of tending and taming the wild places of the earth.

The model of Stewardship was adopted to give guidance on how the tasks of filling, dominion, and tending should be carried out. Not only does it shape human identity but also human vocation. Human identity *is* a task. Humans have a unique role to play in creation precisely because of the place that they hold therein.

Those who have adopted the Stewardship paradigm believe that this model can provide an answer to the problems of ecological degradation. By laying out the guidelines of a theocentric relationship between humans and nature, it hopes to thwart the patterns of human behavior that drive environmental crises. By redefining and qualifying the

nature of human dominion Stewardship also aims to quell fears that Christianity itself promotes degradation through its mandate to "have dominion." With dominion understood in terms of Stewardship, humans have the blueprint for living out humbly the God-given responsibility to care for the planet.

3.4. Human Being in Ecological Perspective

However, the idea of Stewardship despite a growing popularity in both theological and secular arenas, has done little—if anything—to significantly alter the behaviors that produce the current ecocrisis. To be sure, awareness of the importance of environmental issues has grown, especially in mainstream Christian circles, but some argue that it is too little, too late. Secular critics have lamented that Stewardship represents little more than enlightened self-interest.[18] As such, it provides a conceptual resting place for those recovering from environmentally exploitative perspectives, but it does not go far enough to address the heart of environmental issues in human self-understanding and actions. To use ethicist Anna Peterson's language, Stewardship may bring about *change*, but does it produce *transformation*?[19] I think that the reason Stewardship has been largely ineffective for transformation is because at its core it involves a flawed concept of human identity and vocation in regard to nature. Namely, Stewardship fails to capture contemporary insights into the basic structures of human reality. From the diverse fields of biology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and ecology arises a common picture of radical human

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[18] Merchant, *Radical Ecology*, 72.

[19] Peterson, *Being Human*, 49-50.

interrelatedness.[20] This interrelatedness presents a challenge not only to Stewardship's assumptions about the human place in the world and our role in the natural world.

3.4.1. Problem of Place

The problematic idea of human nature assumed by the Stewardship paradigms is that human beings are essentially individualistic, isolated, and disconnected from each other and the rest of the natural world. Stewardship is activity carried out by separate individuals. However, there is a growing interdisciplinary awareness that human existence is radically connected to and dependent upon other beings and planetary processes. In psychology and sociology this is fleshed out in terms of the social self.[21] Human identity—who we are—is not fashioned in isolation, but it emerges out of the complex interactions of interpersonal relationships. These relationships *constitute* the core of human self-identity. This perspective is paralleled in philosophical anthropology in what has been called the "turn to relationality."[22]

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[20] See Ernst Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?*, 211-212 and Conradie, "Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?" *Scriptura* 73 (2000): 158-159. Conradie suggests that the very notion of a relationship *between* humans and nature is itself problematic because it promotes a logical disconnect. Such a perspective fails to accentuate that we belong to the earth more than it belongs to us.

[21] Charles Horton Cooley and Hans-Joachim Schubert, *On Self and Social Organization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 259; David Bakhurst and Christine Sypnowich, *The Social Self* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995), 184; Joseph P. Forgas and Kipling D. Williams, *The Social Self: Cognitive, Interpersonal, and Intergroup Perspectives* (New York: Psychology Press, 2002), 397.

[22] F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 264. See also Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 363; and Martin Buber, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1958), 137.

In biology, this interrelatedness extends to the biotic world understood in theories of evolution and emergence.[23] The human species is a result of the same biological processes that generated all living species. All life descended from a common life form, and many are related through a more recent common ancestor. In the family of life, species are more like cousins than wholly distinct entities. The controversial discipline of sociobiology draws a strong connection between the psycho-social and the biological realms of human life.[24] Social behaviors of all animals, including humans, are understood in terms of evolutionary fitness. All behaviors are adaptive mechanisms that ensure the continued survival of the species.

Ecology studies have yielded the insight that human bodies, themselves a unified conglomerate of complex systems of specific functionalites, connect intimately and essentially with the life-systems of the planet. In much the same way that human self-identity depends upon relationships for its continued existence, human embodiedness depends upon the planet for nourishment. The biosphere—which provides for all life on the planet—is itself a complex system of systems, each dependent on all its constituent parts for the proper functionality of the whole. It is clear that all life is supported by a delicate balance of relationships. Breakdown in any part of an internal system threatens to bring its functionality to a halt. If enough systems fail, then the entire organism fails. The biosphere in this way is like an organism, dependent upon the proper functioning of all of its systems, such as atmosphere, water, climate, etc., in order to support life.

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[23] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection Or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life; and, the Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: Modern Library, 1990).

[24] Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 697.

In cosmology and physics, this interrelatedness is extended even further—to all of physical reality.[25] At the most fundamental levels, all things are connected with one another. At the quantum level, all non-human and human entities are specific reconfigurations of matter and energy. The physical universe is constituted by an unseen interplay of forces that manifest themselves in the structures of physical reality.

In light of the growing evidence of a radical relationality and interconnectivity of all things, the challenge to Stewardship is clear: can the metaphor keep up? Granted, the relational hierarchy of God, humans, and nature is a central component of the Stewardship model. Yet this hierarchy is not a constitutive relationality but rather a positional one. The relations between human and nature do not constitute their identity, but they are external to already constituted realities. Furthermore, Stewardship's positional hierarchy is dependent upon the idea of human uniqueness and superiority.

This has led to the common critique that Stewardship is incurably anthropocentric, affirming the supremacy of humans over the rest of creation.[26] The belief that the earth exists for humanity and not first of all for itself is the kind of anthropocentrism so roundly criticized in modern environmental studies.[27] Despite Hall's attempt in his theology of Stewardship to overcome this assumption, there still remains a

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[25] Niels Bohr, *Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature* (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), 119; Albert Einstein, Edwin P. Adams, and Ernst Gabor Straus, *The Meaning of Relativity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), 135; S. W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, Updated tenth anniversary commemorative ed. (London; New York: Bantam Press, 1998), 241.

[26] See Field, "Stewards of Shalom: Toward a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic," 384; Conradie, "Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?," 158; and John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 101.

[27] Many who embrace Stewardship have no problem with an anthropocentric perspective. Bruce Reichenbach even goes so far as to suggest, "It is not hubris, then to hold that change should benefit humans as well as the Landlord. The precedent is found in our paradigm." See Bruce R. Reichenbach and V. Elving Anderson, *On Behalf of God: A Christian Ethic for Biology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 58.

sense in most uses of the metaphor by churches and theologians, that humans have been set apart for the purpose of taking care of, managing, even controlling the Earth. Where the disconnection becomes clear—and perhaps inevitable—is in the accompanying justification of that unique responsibility. The justification is that God has made us different (evidenced in our enhanced cognition), and the consequence is that this difference authorizes us to manage the rest of creation for human purposes. The difference is reinforced by the Genesis 1 account of creation, and the assumption that we are *ontologically* so different from the animals and plants and rocks as to have no intrinsic bonds with them.[28]

Some of the implications of evolution pose the most significant challenge to Stewardship's assumption of human uniqueness. The first implication is a recognition of our animal nature. The Darwinian implication that we *are* animals—not just like them in some ways—overturns centuries of thinking that humans are "something more, something else, something better."[29] The difference between humans and other animals is not greater than the difference between other kinds of animals.[30] Another implication, directly related to the first, is the kinship shared between human and nonhuman animals. This again does not deny human distinctiveness, but insists, "first, that our continuities with the rest of life are as important as our differences and, second, that other species are

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[28] Not all proponents of Stewardship embrace this tendency. See for example Lawrence Osborn, *Stewards of Creation: Environmentalism in the Light of Biblical Teaching* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1990), 47. However, this is very often the functional assumption.

[29] Peterson, *Being Human*, 174.

[30] This does not negate the reality that human distinctiveness may have a greater ecological impact than the distinctiveness of other creatures.

just as distinctive, just as fit to their own lives, as we are to ours."[31] Both of these

implications undermine the Stewardship vision of humans as disconnected, unrelated

lords over a distant "nature." If true, then the very foundation of a unique caretaking role

is also undermined.

Yet we *are* different in ways that are significant; our unique capacities of reason,

reflection, laughter, and language allow us to relate with one another and with our

environment in unique and monumental ways. Not that these features are wholly unique

to humans, but they are unique as far as the degree to which humans as a species possess

them. While these capacities may not disconnect us ontologically from other species, they

do elevate the impact that we have had on all other creatures. We may speak then of a

moral distinction from the rest of creation. No other creature has the capacity to reflect,

valuate, and act upon that valuation. So while we are indeed intimately integrated into

the life-rhythms of the planet, humans have a unique capacity for responsibility.[32]

Stewardship misconceives the human difference from the rest of nature by ignoring all the

connections to nature.

3.4.2. Problem of Role

While evolutionary theory has presented a major challenge to Stewardship's

assumptions about the place of humanity in the natural world, developments in ecological

science challenge its assumptions about humanity's role as manager. Even though the

metaphor of Stewardship reflects a sense of responsibility humans have as moral agents, it

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[31] Peterson, *Being Human*, 175.

[32] See for example the essays in Warren S. Brown, Nancy Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, eds. *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). The relational and reflective capacities of human beings create the conditions necessary for moral agency. To the best of our knowledge, no other species has this level of capacity.

carries also an inaccurate picture of what that responsibility can and should look like. Stewardship implies that the planet is in need of managing, keeping, caring, and protecting. Clare Palmer argues that this reflects a pre-evolutionary perspective on the world in which human activity is required to perfect "fallen" nature.[33] Even though a scientifically informed understanding of nature has dismissed the idea that the environment *requires* human tending in order to flourish, the assumption remains active as a byproduct of the Stewardship paradigm.

A closer look at the way natural systems operate reveals that nature functions according to its own integrity. Any notion of tending, gardening, and caretaking only makes sense in light of what these activities provide for humanity, their instrumental use of nature. However, to remove human activity from the equation does nothing to threaten the flourishing of life on the planet. Nature does not need tending to realize its own flourishing and ends; we tend nature for our own benefit. It is the same with the concept of management. Within a Stewardship paradigm, natural resources are managed for the betterment of humanity. Indeed, this is what they exist for, as resources to meet human needs. According to Palmer, "it is this idea which is the most dangerous assumption contained within the concept of Stewardship,"[34] because it reinforces a purely instrumental engagement with the world.

Lisa Sideris is also critical of ecotheologies—Stewardship-based or otherwise—that seek to "heal" or "redeem" nature.[35] By itself, the environment does not need healing. It is only when the ability of a system to balance itself is disrupted by destructive human

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[33] Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," 79.

[34] Ibid., 81.

[35] Lisa H. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection* (Columbia University Press, 2003), 189-93.

activity that it becomes necessary for humans to "heal" and "preserve" it. It seems to me that what needs stewarding is not nature but the impact on it that our activity creates. In this view, the very need for Stewardship's responsibility has been created by the abusive practices of humans.

This begs the question: if Stewardship demands responsibility, for what and to whom are humans responsible? Is "tending" a responsibility? While humans after the inception of agriculture have had the ability to cultivate the Earth so that it will yield a greater abundance of human food than it would if left to its own devices, it is unclear that this involves a moral responsibility to do so. Was the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture fulfilling a moral responsibility? It may be that doing so demonstrates a responsibility to the needs of the human population, but it does not represent a responsibility directed toward the benefit of the Earth.

I suggested earlier that human responsibility in the world depends on ideas about our place in it. Since evolution has done much to undo the myth of human autonomy from and superiority to nature, what kind of role is conceivable? Here a deeper exploration of ecology can shed light on the matter. Because scientific ecology studies the relationships that obtain between organisms and their environment, it can provide clarity on the way that humans too actually relate to and within environmental systems. To spell this out, I will look at the ways that ecologist James Kay and others have adopted complex systems theory and non-equilibrium thermodynamics to map ecological systems and describe their functionality.

3.4.3. Self-Organizing, Holarchic Open Systems

This subsection details why Stewardship is inadequate to contemporary ecology. James Kay represents a growing number of ecologists who are calling for a new approach to understanding ecological systems.[36] While ecology has traditionally operated with explanatory models characterized by linear cause and effect relationships, this new approach questions whether this can adequately represent the kinds of complexity involved in actual ecological relationships.[37] Kay and his colleagues instead argue that explanations ought to be given in terms of morphogenetic causal models, that is, in terms of models defined by feedback loops and self-organizing properties.[38] He proposes that understanding ecosystems as Self-organizing, Holarchic Open (SOHO) systems better captures the complex dynamics evidenced in natural processes. According to Kay and Regier, a SOHO system is:

> a nested constellation of self-organizing dissipative process/structures organized about a particular set of sources of exergy [usable energy], materials, and information, embedded in a physical environment. The canon of the SOHO system is the complex nested interplay and relationships of the processes and

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[36] David Waltner-Toews et al., "Perspective Changes Everything: Managing Ecosystems from the Inside Out," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 1, no. 1 (2003): 23-30; James J. Kay et al., "An Ecosystem Approach for Sustainability: Addressing the Challenge of Complexity," *Futures* 31, no. 7 (1999): 721-42; James J. Kay, "Ecosystems as Self-Organizing Holarchic Open Systems: Narratives and the Second Law of Thermodynamics," in *Handbook of Ecosystems Theories and Management* (Boca Raton: Lewis Publishers, 2000); C. S. Holling, "The Resilience of Terrestrial Ecosystems: Local Surprise and Global Change," in *Sustainable Development in the Biosphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 292-320.

[37] James J. Kay and Henry Regier, "Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ecological Integrity: Insights from an Ecosystem Approach," in *Implementing Ecological Integrity: Restoring Regional and Global Environmental and Human Health,* ed. P. Crabbe, A. Holland, L. Ryszkowski and L. Westra (Kluwer: Environmental Security, 2000), 123-24.

[38] Ibid., 124.

structures, and their propensities, that give rise to coherent self-perpetuating behaviours, that define the [operational state of the ecosystem].[39]

This definition is an application of complex and open systems theory to ecological systems in general. Ecosystems—like SOHO systems—display characteristics of self-organization, hierarchy, and energy dissipation.[40]

Self-organizing systems are governed by positive and negative feedback loops, which drive the system by reinforcing a given information stream. For example, in a particular marsh ecosystem in Southern Canada, the feedback mechanism which maintains the swamp state (the given information stream) is a process of water pumping (evapotranspiration) by the trees that populate it.[41] The dynamics of morphogenic causal feedback loops are such that they may generate surprising emergent phenomena, evident in the functionality of the system as a whole, yet unexplained in terms of the system's individual components. This will be explained in further detail shortly. The process of self-organization describes the dynamics by which energy flows and behaviors become structured into coherent, discernable patterns. These discernable patterns are its operating state, also known as an "attractor." It is called this because the system will have a propensity to remain in this state as if it were "attracted" to it.[42] Ecologists also apply non-equilibrium thermodynamic (NET) models to illustrate the kinds of energy flows within a system. NET models reveal that ecosystems in general are primarily energy

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[39] Ibid., 133.

[40] James J. Kay, "Ecosystems, Science, and Sustainability," in *Advances in Energy Studies: Exploring supplies, Constraints and Strategies,* ed. S. Ulgiati, M. T. Brown, M. Giampietro, R. Herendeen, and K. Mayumi (Porto Venere, Italy ed., 2001), 320-22.

[41] Ibid., 322.

[42] Kay and Regier, "Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ecological Integrity: Insights from an Ecosystem Approach," 129.

dissipative structures that utilize available energy in a system to self-organize.[43] Systems

of this type are characterized by emergence and surprise; they are by nature unpredictable

and preclude simple anticipation of effects from linear causality. Even when

environmental parameters change, feedback loops tend to maintain the system in its

current operating state. However, when the feedback loops are no longer able to maintain

the current state, the entire system will "flip"—often rapidly—into an alternate attractor.

Quite often an ecosystem will have multiple possible operating states, none of which can

be called the "correct" one for the system. Which state the ecosystem currently occupies

is a function of its history.[44] Ecological integrity, in this approach, is not about

maintaining a specific, "ideal" state of an ecosystem, but rather about maintaining the

process of self-organization.

Kay and Regier tell of a wetland maple swamp in Southern Canada as an example

of the dynamic nature of ecosystems.[45] During dryer periods, which occur in extended

drought conditions, the operating state may shift to that of an upland forest community

or grassland. With this shift comes an accompanying "vegetation structure." However,

during extended wet and flooding conditions, the operating state flips to that of a marsh

ecosystem.

> This is because red and silver maple are tolerant to flooded conditions within 30%
> to 40% of the growing season. If flooding events are greater than this threshold,
> the forest trees will die, giving way to more water tolerant herbaceous marsh
> vegetation. The feedback mechanism which maintains the swamp state is

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[43] Ibid., 122.

[44] Kay, "Ecosystems, Science, and Sustainability," 320.

[45] The following example is found in Kay and Regier, "Uncertainty, Complexity, and
Ecological Integrity: Insights from an Ecosystem Approach," 129-30. Emphasis in text.

evapotranspiration (i.e. water pumping) by the trees. Too much water overwhelms the pumping capability of the trees and not enough shuts it down.[46]

The point of this example is to reinforce that the current state of an ecosystem is largely the result of its physical environment and the accidents of its history. A single climate season—in this case, too much or too little rain—can change a landscape for decades.

Structurally speaking, SOHO systems are characterized by hierarchy. Every system is a nested component of another system and is itself constituted by systems. To understand a hierarchy, one must integrate multiple perspectives of different types and scale.[47] For example, simply focusing on the population dynamics of a particular species may not be helpful in understanding phenomena at a regional scale. A famous study on the environmental impact of an oil pipeline on the reproduction of caribou herds focused on the reproductive habitat of the caribou, but it failed to consider the broader scope of potential problems.[48] Once the pipeline was built, it was discovered that the major negative effect of the project was on the way it affected the caribou's food source, something not considered in the original study. Habitats were spared but not the integrity of the food chain. Problems must be addressed at the proper scale. Ecological sustainability must be understood in terms of these nested systems, each forming the context for the level below it. The challenge for traditional approaches to environmental issues is that a nested hierarchy requires multiple perspectives for dealing with a problem; no single correct model will suffice because it will be unable to address all contextual

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 126.

[48] Ibid., 128.

levels. On this front, Kay argues for a "manner of investigation" that utilizes multiple perspectives and models.[49]

The implications for environmental ethics are clear. When it comes to the relationship between humans and the natural world, the effects of human activity on/in an ecosystem have to be evaluated by way of an appropriate causal scheme. Straightforward cause-and-effect models cannot depict the complex nature of actual processes/relationships within a complex system. There must be an account of how human activity influences the system's feedback loops, which buffer the system from changes in external influences and are of key importance to a system's integrity. According to Kay, understanding the way in which changes in context enable and disable positive and negative feedback loops is of primary importance if we are to comprehend the relationships between human activities and changes in the integrity of ecological systems.[50]

The issue then is maintaining a sustainable context not just between individuals and nature but between societal and ecological systems. Society and ecology are not separate domains but nested and interpenetrating with one another. Society is nourished by ecosystems, which is its context and condition of existence. Society in turn shapes the context and influences the structures within which it is embedded. The health of these multivalent relationships may be evaluated in terms of "sustainability"—which is about maintaining the integrity of the combined ecological-societal system. Ultimately, sustainability and integrity are about "maintaining the context (both for the ecological

[49] Ibid., 129.

[50] Ibid., 136.

and societal systems) which is appropriate for the desired states of self-organization."[51]

Stewardship, be it noted, simply cannot handle this condition of an integrated ecological-social system.

Kay's solution for "maintaining the context" is an Adaptive Ecosystem approach to sustainability.[52] It is based on a post-normal scientific epistemology, which moves away from conventional attempts at prediction and certainty in favor of fallible and fluid conclusions.[53] Whereas traditional ecological management attempted to predict and anticipate, with a high degree of certainty, the consequences of relational interactions in a given system, the complexity of system dynamics renders this approach nearly useless. The ability of SOHO systems to generate novel behavior and self-organize unpredictably in response to change makes it impossible to make accurate forecasting models in many situations.[54] In a post-normal approach, the role of the scientist shifts from predictor to narrator. Since there may not be a single "right" answer in a given situation, the definitive quantitative answers so desired by "hard" science are elusive.[55] Instead of inferring what

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[51] Ibid., 142.

[52] See especially Kay et al., "An Ecosystem Approach for Sustainability: Addressing the Challenge of Complexity," 721-42; and Waltner-Toews et al., "Perspective Changes Everything: Managing Ecosystems from the Inside Out," 23-30.

[53] "Post-normal" science is a product of the search for ways of addressing complex environmental concerns. Conventional—or "normal"—scientific approaches in ecology are based on the assumption that explanations can be given in terms of linear cause and effect. The development of morphogenic causal models, which employ feedback loops and other complex dynamics, requires a different kind of explanatory strategy. This gave rise to the birth of post-normal approaches. See S. Funtowicz and J. R. Ravetz, "Science for the Post-Normal Age," *Futures* 25 (1993): 568-82.

[54] Kay, "Ecosystems, Science, and Sustainability," 325.

[55] Traditional ecological approaches balk at the inability to come up with hard definitions of concepts like "integrity" and "sustainability." However, definitions of this type are only possible in very simple, straightforward contexts.

will happen, scientists ought to aim at "providing decision makers and the community with an appreciation, through narrative descriptions, of how the future might unfold."[56]

Through these narratives, scientists can illuminate the human context within the nested hierarchy of systems. This helps put in perspective both how the systems are interrelated, and how changes at one level may impact all others. Understanding the feedback loops and the possible operating states of an ecosystem can help identify the forces that might precipitate flips between attractors.[57] The narratives also provide a space to evaluate human sustainability concerns. Kay emphasizes that:

> care must be taken to identify the human sustainability issues at hand and the appropriate perspectives and scales of investigation necessary to deal with these issues in an ecological context. This identification process can only occur in the context of human values and requires bringing a diversity of views to bear on the question at hand.[58]

What this does not do is rule out human concerns, values, or plans but rather situates them in a broader ecological framework in which ecosystems influence society as well as vice versa.

The core premise for Adaptive Management is that a sustainable society is dependent upon the context of the larger ecological system of which it is a part. In other words, human society and natural ecosystems must be integrated and understood as integrated if they are both to survive. Decision-making involves trying to find our way through the complex maze of interrelationships in a way that sustains the processes that drive system stability, and this involves strategies for maintaining the capacity to adapt to

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[56] Kay, "Ecosystems, Science, and Sustainability," 324.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Kay and Regier, "Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ecological Integrity: Insights from an Ecosystem Approach," 133.

changing environmental conditions. Although a scientist himself, Kay is clear that ecological strategies require interdisciplinary input.

> Decisions must also be made about how to deal with the inherent uncertainties, what risks to take, what contingencies to plan for, what backups to have in place. These decisions must be informed by science, but in the end they are an expression of human ethics and the socio-political context that they are made in.[59]

An ecologically informed narrative is vital for integration by helping humanity learn how to live sustainably in the world.

In principle, Kay's Adaptive Ecosystem approach moves from theory to practice in the development of an issues framework and an adaptive program. This, of course, is aided by the scientific narrative, which helps to determine the sustainability issues of a given system and its possible futures. Both framework and program ought to be developed at the community level, expressing the community's vision for how human and natural ecosystems should "co-evolve as a self-organizing entity."[60] However, local initiatives cannot be formulated without reference to the broader socio-economic contexts of which they are a part. This is easier said than done, especially when a community is either ignorant of ecological perspectives or the consensus of the community runs counter to ecosystem health. A well-cast (and well-informed) vision is needed to guide community consensus toward appropriate action.

The adaptive program itself consists of a plan and infrastructure for governance, management, and monitoring activities. Governance refers to the ongoing, ever-changing process of learning and adapting to changing situations. Management involves the development and implementation of strategies for maintaining the desired context of self-

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[59] Ibid., 144.

[60] Kay, "Ecosystems, Science, and Sustainability," 326.

organization.[61] Finally, monitoring is the activity of assessment, evaluating the effectiveness of the current integrative vision.

All in all, the purpose of Kay's approach is to provide an ecologically-informed basis for human responsibility. An Adaptive Ecosystem approach offers guidance for adapting human activities "so that the human and natural ecosystem co-evolve as a self-organizing entity."[62] It also provides a significant challenge to Stewardship's assumptions about our role in governing or managing creation. Stewardship ethics presupposes the same kinds of scientific epistemology (explanation in terms of linear causality) utilized by conventional ecological management strategies. Kay has rightly demonstrated the weakness of these explanations, because they cannot, in principle, express the complexity of ecosystems. Being a Steward of nature requires a degree of control and mastery that simply does not exist in actual ecological relations.

Clare Palmer is correct in questioning that "man actually is ultimately in control of the natural world—or, to phrase it another way, that man is *able* to be a steward."[63] SOHO systems theory explains this inability. A nested hierarchy of systems creates layers of contexts and scales. These systems operate in a state of constant flux, responding to change according to their propensities, and driven by positive and negative feedback loops. Systems display emergent phenomena not reducible to the parts that make up the

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[61] Kay points out that this does not entail intervening in the system in a mechanical way. Generally, management in this paradigm concentrates on the relationship between human and natural systems, guiding the human side of the equation. Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 327.

[63] Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," 80.

system, and they respond unpredictably to changes in context.[64] Human systems are deeply embedded in this hierarchy and operate by the same dynamic principles. Larger, more expansive ecosystems form the context for and influence human sociality and therefore govern its possible states of existence. A place (terrain, climate) and its energy relationships (plant and animal species, food chains, water sources, etc.) provide limits and possibilities for the way people live in their particular part of the world. While humans may impact and alter their ecosystem context, they cannot master it. To put it in more conventional language, humans may fight and protect themselves against the forces of nature, but they cannot ultimately control them.

Even though Kay uses the language of management in his Adaptive Ecosystems scheme, it should be noted that he is careful to distance it from notions of intervention. Management for Kay concerns maintaining the context for a system's self-organization, which means guiding human behavior toward integration with that context. In this sense, what is managed is human behavior, not the ecosystems themselves (or parts of an ecosystem, such as a forest).

From all this it is clear that contemporary perspectives on human nature, particularly insights from biological evolution and scientific ecology, have effectively rejected Stewardship's most central assumptions of ontological superiority and managerial mastery. The conceptual paradigm upon which Stewardship ethics has been built has given way to newer paradigms of complexity and interrelatedness. Although nuanced

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[64] Kay notes that Lake Erie has two possible operating states which he terms benthic and pelagic, and it is not uncommon for lakes in the area to flip between the two due to naturally occurring events. Human activity in the region spurred a flip from benthic to pelagic several decades ago and continues to reinforce it in this state. However, the relatively recent introduction of zebra mussels in Lake Erie seems to be driving the system toward a previously unknown and unpredictable operating state. Kay and Regier, "Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ecological Integrity," 136.

defenders of the concept—such as Hall and DeWitt—do much to answer the various

critiques leveled against it, Stewardship still suffers from a fatal flaw: its vision of human

identity and vocation. It could be argued that Stewardship ethics could be saved by an

integration of the ecological and managerial dimensions, but I think that the two are

mutually exclusive. Incorporation of the ecological negates, in principle, managerial

possibilities internal to the concept of Stewardship.

In terms of the models methodology discussed in the Introduction, Stewardship

fails as an ethical model on at least two fronts. Although it can be argued that

Stewardship is rooted in a faith tradition (Christianity) and offers a fairly wide scope of

relational contexts, it struggles to adequately meet the other two criteria. Most

significantly, Stewardship fails the criterion of consistency with interdisciplinary data,

particularly that contributed by the field of ecology. It simply fails to model human

embeddedness in the natural world. In addition, as Wirzba has pointed out, the ethical

ambiguity of Stewardship provides only vague norms and no internal logic to carry out

those norms in a particular manner.

Since Stewardship currently occupies such a popular place in both ecclesial and

theological spheres, moving beyond it will not be an easy task. Yet this is what we must

do if we seek to offer a credible, effective alternative capable of addressing environmental

problems. Before laying out my own proposal for going beyond Stewardship in the

following chapters, I want to look at a few alternative options already on the table.

3.5. Moving Beyond Stewardship: Some Alternative Models

In recent theological scholarship there has been a conscious attempt to replace the

Stewardship model with alternatives better suited to contemporary ecological theories.[65]

Three alternatives will be examined in the following pages. Each of these alternatives

represents an explicit and stated attempt to go beyond the weaknesses of Stewardship by

offering a more ecologically-sensitive theological theory. The eschatological approach

flows out of proleptically-focused eschatological theologies. Philip Hefner's scheme

reflects the ever-growing field of science and theology, which seeks to reframe traditional

Christian beliefs in light of the natural sciences. Norman Wirzba's model represents an

approach that seeks to reform Stewardship by altering the organizing metaphor.

Servanthood, for Wirzba, is a way of refocusing Stewardship without drastically moving

away from the sense of responsibility that it engenders.

3.5.1. Eschatological

In *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, Ernst Conradie sets out to reorient the

entire conceptual landscape of Christian anthropology. It is clear from the outset that

Conradie works within the context of ecological theology, which he identifies as a kind of

contextual theology in the vein of feminist or liberation theologies.[66] Like these others,

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[65] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature*; J. Baird Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999), 427; Himes and Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology*, 213; Jame Schaefer, "The Virtuous Cooperator: Modeling the Human in an Ecologically Endangered Age," *Worldviews* 7 (2003): 171-195.

[66] Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, 264.

ecological theology is both a defense and critique of Christian faith as it pertains to a particular context, in this case as a response to environmental threats and injustice.

Because the environmental crisis concerns the environment as affected by humanity, and because how humans understand themselves shapes that impact, anthropology forms the crux of any ecological theology. The central question that must be asked, argues Conradie, concerns the place of humanity within the earth community.[67] One image that has dominated ecological theologies is that of humans "at home on earth," which emphasizes the embeddedness of humanity within the natural processes of the planet. Conradie refers to those that embrace this image as "oikos theologies," because of their utilization of the Greek *oikos* (house) and its derivatives. The earth is God's *oikos*, and humans are members of the household. Generally speaking, oikos theologies locate the place of humanity as "at home on Earth" and point to humanity's role or vocation therein as a responsibility to act in ways that benefit the whole household. Stewardship is one way of describing that human role.[68]

While Conradie certainly criticizes Stewardship as a root metaphor for understanding the human place and vocation in the world, his greater concern lies with the overarching context within which the anthropological inquiry takes place. To illustrate his point, he traces the diverse sources upon which theologians have drawn in the construction of theological anthropologies. From Calvin situating anthropology in the doctrine of God, to Barth's Christological anthropology, to Moltmann's pneumatological anthropology, a tradition of establishing true humanity within the relationship between

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[67] Ibid., 2.

[68] Ibid., 6-7.

God and humans predominates.[69] While these allow for a *theological* rendering of humanity, their personalist trajectories make them difficult to reconcile with an *ecological* vision.

> Says Conradie,
>
>> There is a clear need to situate the doctrine of humanity within the context of a far more thorough reintegration of the doctrines of creation, sin, providence, redemption and consummation.[70]

In other words, anthropology may serve as a kind of filtering lens through which the whole of Christian doctrine may be viewed.

The locus for this integration in Conradie's view, however, is eschatology. Conradie argues, "[W]e can only understand the place and vocation of humanity in the earth community if we have a sense of the destiny (telos) of creation and of humanity."[71] This eschatological focus, then, leads to a moderation of the "at home on Earth" theme. The Earth is *not yet* our home. "Belonging" to the earth is a "longing" that we share, since we do *not yet* belong. It is God's house, but not yet our home.[72]

So what does a thoroughly eschatological framework tell us about humanity's vocation in God's household? Conradie explores a range of given options noting a series of shifts in perspective as one slides along a continuum. As one moves from domination to Stewardship, from Stewardship to servanthood, from servanthood to membership in God's household, from membership to sojourning, and from sojourning to homelessness,

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[69] Ibid., 10-12.

[70] Ibid., 12.

[71] Ibid., 13.

[72] Ibid.

there is a progression toward his own eschatological perspective.[73] However, Conradie

never offers a clear root metaphor for understanding our role in it all. There are hints and

implications but no fully fledged anthropological model. The closest he comes to that is

suggesting that the category of "preparation" may serve as a possible metaphor, but he

never develops it any further.[74]

Robert John Russell, himself a proponent of an eschatological context for

understanding humanity, offers a potential model. He suggests that humanity become the

"eschatological companion" to all life on earth.[75] At the heart of Russell's position is a shift

away from using the *imago Dei* as a basis for humanity's relation to the world. Instead, he

proposes that this relation "should be based on the life, ministry, death, and resurrection

of Jesus of Nazareth, since this is what makes Christian faith distinctively Christian."[76]

This reconceptualizing of the human person is constructed around the proleptic

hope of new life, grounded in the resurrection of Jesus, which results in a radical

recreation of the new universe out of the present one.[77] Human identity and vocation only

have meaning in this context:

> It is this eschatological future—no matter how dim, how inconceivable it is in light
> of science, no matter how unlikely it is in light of evil and suffering in human
> society and in nature—to which we must orient all our ultimate plans and ideals
> and convictions if we are to live as Christians today in the Easter dawning of a new

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[73] Conradie, "Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?," 153-174. See also
Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, 215-217.

[74] Conradie, "Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?," 169. See also Conradie,
An Ecological Christian Anthropology, 229-230.

[75] Robert John Russell, "Five Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology from a Christian
Perspective," *Theology and Science* 1, no. 2 (2003): 156.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

age. Somehow all of nature, and not just humankind, is destined to eternal life with God in community with each other, a community of unending and bliss-filled experience. This eschatological vision would be, for the Christian at least, the "litmus test" of all our plans, the "plumb-line" for all our values, the ideal for all our goals, pointing toward the conjoined future God has in store for all life on earth.[78]

On this basis, Russell departs from the Stewardship model, which has no eschatological orientation.

3.5.2. Created Co-Creator

Another model that has received significant attention of late is Philip Hefner's concept of humanity as "created co-creators." This marks his attempt at integrating theological and ecological insights on human being within a Lakatosian research program.[79] At the core of his proposal is a theological anthropology that takes very seriously the picture of the world painted by the natural sciences. By understanding the human being through the lens of the natural sciences, Hefner's anthropological model incorporates bio-cultural evolution within the physical ecosystem.[80] The empirical description of the world offered by the natural sciences serves as the basis for his theological proposal.

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[78] Ibid., 157.

[79] Imre Lakatos (1922-1974) is perhaps best known for his contribution of the idea of the "research programme" to the philosophy of science. This was his attempt to integrate the seemingly irreconcilable scientific philosophies of Thomas Kuhn and Karl Popper. A research programme consists of a conceptual "hard core" buffered by "auxiliary hypotheses." Challenges to a currently accepted scientific paradigm—through new data or innovative theories—may cause revisions in the auxiliary hypotheses. Once these auxiliaries are unable to account for novel data, then the hard core itself must be replaced by another that can explain the phenomena. Theologians like Hefner and Nancey Murphy have adapted this model of theory change to theological paradigms as well.

[80] Philip J. Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 27.

Hefner sees in a human being a two-natured character, the culmination of two information streams in a singular physical substructure.[81] The first is the information derived from our genetics, which determines the parameters of physical possibilities. Included in this is what we look like, what kind of temperament we have, and how well and in what manner we respond to environmental stimuli. The second information stream is that derived from our social embeddedness within a culture. This stream shapes how we view reality, how we relate to one another, and how we view relationships between all things.

Hefner sees this two-natured character as the source of our apparently contradictory experiences of both freedom and determinism in human existence. Who we are is constituted by both genetic and cultural factors. We are the products of nature (our genes) *and* nurture (our socialization within a culture). The former corresponds with our experience of conditionedness, the latter with our experience of freedom. Both forces come together in the human being.

From this empirical description emerges Hefner's theological proposal:

Human beings are God's created co-creators whose purpose is to be the agency, acting in freedom, to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us—the nature that is not only our own genetic heritage, but also the entire human community and the evolutionary and ecological reality in which and to which we belong. Exercising this agency is said to be God's will for humans.[82]

Each element of the model's nomenclature is designed to capture the multidimensional complexities of being both determined and free.

"Created" captures the conditionedness of human existence by recognizing that we find ourselves placed within an ecosystem, in an intimate interrelationship with an

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[81] Ibid., 29.

[82] Ibid., 27.

environment that conditions us in significant ways. "Theologically, we say that this

conditionedness has been given to us by God; humans have been created and given their

place in the evolutionary process by God."[83] It also speaks to human connectedness with

all of life's processes and all other created things. There is no ontological divide between

humans and the material universe because all alike are connected and situated. Most

importantly, this connectedness is linked to divine purposes in creating, which provide

the overarching context within which human activity and purposes may be understood.

"Co-creator" speaks to the freedom of human beings. Hefner is careful to make

clear his understanding of human freedom:

> Freedom is defined in this connection neither as liberty (the classical liberal and
> prevailing American view) nor as the ability to make and shape the world (the
> prevailing Marxist view). Rather, freedom refers to the condition of existence in
> which humans unavoidably face the necessity both of making choices and of
> constructing the stories that contextualize and hence justify those choices.[84]

Freedom entails responsibility when human purposes are linked to God's purposes.

Hefner argues that human purposes are embedded in life processes: we see our purpose

and destiny in the structures (conditioning matrix) of the processes that brought about

our being. In interpreting and understanding these processes, it is possible to project

human purpose and destiny. Humans, as that part of nature to attain a level of freedom,

have a responsibility to learn and further the God-ordained goals of his creative purposes.

In this sense, humans are "co-creators" with God. Humans are not the source of life-

processes but have the ability and responsibility to shape their trajectories.

The human being, then, *is* nature becoming what it will be. It is a step in the

emergence of free creation. By recognizing the conditioned freedom of our existence, we

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[83] Ibid., 36.

[84] Ibid., 38.

take our place as special agents, co-creators, in the divine creative plan. This view goes beyond Stewardship in that it more accurately depicts the limits and possibilities of human interaction in the natural world.

3.5.3. Servanthood

Norman Wirzba seeks to go beyond Stewardship not by abolishing it but by building upon some of its basic insights. Like other Stewardship models, he locates his anthropological understanding in the creation texts of Genesis 1 and 2. The "dominion" concept is carefully qualified in terms of presence, as in the way a dome or spire "dominates" a cityscape.[85] Understood this way, human dominion can be seen as a transforming presence rather than an oppressive domination.

Wirzba then connects dominion as transforming presence to human creation in the image of God in Genesis. Humans have been set apart, as *imago Dei*, not because they are something other than creation, but because they have a unique role to play within creation.[86] This special status is played out as a call to responsibility, a task which defines our humanity.

At this point, Wirzba parts ways with the Stewardship concept, opting instead for a model of Servanthood as fulfillment of Stewardship. Noting that the Hebrew verb in Genesis 2:15 (*abad*) often translated as "till" or "cultivate" can also mean "serve," he connects the creation narratives with the New Testament call that Christians be servants to one another. He interprets the dominion of humans laid out in Genesis not in terms of

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[85] Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 125.

[86] Ibid., 127.

domination—or even Stewardship—but in light of Christ's mission of service and in terms of sustaining creation.[87] He extends service to nature as God's creation.

Servanthood in relation to nature so understood speaks to the character of human vocation. Seeing ourselves as servants of creation, shifts the orientation of action from ourselves to others. It is this other-centeredness that is constitutive of—and flows out of—our identity as servants. Practically speaking, humans are servants of creation when their actions are governed by the well-being of others, both human and non-human alike. According to Wirzba, this means aligning human intelligence, desire, and will with the planet's life processes[88] in order to maximize creation's health.[89] "Our dominion, viewed christologically, is to effect a transformation of the world such that it no longer reflects pain and suffering, but rather health and peace."[90]

3.6. Shortcomings of the Alternative Models

As insightful and constructive as these alternatives to Stewardship are, they are missing something important. Each contains conceptual flaws that I believe hinders itsability to serve as adequate models of human ecopraxis.

3.6.1. Eschatological

While Conradie's critiques are thorough and his eschatological scheme is theologically plausible, his glaring weakness is the absence of an actual anthropology. He

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[87] Ibid., 138.

[88] Ibid., 139.

[89] Ibid., 140.

[90] Ibid., 144.

may be laying the groundwork for the building of an ecological theological anthropology, but none is evident yet in his work. This is an important deficiency since, presumably, an eschatological shift in perspective will impact not only our understanding of the place of humans in creation but also our understanding of the vocation of human beings acting on creation.

Russell does not fare much better with his "eschatological companion" model. His vision of the *eschaton* provides a possible identity for humanity by linking the resurrection of the body with the redemption of all creation, but it is still unclear what the implications are for a human vocation. He does note that the use of technology should reflect Christ-like love, but how this flows from a specifically eschatological perspective is just as unclear. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge or clarity on what the realized *eschaton* will be like in comparison with known and knowable history is a real weakness. There is very little upon which to build a "vision" that guides moral behavior.

From a criterion of ethical models standpoint, the eschatological view is weak in the area of ethical vision and scope. Although it presents itself as a temporally comprehensive model, it is unclear how it ought to be applied in various contexts. Furthermore, the lack of a definable anthropology weakens its ability to be consistent with interdisciplinary data.

3.6.2. Created co-creator

Hefner's proposal attempts to integrate theological and scientific visions of the human being. His model places humanity squarely in the midst of the conditioning matrix of life-processes, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all created things. The relationship between humans and nature becomes nature's self-relation, since humans are

never seen as over or against nature. In fact, Hefner argues that such a separation is

artificial and misleading. If we view humans as ontologically distinct from the rest of

creation, we are incapable of understanding humanity.

While Hefner has provided a scientifically plausible reading of humanity, he has

not been without his critics.[91] Critique, though, has focused primarily upon his theological

proposal and not his incorporation of scientific data. The problem, as I see it, is in the

theological ambiguity and unwieldiness of the concept itself. What does it mean to be a

"created co-creator?" Ambiguity manifests itself on several fronts. First, it is unclear

toward what ends the created co-creator is working. What is the future towards which

humanity should direct planet Earth?[92] If it is simply to further the processes of evolution

for our species, as Hefner seems to be suggesting, then the task is theologically

unsatisfying, since this task gains priority over anything like salvation and evangelization.

Secondly, it is unclear what serves as the ground of our ethical obligations. This is

due to Hefner's insufficient attention to responsibility.[93] Yes, our conditioned freedom

implies responsibility, but there is not a clear picture of what that responsibility entails,

nor the manner in which that responsibility is to be exercised. Furthermore, Hefner

undercuts any possible ground for obligation by denying any distinction between humans

and the rest of creation. While an ontological distinction can be exaggerated, still some

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[91] See Anna Case-Winters, "Rethinking the Image of God," *Zygon* 39, no. 4 (December 2004): 813-826 ; Gregory R. Peterson, "The Created Co-Creator: What It Is and Is Not," *Zygon* 39, no. 4 (December 2004): 827-840; Russell, "Five Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology from a Christian Perspective," 149-159 ; Roger A. Willer, "Created Co-Creator in the Perspective of Church and Ethics," *Zygon* 39, no. 4 (December 2004): 841-858.

[92] Russell, "Five Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology from a Christian Perspective," 155.   This is a strong concern for the eschatologically-minded Russell.

[93] Willer, "Created Co-Creator in the Perspective of Church and Ethics," 852.   Willer describes Hefner's program as an axiology with no theory of obligation.

form of criteria must be established by which humans are obligated to act in a particular manner. Without a destiny or differentiation for humans, it is impossible for Hefner to establish anything but an arbitrary sense of obligation.

It may also be asked whether created co-creator is the most adequate metaphor for human self-understanding.[94] Linguistically speaking, there is some concern that Hefner's term distracts from its intended purposes by its sheer awkwardness. Hefner is trying to depict both the place and role of humans in the scheme of created reality, yet his own analysis of the concept seems dominated by a focus on our place in the world. His title, however, brings the issue of human vocation to the fore by calling attention to the term "co-creator" as a description of our role. The adjectival "created" inadvertently fails to carry the same weight.[95] The very phrasing of the concept distracts from the thrust of what it is intended to communicate.

As a model, it seems to only loosely fit the criteria of being rooted in Christian tradition, and I think this undermines its ability to be adopted by a variety of Christian groups. Hefner does a fantastic job of being consistent with interdisciplinary data, but fails to do this in a way that carries ethical weight. In other words, the model's ethical vision does not provide an adequate ground of human responsibility.

3.6.3. Servanthood

In many ways, Wirzba's Servanthood model shares affinities with Hall's Stewardship model, especially with Hall's suggestion that servanthood is the character or mode of Stewardship, how it is exercised. Wirzba drops the term "Stewardship" for the

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[94] Ibid., 847-849.

[95] Ibid., 848-849.

reasons listed above. Yet Servanthood has its own baggage in many ex-colonial cultures, where oppressive economic servitude has taken on the taint of slavery. However, it is more theologically developed than Stewardship. While the image is translatable into virtually any cultural context, the question remains as to whether it can be the best metaphor in *all* cultural contexts. There still exists the possibility of distortion and misunderstanding, though its theological development into service helps to safeguard against that. In particular, the model may find serious receptivity problems in cultural contexts where the occupation of "servant" may carry heavy negative connotations of class stratification.

Wirzba does much to overcome the ambiguities of Stewardship, even while retaining its positive sense of human responsibility. In many ways, he takes the positive insights of Hall's Stewardship, particularly his emphasis on love and reciprocity, and then adopts a new designative title. Steward is replaced by servant.

As a model, Servanthood demonstrates greater potential than Stewardship. However, it still fails to meet important criteria as an ethical model. First, for many of the same reasons as Stewardship, Servanthood can be questioned concerning its consistency with interdisciplinary data. While it does not explicitly affirm—and in fact denies—ideas of human mastery and control, Wirzba also does not present a detailed anthropology. His concern is with human behavior and attitudes, both of which could be greatly enhanced with a clearly stated interdisciplinary view of human nature. Secondly, Servanthood fails the criterion of scope, as noted above.

3.7. Conclusion

The assumptions regarding humanity at the very core of Stewardship are so problematic, so detrimental to a constructive construal, that Stewardship cannot be accepted as a viable model of human agency in ecotheology. Alternatives to it claim to improve upon Stewardship's deficiencies to varying degrees of success. However, it has been shown that they too are inadequate as models of human behavior. What then is the state of the question? There still exists the need for a revised approach to ecological theological anthropology and a new ethic that moves beyond Stewardship.

David Field questions whether it is even possible for a single model to express the complexities of the relationship between humans and the environment. Since socio-economic factors determine the way humans relate to nature and anyone's place in the economic power structures in particular, no single model allows for a vision of how *all* should relate. "The concept of human beings as Stewards of creation is not comprehensive enough to provide ethical direction within these complex relationships."[96] In other words, the ethical model employed will necessarily be context-dependent if it is going to have any significant meaning.

What is needed is a revised approach. Rather than seeking an overarching ethical model to guide environmental praxis, I will argue for a more basic and comprehensive paradigm of human relationality. Functionally, this would be a kind of meta-ethical model capable of application in the specific area of ecological praxis. Such a paradigm would be structured as a relational dynamic capable of being expressed in multiple, context-dependent models and metaphors. While determinate models will come and go

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[96] Field, "Stewards of Shalom: Toward a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic," 387.

as socio-economic contexts shift, the universal relational dynamic of normative Christian praxis will continue to support and inspire new models to meet these shifting contexts.

After the analysis in this chapter, it is my conclusion that Stewardship cannot account for the kind of responsibility humans in fact have, the responsibility to be different, to be-for and be-with all dimensions of creation. Nor is Stewardship an adequate model of human agency. If the goal of environmental ethics is the health of both human and non-human systems, does the image of a manager—with its goal of a well-ordered home—convey the right kind of relational dynamics to guide how humans relate to nature? In this light, I propose that the question is not "how do we relate *to* nature?", but "who are we *with* nature?" The following chapters will explore a model of human agency sufficient for addressing environmental concerns from a theological perspective. The dissertation will identify the ethical dimension of this model in New Testament terms of *agape*.

CHAPTER FOUR:
CONCEPTS OF LOVE AND *AGAPE* IN ECOTHEOLOGY

"A Christian ecological ethic is seriously deficient—if even conceivable—unless it is grounded in Christian love."[1]
--James Nash

The previous chapter looked at the way that views of human nature and human responsibility are related. Ethics—as the prescriptive guidelines and norms for human behavior—always involves a presupposed anthropology that spells out the limits and possibilities of human agency. Stewardship as an ethical model for human/nature relationships involves and presupposes an anthropology in which human agency has the purpose of managing nature for human benefit. This begins the problematic anthropology of Stewardship.Not only does it fail to model the way that humans are relationally embedded in the world as Kay's SOHO model showed, but Stewardship may be counterproductive in guiding human behavior in an ecological context—the very context for which it is claimed to be most appropriate. Furthermore, it was argued at the end of Chapter Three that several attempts to move beyond Stewardship were ultimately unsuccessful in delimiting *the* way humans should relate to nature.

The purpose of the final two chapters is to find a way beyond Stewardship in ecotheology. David Field reminded us in the last chapter that human relationality in the natural world is too complex to be depicted by a single model.[2] What is required is a diversity of models that can reflect a multiplicity of ways of being-in-the-world. I think that Field is correct in this matter. Yet while a single model of human action, as Field

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[1] James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 139.

[2] David N. Field, "Stewards of Shalom: Toward a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic," *Qarterly Review* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 383-396.

argues, may be too narrow to address the complexity of ecological relationships, perhaps a multivalent ethic can accomplish this task. If models represent the way that human relationality is manifested in ecological relations, then an ethic such as this could provide a thematic unity.

In this chapter I want to explore the possibilities of developing a multivalent, ecologically sensible ethic of human agency grounded in Christian love. Specifically, I want to develop this approach to ethics out of a robust interpretation of *agape,* the Greek word for "love" used most often in the New Testament.[3] The reason I look to biblical *agape* is because it serves as a bridge between ethics and anthropology, as well as a credible rootedness in Christian tradition. While this chapter develops the rationale and meaning of *agapeic* love in environmental ethics, the final chapter will demonstrate how an *agapeic* ethic flows out of an *agapeic*, relational concept of human nature.

The desire to link environmental concerns with Christian ethics is not just a matter of a correct understanding of faith, but a right understanding of mobilization. Ethicist Anna Peterson notes that environmental ethics is usually seen as a type of applied ethics with a public aspect, as opposed to a formal or abstract moral system. However, she argues insightfully that it might be more fruitful to conceive of environmental ethics as a type of lived ethic rather than as an "application" of a more general ethical framework.[4] In other words, environmental ethics as a lived ethic deals with the moral assumptions, principles, and values that actually shape the way individuals and

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[3] See e.g. John 3:35; 14:31; 15:30; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2; and 1 John 3:16.

[4]Anna Lisa Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and our Place in the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 4.

communities live their lives in an ecological context. Religion, she goes on to say,

provides the principal models for lived ethics.

> Like philosophical ethics, religious ethics reflect upon conceptions of good and evil, correct and incorrect behavior and the consequences thereof, goals for individuals and communities to seek, and obstacles to realizing those goals. Religious ethics are distinguished, however, by their grounding in the histories, texts, rituals, practices, and situations of particular communities...Religion remains the primary way that most people conceptualize the "big questions" of ethics and metaphysics...In and through religious narratives and rituals, people set everyday duties, concerns, conflicts, and hopes in a larger context, giving them meaning and significance beyond their own times and places.[5]

Religion, then, is a powerful force in forming, sustaining, or challenging ethical ideas and

practices, and religion does this without in the first instance invokinga formal ethical

theory. Instead and first of all religious communities through practices, narratives, and

rituals cast and recast ideas about what it means to be human, the value of nonhuman

nature, and the possibilities and needs for social and ecological transformation.Although

religions have ethical codes, the most formative, underlying ways of being in the world are

absorbed by adherents less by way of hearing direct injunctions in articulated

propositions, and more through non-propositional mediations in practices, narratives, and

rituals.

The previous two chapters explored and critiqued the predominant way that

Western Christianity has understood the meaning of humanity and our role in the

cosmos. In light of the serious deficiencies in Stewardship as a conceptual metaphor for

Christian environmental ethics, I believe that Christianity would be better served with a

new one that expressed a better anthropology. My goal, then, in the final two chapters is

to demonstrate how love—cast in terms of *agape*—might serve as a better and more

fundamentally Christian alternative to Stewardship. If a concept of Christian love and its

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[5] Ibid.*,* 5.

accompanying anthropology can be thematized as a ground for environmental ethics,

then it paves the way for Christianity to become a more positive force in transforming

ecologically-destructive human behavior.

4.1. Why love?

I suggest *love* as an ethical motif for several reasons. First, it is an essential

component of Jesus' highest command: to love God and to love one's neighbor.[6] Because I

am writing to Christians as a Christian, this seems a credible starting point. Insofar as

Christian faith and life is conformed to the life and teaching of Christ, any Christian ethic

ought to be grounded there. Secondly, linking environmental issues with Jesus' command

to love opens a new possibility for the mobilization of individuals and communities

toward greater eco-praxis, since presumably all Christians share a commitment to the

centrality of divine love.

4.1.1.Command to Love

When comparing the structure of an ethic of environmental Stewardship to the

structure of Christian ethics in general, an interesting divergence appears. Whereas the

former revolves around an injunction to dominate or manage,[7] the latter tends to be

centered in Jesus' command to love God and neighbor.[8] I think this difference is

significant. For one thing, it appears that Stewardship operates under a different logic

than Christian ethics in general. Moreover the motivation for action derives from a

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[6] See e.g. Mark 12: 29-31.

[7] Gen 1:28.

[8] Mark 12:29-31; Matt 22:37-39; and Luke 10:27-28.

different injunction. While defenders of Stewardship often attempt to make a connection between the command to manage and the command to love, the connection cannot be sustained.[9] Such a connection is so qualified as to be nearly artificial and tenuous. This puts Stewardship ethics at risk of standing outside the normative sphere of Christian ethics. At best it utilizes a disconnected logic; at worst it is insufficiently Christian. The inability of an environmental ethic of Stewardship to find strong, clear, and fundamental grounds in the New Testament makes it suspect.

That being said, I agree with James Nash that a Christian environmental ethic—like any other Christian ethic—must in some way be grounded in love.[10] What I will spell out in the next two chapters is a way that love can be manifested in an ecological context. First, though, I believe it will be important to clarify what I mean by "love" and "*agape*" and how I see them issuing forth from the Biblical text. Although my project is primarily theological and philosophical, it is important that it also be well-grounded in Scripture.

The essence of the Great Commandments is found in parallel passages from the gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew it says:

> Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"
> Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."[11]

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[9] For example Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 258.

[10] Nash, *Loving Nature*, 139.

[11] Matt 22:34-40 NIV. All biblical references are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted. See R. T. France, ed. *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary,* ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985) and Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004)

Mark's version goes like this:

> One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?"
>   Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
>   The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."
>   When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.[12]

Here is Luke's version of the passage:

> And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"
>   And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"
>   And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."
>   And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."[13]

In this encounter Jesus is making it clear that the *way* one is obedient to the Law is more important than simple obedience: motives and relationships matter. When one truly loves God and other people, then they will truly be obedient in following particular laws, because to love is the culmination of the Law. Likewise, Paul elucidates the centrality of love in the Christian life by echoing this sentiment.[14] His treatise on the matter in 1

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[12] Mark 12:28-34. See William Barclay, ed. *The Gospel of Mark,* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956) and James A. Brooks, *Mark* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991).

[13] Luke 10:25-28. See F. Scott Spencer, *The Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) and Richard B. Vinson, *Luke* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2008).

Corinthians 13 makes an even stronger statement by arguing that without love, even noble and angelic acts are worthless. It would seem, then, that a Christian ethic must not only take into account, but also depend on and promote, the centrality of loving God and loving others.

For now I will assume that the command to love God and neighbor is a valid, sufficient ground for Christian ethics.[15] After all, Jesus indicated that nothing was more fundamental than this, that love transcends the Law by fulfilling it. Christian ethics, then, is—or should be—ordered around reflection on what it *means* to love God and neighbor in light of this command and the witness of the early believers.

4.1.2. Love and Agape in Scripture

Love is a central concept in both the Old and New Testaments, used to designate a variety of affections, dispositions, and relational dynamics involving God and human beings. It is used to characterize human relationships with one another (e.g. John 21:15), God's relationship with humanity (e.g. John 3:16), human responsiveness to God (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22), and even the nature of God's very being (e.g. 1 John 4:8). In both the New Testament—written in Greek—and the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament—the term *agape* is the word used most often to designate this concept. Much

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[14] See e.g. Gal 5:14 and Rom 13:8-10. For commentary reference on Galatians see John R. W. Stott, ed. *The Message of Galatians,* ed. Motyer, J. A. and John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968); F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982); and Scot McKnight, *Galatians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995). For commentary reference on Romans see John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994) and C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985).

[15] This is the premise of such works as Gene H. Outka, Edmund N. Santurri, and William Werpehowski, *The Love Commandments: Essays in Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992); and Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994).

has been made of the various classical Greek terms that can be translated by the English "love," and the fact that both Greek Testaments use *agape* almost exclusively.[16] Anders Nygren developed the popular thesis that *agape* represents an expression of love that is unique to Christianity. It is God's love for humanity. *Agape,* as the essence of Christian love revealed in the New Testament, is unmotivated, spontaneous, and indifferent to value.[17]

However, a careful study of the way in which *agape* is used in both Testaments challenges Nygren's thesis.[18] In translating the Septuagint from Hebrew to Greek, the Greek-speaking translators had at their disposal a number of lexical options for designating the range of affections that we call "love." *Eros* (desire, longing) and *philia* (mutuality, friendship) were common in classical Greek, yet were passed over in favor of the less familiar *agape*. Perhaps this was done because the meaning of *agape* is less specified than the others and therefore amenable to a wider range of relational dynamics.[19] Whatever the reason, it has become the linguistic root of Christian theologies of divine and human love, and it drives a number of works that seek to determine the true, essential, or uniquely Christian meaning of *agape*.[20]

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[16] For example James Moffatt, *Love in the New Testament* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930) and Bernard Brady, *Christian Love* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

[17] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 764.

[18] Nygren's work continues to be influential even as it has undergone extensive criticism over the last two decades. The Spring 1996 issue of the *Journal of Religious Ethics* was devoted entirely to discussing the strengths and weaknesses of his work.

[19] Brady, *Christian Love*, 54.

[20] In addition to Nygren, see Gene H. Outka, *Agape: an Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); and Stephen Garrard Post, *A Theory of Agape: On the Meaning of Christian Love* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990).

Scholarship on the subject emphasizes that the Christian meaning of *agape* is not to be found in studying its use in classical Greek literature, but in the way it is used in the biblical texts. This recognizes that there is a difference: the Christian Scriptures employ *agape* in diverse and unique ways. From a theological perspective, this is especially true of Jesus' ministry and teaching in the New Testament. "Jesus revealed the meaning of love by his life,"[21] and this love was identified by the authors of the New Testament as *agape.*

The result of a focus on the way this concept is used in Scripture reveals not a unified, essential meaning but a diverse and polyphonic presence.[22] Ethicist Amy Laura Hall argues that articulating the epitome of Christian love can only come at the expense of silencing a multiplicity of voices found in the biblical narratives. Nygren's problem—a problem shared by those he continues to influence—is trying to find *the* essence of Christian love by distilling a singular meaning from *agape*.[23] Rather, we should allow *agape* to speak for itself as it confronts us through a variety of narrative voices. In doing so, we are better able to maintain the nuanced complexity of divine and human relationality. In the Septuagint, *agape* translates affections and commitments that are sometimes disparate. For example, it is used to translate words such as *ahav* (a form of passionate love); *rechem* (a physical attachment eliciting mercy toward another); and *dodh* (joyful delight in another). In addition, *agape* is also linked strongly with *hesed* (steadfastness or abounding loyalty, sometimes translated as "steadfast love"); *taseq* (to be

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[21] G. Johnston, "Love in the New Testament," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 169.

[22] Amy Laura Hall, "Complicating the Command: *Agape* in Scriptural Context," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 19, no. 1 (1999): 97-113.

[23] Ibid., 98. Hall argues convincingly that a careful reading of *agape* in Old and New Testaments simply cannot yield Nygren's concept of *agape* as "unmotivated" and "spontaneous." In the OT, God shows his love as faithfulness to an unfaithful Israel. The NT injunction to love one's enemies is an extension of this basic faithfulness in the face of betrayal.

bound or attached to another); or *rasah* (being pleased with another).[24] In these ways, *agape* is used both for God's love and our responsive stance toward Him and our neighbor. The connotation is not always positive—for example, David's son Amnon raped his sister Tamar out of his *agapao* ("lust") for her (see 2 Samuel 13). However, when used of God's relationship to humans, *agape* conveys God's intensely passionate relation to Israel, benevolence toward Creation, empathy toward neighbor, and impartial goodwill.[25]

The New Testament writers build on this Old Testament foundation. God's abiding love, demonstrated in His faithfulness during the exodus and repeatedly promised in His covenants, sets the narrative context for understanding divine and human *agape* and lays the pattern for how it is used in the New Testament. In Luke, for example, God's *agape* is illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-31). There, the father's steadfast love for the wayward son resembles Hosea's love for the unfaithful Gomer and parallels God's steadfast love for a people that continually rebel against Him. Johanine *agape* goes even further: God not only loves his people, he also *is* love (1 John 4:8, 16). Out of this *agape*, the followers of Jesus are called to "love one another."

4.2. Theological appropriations of *Agapeic* Love

The connection between God's being as love and our command to love one another is foundational to the way I will suggest that *agape* can be used as a foundation for an environmental ethic. Before I do this, however, I want to look at the way that *agape* has been appropriated in recent scholarship on love. Thomas Oord and Stephen Post are

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[24] Ibid., 100-01.

[25] Ibid., 105.

part of a growing number of scholars who are devoting concentrated attention to the topic, and the way they do so offers important insights for my own project.

4.2.1. Beyond Love as Self-Evident: Thomas Jay Oord

The task of defining love is not as easy as it first seems. We all talk about love and agree that it should hold a central place in human relations, yet love becomes slippery when we try to pin down a definition. The proliferation of attempts to do so in academic literature only serves to illustrate the complexity and ambiguity of the concept.[26]

For help with this task I turn to two thinkers who have devoted much time and energy to thinking about love. Thomas Jay Oord and Stephen Post both work for the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, with the latter serving as director. The Institute has been a leader in the fledgling love-and-science research dialogue which seeks to integrate interdisciplinary perspectives on love and altruism as a way of addressing human problems. Established in 2001 with funding from the John Templeton Foundation, the Institute is committed to funding scientific research on altruism and unlimited love, sustaining a dialogue between science and religion on love's meaning and significance, and enhancing the practical manifestations of love across the full spectrum of human experience.[27]

Oord points out that most philosophical and theological writing, when it speaks of "love," does not analyze what love is, but rather assumes it has an evident meaning. This

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[26] Again, see Pitirim Aleksandrovich Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954); Moffatt, *Love in the New Testament*; Nygren, *Agape and Eros*; and Outka, *Agape: an Ethical Analysis*.

[27] Stephen Garrard Post, *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003), vii.

has contributed to the ambiguity of love and stands as an obstacle to interdisciplinary study of the subject. "When we are not clear about what love is, however, it becomes difficult to judge the value or contribution of any particular investigation of love...it is difficult to compare the theories and research of one discipline with another."[28]

In order to help pave the way for an interdisciplinary investigation of love, he suggests a functional definition that can be operative in a variety of methodologies.

> *To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote well-being.*[29]

The purpose of this formulation is to provide an adequate definition of love for those doing research in the love-and-science nexus. Although environmental ethics does not fall into this nexus directly, I believe that Oord's definition may be helpful in establishing the trajectories of an ecologically sensible model of human agency grounded in the command to love.

The first phrase of the definition...*to act intentionally*...encompasses three aspects of love: deliberateness, motive, and self-determination. Deliberation recognizes that love involves a decisional aspect, though deliberation need not be highly conscious or be drawn out temporally. Love does require conscious intentionality, however; accidental or unconscious positive results do not count as deliberate loving action.[30]

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[28] Thomas Jay Oord, "The Love Racket: Defining Love and *Agape* for the Love-and-Science Research Program," *Zygon* 40, no. 4 (December 2005): 924.

[29] Ibid., 924.

[30] Ibid. I wonder if there is a place here for valuation that does not depend overly much on conscious reflection. It would seem that action could be "evaluatively laden" without being specifically conscious. The issue is the relationship between reflection and consciousness, especially the dependence of the former on the latter. I believe that a loving response can be generated by an "evaluative stance;" while the stance may be constructed on conscious reflection, action generated by it may not be preceded by deliberate reflection.

By incorporating motive into intentionality, Oord argues that an action is not loving if it was intended for harm. This is a rejection of consequentialist theories that judge actions as good or evil by virtue of their outcome. Motives (even one's own) are notoriously difficult to discern. However, the ability to discern motives is not vital to the project. The third aspect, self-determination, addresses the requirement of love that the actor be free to choose between possible actions. Coercion, in any definition, is antithetical to love.[31] These three aspects together form the dynamics of *intentional* agency. It would appear that this agency ought also to include actions toward, and relations with, non-human nature.

The second phrase...*in sympathetic response to others (including God)*...presupposes relationality. It recognizes that there are no isolated individuals immune from the effects or forces of relationships. Each relationship to an "other"—whether people, nonhumans, our past, or God—conditions and influences us.[32]In addition, these relationships involve and demand a response from us.

Oord asserts that an appropriate response to others is sympathetic. By "sympathy" he is referring to a process-influenced technical term to indicate the internal, constituting influence of one or more objects or individuals upon the one who loves. It has the sense of "feeling with" and is sometimes called "empathy." In essence, it is feeling the feelings of others.[33] Sympathy, for Oord, denotes an awareness of suffering (and positive moving-toward), while empathy is a neutral (cognitive) understanding. To sympathize is to feel

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[31] Ibid., 925.

[32] I question though if the relation to God fits here. The relationship to God is both ontologically- and self-constituting, while the others are identity-constituting only. I would argue that God's "otherness" apprehends us in a different kind of way.

[33] Ibid., 926.

what the other feels and be shaped by responding appropriately to it. It is sympathy that connects the lover to the beloved. It would appear here too that something analogous to sympathy can characterize human interrelatedness within nature.

The final phrase…*to promote well-being*…indicates that the action of love has a particular goal. Oord identifies his definition as falling within the *hesed* linguistic tradition, which he contrasts to the "proper/improper agency" and "mutuality" traditions that have dominated talk about love. The first he faults for rendering *any* purposive action as love; the second for identifying love in *any* reciprocal relationship. For Oord, both are misguided. *Hesed* is linked to the Hebraic sense of "righteousness," often translated as "steadfast love" or "loving-kindness." Not just any relation or action is defined as loving, but only those that conform to the ideal of promoting well-being.[34] In other words, the intentional response to the need of the other has as its goal the overcoming of that need. At the very least, it should be directed at helping the other cope with the circumstances involved. A loving response to the destitute will exceed affections of pity and involve engagement that actively seeks to change the source of destitution.

"Well-being" in Oord's definition recalls Aristotle's *eudemonia* (health, happiness, wholeness, and flourishing).[35] This is what sets the definition apart. An action may be purposive, but it is not love if it does not foster *eudaimonia*. A relationship may be characterized by reciprocity, but it is not love if it fails to engender well-being. This kind of differentiation adds a level of precision and clarity by which actions can be analyzed. The presence of love is not only identified in the dynamics of intentionality, but it will

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[34] Ibid., 929.

[35] See Michael Woods, ed. *Aristotle's Eudemian Ethics: Books I, II, and VIII,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

affect the one who is loved in a particular manner. Already, Oord indicates that such a definition could be applicable to an environmental ethic: "Love takes into account, to varying degrees, the life of the individual, local community, and global community. As far as they apply, acting to promote well-being includes considering the flourishing of nonhuman organisms and ecological systems."[36] This is an important point because it opens the door for applying a relational dynamic of love to environmental relationships. Although few scholars have attempted to bring love into environmental ethics—we will look at several later in this chapter—Oord's definition marks an important step in seeing love as relational and effective and not just as affection.

The task of defining love in a Christian context is further complicated by the fact that Greek grammar allows for the differentiation of at least three types of love: *agape, eros, and philia*.[37] Each is usually translated as "love" in English, yet each carries a unique sense of relating to an Other. In ethical discourse, *agape* is used by many scholars for different purposes, most often to differentiate a specific relational dynamic from the more general notion of "love."[38] This has resulted in a wide variety of uses and the same overall ambiguity that plagues ideas and language about love. The fact that scholars with divergent theological, ethical, anthropological and metaphysical commitments will tend to use *agape* to identify something unique about one form of love over another only muddies the water.

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[36] Oord, "The Love Racket," 928.

[37] C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988), 141.

[38] Mike W. Martin, *Love's Virtues* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1996); Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Alan Soble, *Agape, Eros, and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love* (New York: Paragon, 1989); and Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics*, 352.

Oord attempts to remedy this by offering his own definition of *agape*. *Agape* is:

Intentional response to promote well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being.[39]

This definition allows him to contrast *agape* with altruism, which is the typical understanding of the concept in love-and-science research. Oord sees this conflation of *agape* and altruism as problematic. Not only is universal selflessness impossible to maintain, altruism cannot account for those circumstances that require self-realization instead of self-sacrifice, such as in the case of someone suffering abuse. The above definition also allows him to uphold a clear differentiation between *agape* and love in general. Oord is especially wary of privileging *agape* in religious discourse and points to lack of uniform meaning in the scriptures as a cautionary fact. Even though many Christian scholars uphold *agape* as the ideal and uniquely Christian form of love, the term has a wide variety of meanings in the biblical texts. While this has created enough flexibility in the concept for scholars to bend *agape* to fit their ideals and theories, the practice threatens to render the term vacuous.

To prevent this, Oord suggests three guidelines for using *agape*. First, the term must be defined clearly and used consistently throughout an investigation. Second, one needs to show how this meaning differs from the meaning of other forms of love (i.e. *eros* or *philia*). And finally, those who use *agape* need to explain the relationship between *agape* and love in general. Naturally, Oord's definition fills the bill.

While other forms of love are intentional responses as well, they are just responses to differing things. By grounding love in the notion of intentional response, he provides a schema capable of expressing sameness and difference. *Agape*, *philia*, and *eros* are all

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[39] Oord, "The Love Racket," 934.

types of love (intentional responses), but they are differentiated by what they respond to. *Agape* responds to the conditions of ill-being. *Philia* responds to promote deeper levels of cooperation. *Eros* responds to promote value.[40]

Later in this chapter I will amend Oord's interpretive schema, but for now, I think he provides a helpful way into the task of clarifying what we mean by love and *agape*. His definitions are particularly helpful for developing an ethical model of human agency related to non-human nature, since they incorporate the dimensions of both praxis and affection.

4.2.2. Love as Participatory: Stephen Post

Stephen Post, the director of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, likewise wants to move away from defining love in terms of altruism or self-sacrifice alone. While these may indeed be loving acts, they are not by themselves capable of supporting the dynamics of loving relationships.[41] For this reason, Post identifies love with mutuality and argues that the highest form of love is the reciprocity rooted in familial and "special" relations.[42]

Post advances the discussion of love and *agape* by highlighting the communally embedded nature of Christian love. He is highly critical of the way post-Enlightenment analytic philosophers, such as Nygren and Outka, have tended to study love in abstraction

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[40] Ibid., 934-35.

[41] Post points out that emphasis on self-sacrifice may serve as a corrective to the male—or socially powerful—tendency to selfishness or self-assertion. Women—or the socially oppressed—are concerned not with the sin of self-assertion, but with that of self-negation. The antidote to the 'negation of self' is a fitting affirmation of the self in the mutual good of participation in reciprocal love. Post, *A Theory of Agape,* 65.

[42] Post, *A Theory of Agape*, 33.

from lived experience, which he believes has led to an eroded concept. The study of love in abstraction from relationships strips it of its relational dynamic of mutuality and eviscerates its moral potency. Without mutuality, intimate relationships could not develop and moral experience would be reduced to universal obligations toward strangers.[43]

For Post, *agape* is a form of love unique to Christianity. He is able to maintain this distinctiveness by linking the practice of love to the narratives of the Christian community.

> The primary and essential location of agape is within the community of believers, that is, the *koinonia*, because this is the focal point where the narrative foundations necessary to sustain Christian love are present. Without a narrative basis and a people of faith, *agape* is inevitably destabilized and finally eroded.[44]

Christian love (*agape*) is not an abstract concept; it is rather a way of life among a people who form, and are formed by, a storied tradition. It is in mutual love that human beings experience joy, a secure sense of well-being and identity, as well as the affirmation of the self that encourages the giving of the self. Post sees these moral goods as a part of the order of human social life and reflective of the intentions of God for humanity.[45]

Post is careful to point out that *agape* should not be conflated with mutuality and reciprocity; all mutuality is not *agape*. The differentiating factor is its manifestation in the Christian *koinonia*. It is *agape* that distinguishes Christians from non-Christians, and it sets them apart as a separate people. While the goal of agape may be universal, it cannot be abstractly universalized. "Agape may appear unconditional and therefore universal in

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[43] Ibid., 53.

[44] Ibid., 79.

[45] Ibid., 65.

its initial outreach, but eventually it requires that the recipient undergo a change of heart—a conversion grounded in the narratives and community that themselves sustain *agape* in the history of salvation."[46]

Whether we agree or not with this exclusive identification of *agape* with Christianity, Post's rendering of this form of love is significant for a Christian explication of relational dynamics. By rescuing *agape* from philosophical abstraction, he reorients proper reflection on love back to the lived experience of the community of believers. In this way we can see that fundamentally *agape* is participatory love: it involves praxis as well as affection. The biblical emphasis on love in the New Testament is on reciprocity in which the generosity of one is encouraged and rewarded by the generosity of others. Other-oriented actions are reinforced and empowered by the expectation that good will be met with good. The community is stabilized and deepened by the knowledge that others will reciprocate. Any Christian discussion on love and *agape* must recognize and incorporate its embodiment in a way of life.

Oord and Post have contributed to this project by providing helpful methodological clarity. Oord's fundamental-ethical definitions of love and *agape* allow us to investigate the relational dynamics of our experience of love across a number of disciplines. Post's treatment of *agape* as Christian love reminds us of the importance of maintaining the fundamental connection between love and community. A Christian treatment of the subject must not neglect the experience of love in *koinonia*.

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[46] Ibid., 83. I am not sure I want to limit the manifestation of *agape* to the boundaries of a particular religious institution/community. When present in Christian community, it has unique characteristics due to the way it is manifested in the symbols and story of that particular community. But if the Spirit of love is infinite, then there should be provision that the infinite working of the Spirit toward the intensification of love in *koinonia* may not be bounded. Such bounding seems to privilege the narrative and not the Spirit at work in the community.

In the following section I will be looking at some ways the concept of love has been used in ecologically-oriented theologies. As I progress from a general theological appropriation of *agape* into a particular appropriation of the concept for ecopraxis, it is helpful to understand by contrast how love may function as a guiding principle.

4.3. Love and ecotheology

The concept of love has been utilized as an ethical theme by several ecotheologians, although in differing ways. I want to examine three of these as a stepping stone from generalized discourse on the ethics of love to an application of love in the sphere of environmental ethics. Seeing how love is already being employed by ecologically-oriented theologies will be helpful in laying the groundwork for an ethic of human agency grounded in, and not merely connected to, Christian love. In the following pages, I will look at the way Douglas John Hall, James Nash, and Lisa Sideris deal with love.

4.3.1. Ontology of Communion: Douglas John Hall

While perhaps best known for his defense of Stewardship theology, Douglas John Hall builds his particular brand of Stewardship on an "ontology of communion" and the language of love.[47] In Chapter 3 we discussed Hall's three ways of conceiving the relationship between humans and non-humans: humans *above* nature, humans *in* nature, and humans *with* nature. At the heart of the third conception—his own—is a relational dynamic intended to mediate a dialectic between the first two options. This tensional position serves as the conceptual frame for his understanding of Stewardship.

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[47] Hall, *The Steward*, 207-13.

Of particular importance to my project is Hall's linking of an ontology of communion with the language of love. The ontology of communion is Hall's designation—borrowed from Joseph Sittler—for the view of reality inherent in the scriptures. He also refers to this as the ontology of Jerusalem, and he contrasts it with the ontology of Athens. According to Hall, the biblical view of reality is that being itself is relational. His formulation of "humanity *with* nature" is intended to capture this view of reality. Linguistically, the preposition "with" captures the dual notions of interconnectedness and uniqueness that are held in tension by a relational ontology. The "with" connects, yet differentiates, the two things in relation. Hall moves farther down this linguistic track by ultimately connecting the ontology of communion with the language of love by way of the "with" preposition.[48] This has the effect of bringing love into the ontological sphere, which is already presupposed in the biblical identification, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Love is a relational category, but it is also a category of being, in this formulation, for an ethic of love is grounded in the basic assumptions of reality, in the very nature of God as source of finite reality. Love in ontological communion functions like the preposition "with" in the realm of linguistics: it upholds both the connection and differentiation between the lover and the beloved. Hall adds, "[T]he whole of reality, in other words, presupposes this dialectical interaction of sameness and difference, identity and distinction."[49]

We participate in this robust notion of love by our "being-with" others in relationships. This is not something secondary or accidental to our identity, however;

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[48] Ibid., 207.

[49] Ibid., 208.

"our very being as human beings, as God intends it, is a being-with."[50] Because our being

is derived from God's being, properly oriented "being-with" manifests love in our

relationships. For Hall, this allows him to offer a conception of Stewardship that mirrors

the dynamics of love. Stewardship built upon the concept of humans *with* nature seeks to

uphold the dialectic of sameness and differentiation found in love.

Whether or not we agree with Hall's account of *how* humans are connected-yet-

distinct from nature, his incorporation of love into ontology sets the stage for a discussion

on love and ethics in the final chapter of this dissertation. Even though he remains firmly

in the Stewardship camp, Hall's ontology of love opens up the way to moving beyond the

anthropological pitfalls of the position. It also suggests that an anthropology of love is not

only possible, but it may be appropriately applied to the realm of ecological concern.

4.3.2. Loving Nature: James Nash

Perhaps the best known proponent of adapting Christian Love in an ecological

context is James Nash. His influential book *Loving Nature* (1991) makes an explicit

connection between loving one's neighbor and loving the environment. For Nash the

implications are clear: if "Love is the integrating center of the whole of Christian faith and

ethics, then a Christian ecological ethic is seriously deficient—if even conceivable—unless

it is grounded in Christian love."[51] His book sets out to clarify the nature of Christian love

and why it is relevant to an ecological context. Along the way he delineates the forms of

love relevant to such a context.

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[50] Ibid., 209.

[51] Nash, *Loving Nature*, 139.

Nash identifies love as the source of Christian ethics. This grounding is rooted in the affirmation that God *is* love, and therefore the ground and goal of all being. "If God is love...the process of creation itself is an act of love. All creatures, human and otherkind, and their habitats are not only gifts of love but also products of love and recipients of ongoing love."[52] Everything has value imparted by the Source of Value; therefore the value of all things is grounded in love. We are called to love what God loves and are empowered to do so by God's love working in us. To be the image of God is to reflect the Divine Love. "An ecological ethic that is rooted in the Christian faith is a reasonable extension of love to the whole creation, in order to re-present the all-encompassing affection and care of God."[53]

A central feature of Christian love is its universality. This means that love is not exclusive or limited to particularity. The "logic" of love extends universally. For Nash, and I agree, the 'love of nature' is simply the 'love of neighbor' universalized in recognition of our common origins, mutual dependencies, and shared destiny with the whole creation of the God who is all-embracing love.[54]

Nash recognizes the challenge of moving from an abstract reflection to a concrete definition in an ecological context. How can love make sense in a sphere of activity where predation and violence are a "natural" part of life processes? The reciprocity of personal relationships provides the typical context for discussions of love; how does the notion of love fit into a context that involves relationships between persons and non-persons? Even in Christian literature—including Scripture—love is difficult to define. The variety of uses

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[52] Ibid., 140.

[53] Ibid., 142.

[54] Ibid., 143.

and expressions, not to mention the ambiguous relationship between love and *agape*,

make attempts to interpret and define love a difficult task.

Nash does not shy away from this task, however. He offers this description:

> By definition, Christian love, as disposition and/or deed, is always at least caring
> and careful service, self-giving and other-regarding outreach, in response to the
> needs of others (human and otherkind), out of respect for their God-endowed
> intrinsic value and in loyal response to the God who is love and who loves all. It
> seeks the other's good or well-being and, therefore, is always other-regarding.[55]

In order to extend love to nature, Nash focuses on those forms applicable in all arenas. He

notes that ideal forms of love are expressed in such terms as reconciliation, communion,

community, harmony, and *shalom*. These features characterize love in a generalized way

so as to be relevant to nearly every relational situation, both social and ecological.[56]

Nash is careful to avoid trying to negotiate a hard and fast definition. He points to

the complexity of our experience of love as the basis for differentiating types of love.

Different contexts require different expressions of love. We should not be surprised then

that ecological love will look different than interpersonal love. Because Christian love is

multi-dimensional, it has the capacity to extend forms of beneficence, other-esteem,

receptivity, humility, understanding, communion, and justice into an ecological context.[57]

While I think Nash has not laid out clearly enough the shape of love in an

ecological context, I think he rightly identifies love as the metaethical grounding of

Christian ethics. What he lacks is a detailed account of the relational dynamics of love,

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[55] Ibid., 145.

[56] Nash recognizes the challenge that nature itself presents to adopting appropriate forms of love. Because death and violence are inevitable parts of the natural world, euphemisms such as harmony, cooperation, community, or family are hardly fit descriptions of a reality in which species eat and otherwise destroy one another as part of the "harmony." Nash, *Loving Nature,* 147.

[57] Nash, *Loving Nature,* 152ff.

and how the various forms relate to the general definition. Because of this, he runs the risk of conceptualizing love in such a vague way that it becomes synonymous with *any* type of positive relation in and to nature.

4.3.3.*Loving Evolutionary Nature: Lisa Sideris*

In her book *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection* (2003), ethicist Lisa Sideris expresses concern over the way love has been incorporated into ethics by many ecotheologians.[58] The basic premise of her book is that many ecological theologies have failed to adequately incorporate Darwinian perspectives into their ethics of the environment. For instance, she is highly critical of positions that ignore or minimize the reality of suffering in the natural world or seek to describe relationships within it in terms of "community," "harmony," or "balance."[59] For her, this simply does not reflect the realities of natural processes.

Although wary of the way love has been employed in environmental ethics, Sideris is not opposed to using it herself, albeit in a qualified way. The problem, she suggests, is that the kind of love presented tends to reflect misguided sentiment that is overly focused on the individual and not reflective of the actual way in which natural relations occur. Norms of human relations are not analogous to biotic relations; when ecotheologians

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[58] Sideris focuses her critiques on a prominent group of ecotheologians that includes Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Charles Birth, John Cobb, Michael Northcott, and Larry Rasmussen.

[59] See especially chapters 2 and 5 in Lisa H. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 311. She also critiques the uncritical and uninformed adoption of ecological perspectives into an "ecological model." Such a model, she suggests in chapter 3, is not ecological in the scientific sense.

attempt to apply love in this realm in an abstract and uncritical way, they fail to respect natural processes.[60]

A key problem in this issue is the ambiguous way that "interdependence" is understood as a basis for an ethic of love. Ecological theologies often move too quickly from the *fact* of the common evolutionary heritage (interrelatedness) of all living beings or eco-system dependence (interconnectedness) of all living things to an *ethic* of community care or love.[61] This kind of description of nature—which is often wrong—has too quickly become (misguided) prescription.

Sideris raises the important question: is there a biological/evolutionary basis for an environmental ethic? Can we move directly from biological kinship with nature to an ethic of love (or any other environmental ethic)? Sideris examines E. O. Wilson's *biophilia* argument and Mary Midgley's notion of "neotony" as two attempts to ground ethics in evolution. The former refers to an instinctual affection for the natural world expressed in most humans, which Wilson roots in the processes of evolution itself. Neotony designates the capacity of humans and other animals to form social bonds among their own kind. Sideris argues that while these capacities in animals can be seen as evolutionary precursors of feelings of love or moral sentiments, they are not sufficient to ground an ethic. There is no direct route from biology to morality.[62] Sideris is searching for an ethic of love that stands between the vagueness of romanticized love, which she identifies in

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[60] Ibid., 8.

[61] Ibid., 222-23.

[62] Sideris holds to the distinction between moral stance and moral judgment borrowed from James Gustafson. One's stance is shaped by response to the environment, but is not a sufficient basis for ethics, since the response may not be adequate or appropriate. Judgment, on the other hand, drives action which is based on deliberation and valuation. This guides one's responsiveness in morally appropriate ways, and takes into account contextual variables. Ibid., 226.

Sallie McFague's ecotheology, and the narrowness of Wilson's deterministic and reductionistic *biophilia*.[63]

For help, Sideris turns to Holmes Rolston.[64] Rolston suggests that humans occupy their world ethically and cognitively, and not just biologically. By this he means that humans have the capacity to reflect morally upon their agency and the trajectory of that agency. Only humans have the capacity to understand their kinship with the rest of nature and to reflect upon its implications. "The *knowledge* that we are kin with other beings may be more significant than the kinship itself," because this shapes the course of our response.[65]

> However, Sideris insists that this knowledge does not entail mastery or dominion:

> The recognition that we inhabit a unique position is not the same as saying that we are completely separate from animals or that we have a divinely ordained role on earth, because such statements about humans downplay the evolutionary origins and long evolutionary history that have made our power of 'overseeing' possible.[66]

The moral dimension of human nature allows us to "step back" from our initial responsive feelings and reflect upon their appropriateness in a given context. But we must remember that the conditions for appropriate response are set within the parameters of the natural processes of life.

What, then, does it mean to respond to the natural world with an ethic of love? Sideris's approach is to set an ethic of love within the broader framework of James

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[63] Ibid., 242.

[64] Sideris draws upon the work of Rolston throughout her book. She relies most heavily on Holmes Rolston, *Conserving Natural Value* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Holmes Rolston, *Genes, Genesis, and God: Values and their Origins in Natural and Human History* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Holmes Rolston III, "Biophilia, Selfish Genes, Shared Values," in *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (Washington, D.C.: Island, 1993), 381-414.

[65] Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection*, 245.

[66] Ibid.

Gustafson's theocentric ethics and Aldo Leopold's land ethics. This calls for a qualification

and contextualization of the human response in light of our place before God and the

demands of the land. She links the two approaches with the notion of "participation":

> As participants in natural patterns and processes, moral action requires a process
> of discernment of values that may begin with—but does not end with—a general
> response, a moral stance regarding the natural world.[67]

Sideris is critical of ecotheologies because they have a faulty moral stance in regard to

nature: unqualified love or ease of suffering is misguided (not reflective of reality) and

narrow (incapable of addressing contexts). The moral ambiguity of biologically generated

sentiments in humans toward the natural world (fear, awe, affection, curiosity, etc.)

requires criteria for appropriate ethical response. Land ethics and theocentric ethics

provide the criteria by which moral deliberation can adjudicate appropriate response

within a given context. In the case of land ethics, considerations of the whole (species,

eco-systems, processes) transcend considerations of the individual.

For Sideris, adopting a comprehensive naturalized approach implies that an ethic

of love can be extended to nature, but it also implies that such an ethic requires

supplementation with other considerations about appropriateness. In her view, we may

have to refrain from expressing love, particularly in the case of "wild" nature. "If we have a

natural love of wild nature, it must be qualified by considerations of what is natural for

nature as well, and the two may not coincide."[68]

This entails the need to differentiate types of living things; different types require

different kinds of response. Biological discrimination is not necessarily prejudicial or

inappropriate in this context, since those elements are already present in the natural

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[67] Ibid., 246.

[68] Ibid., 251.

world, and to some degree, requires them in order to function. This may mean that some individual creatures suffer and die, something difficult to reconcile in views that focus on the rights of individual animals.[69] However, loving each creature for its uniqueness does not constitute an ethic. Ecotheologians like McFague provide no good way of moving from appreciation of particularity to ethical praxis. A means of differentiation (within a viable framework) allows for appropriate response to the particularities in question. The particularities of the individual creature are maintained and addressed in a proper manner only when the demands of whole species and ecosystems are considered first. In other words, the needs of the individual are evaluated in light of their place in a broader, systemic context. The good of the species or ecosystem takes priority over the good of the individuals that make up the whole.

Sideris suggests that a qualified naturalistic ethic of love becomes engaged in the natural world through the theme of "participation," a notion common to both theocentric and land ethics. Our understanding of natural processes makes us realize that we are not the center of things, that we are embedded in systems and processes that we cannot control. To participate ethically in the natural world is to allow our moral considerations and praxis to be shaped by this perspective. Love (as sentiment) serves as a motivational basis for moral action, but under the rubric of land- and theocentric ethics, love recommends participating carefully and cautiously in natural processes.[70]

Sideris illustrates this in practical terms by recourse to a movement known as "bioregionalism." Bioregionalism is a movement that emerged in the 1970s designed to

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[69] See e.g. Peter Singer, "The Place of Nonhumans," in *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 191-206.

[70] Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection,* 225.

facilitate ecologically friendly living within particular localities.[71] It encourages people to

learn the "logic" or "genius" of a place, learn to live within the rhythms of that locality.

Part of that education is learning about the natural history of places in which we live in

order to understand how best to live there. Bioregionalism critiques the homogenization

of culture (chain restaurants and retail stores as invasive species) and encourages people

to invest in local economies. Sideris notes:

> As an environmental movement it encourages scientific familiarity and study of
> places as well as ethical responsibility in terms of cultivating the civic virtues
> necessary for becoming what Leopold called true citizens, rather than conquerors,
> of the land.[72]

The teaching of appropriate forms of participation in natural processes shapes our

sentiments and guides the kind of behaviors we display. It facilitates a kind of

"environmental virtue ethic that links the development of human character, flourishing,

and practical wisdom to moral action within, and on behalf of, specific biotic

communities."[73]

Love, then, in the natural world looks different from love in interpersonal

relations. Sideris upholds this difference on the basis of human uniqueness and the

demands of interpersonal relationality. Unlike the sphere of human social relations,

moral consideration in nature is given first and foremost to natural processes and systems

rather than to individuals. Human agency must be understood within the context of

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[71] Ibid., 257. Bioregionalism is associated with philosophers and ecologists from the 1970's such as Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann, and in recent years has been endorsed by environmental writers such as Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, and Scott Russell Sanders. See Peter Berg, Peter and Raymond Dasmann, "Reinhabiting California," in *Reinhabiting a Separate Country: A Bioregional Anthology of Northern California* (San Francisco: Planet Drum, 1978). For a recent anthology, see William Vitek and Wes Jackson, *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 285.

[72] Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection,* 258.

[73] Ibid.

participation in those systems and processes. Different kinds of beings/relations require different expressions of love.[74] Positive sentiments are not sufficient for ethical praxis—the latter must emerge out of a process of deliberation and discernment. Land ethics sees systems and processes as having the highest value toward which we direct praxis. These are the singularities that are addressed primarily, and all other singularities—including individuals—must be considered in light of these fundamental relations.

Sideris is right to question the way love has been used by some ecological theologies. The presence of love as an impetus for ethical behavior must be tempered by the realities of the natural world. Because of this, Sideris, like Nash, rightly upholds that different kinds of relationships require different kinds of expressions of love. One of the problems with Sideris's approach, however, is that she still treats love primarily as sentiment. Even her notion of a moral stance speaks more to an affective responsiveness rather than to the embodiment of a relational dynamic. I believe this ultimately limits the contribution she can make to an ethic of human agency in and toward non-human nature grounded in Christian love.

In adopting *agape* as a conceptual basis for an environmental ethic, I will add my own contribution to those who see a place for love as a way of addressing ecological concerns. Furthermore, I believe that my appropriation falls in line with past uses in ecotheology while moving beyond some of the problems pointed out by Sideris above.

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[74] Sideris does make an exception for domesticated animals. Non-wild animals make a different moral claim on us than wild animals, by virtue of their embeddedness within human culture. Consideration of individual animals is warranted when they are a part of the "mixed community" of humans and animals. By virtue of entering the sphere of human culture, they warrant a similar place in moral consideration. However, instrumental relationships between humans and domesticated animals is justified, since such relationships already exist in the natural world as a by-product of our evolutionary co-heritage. Ibid., 259-61.

First, though, I will defend the appropriateness of using the term *agape* against a recent critique of its use.

4.3.4. *'Love' Is Not Enough: Laurie Braaten*

Old Testament scholar Laurie Braaten has expressed concern about the attempt to employ *agape* for environmental ethics.[75] He is particularly concerned with the fact, noted above, that in both testaments *agape* is used in diverse—even conflicting—ways. This broad use, he suggests, undermines its ability to function as a distinctive form of God's love.[76] In much the same way, it suffers the same ambiguity of our English "love," capable of referring to a variety of relational dynamics. To try to use *agape* to clarify or distinguish a form of love is to replace one ambiguous term with another. While I agree with Braaten that the term has a variety of contextual uses in Scripture, I am more confident that a distinct meaning—for the purpose of my project—can be tied to a specific contextual use. Even he notes that the most common method of appropriation by biblical theologians is to link human *agape* with the *agape* of God.[77] Humans are to love not with human *agape* but with the *agape* displayed by God. I will make this connection more explicit in the next chapter.

Braaten's concerns center around the ability of *agape* to designate a distinctive form of love (i.e. Christian love or God's love). What I want to suggest is that *agape's*

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[75] Laurie Braaten, "Is There a Future for Creation? Ecology in Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspective," presented at the annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, Duke University, March 15, 2008. I am thankful to Braaten for this and several personal correspondences which have been very helpful in clarifying this point.

[76] Ibid., 10. He also levels this critique at Oord's definition of *agape*.

[77] Ibid., 11.

distinctiveness is not in *how* God loves (and thus how humans love), but in *who* God is. In this way, I think Oord's definition as responsiveness to ill-being is too limiting. Granted Oord is redefining the terms of love for a particular purpose, but it ultimately cuts off a whole range of responsiveness. *Agape* exceeds responses to conditions of ill-being. As Post pointed out, *agape* characterizes individual and community relations. Again, more on this in the next chapter.

Because I want to maintain a biblical basis for love in ecotheology, I am not interested in coining a new term. Rather, it is my desire to maintain a link with biblical imagery and concepts, even if they are appropriated in a new way. By adopting *agape*, I want to introduce a new contextual usage, but one that is connected with a biblical use. To do this, I turn once again to the gospel Love Commandments: love God and love others. Eight times the New Testament commands us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.[78] But this is more than just affection; Jesus taught that to *agapao* our neighbor is to serve them. Additionally, he extended the traditional notion of neighbor to anyone in need, even our enemies.[79] To *agape* our neighbor is to be in relation with them in a particular way, to act responsively and responsibly toward their needs, even to the point of sacrifice (John 15:12-13). We are empowered to do this as we "abide in [His] love" (John 15:9), which enables us to "be imitators of God's love" (Ephesians 5:13). It is our spiritual connection to God who *isagape* (1 John 4:8) that renders *agape* present in our own lives and communities. As I will expound further in the next chapter, the predominantly Johannine usage of *agape* is the New Testament context to which I connect my own use of *agape*.

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[78] Matt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; and James 2:8.

[79] See especially the parable of the Good Samaritan according to Luke 10:30-37.

Braaten's final suggestion is that there are better biblical concepts to adopt than *agape*. In particular he argues that the Hebrew *hesed* is a better fit for a relational anthropology.[80] Often translated as "steadfast love," "lovingkindness," or "mercy," its contextual meanings are fairly consistent.[81] It conveys the idea that one is willing to go beyond what is contractually required for the sake of the other in order to keep a relationship intact (e.g., Gen 21:23; 1 Sam 20:8). He argues that it is biblical, inherently relational, and unlike *agape*, does not have to be applied to nature by extension or analogy. *Hesed* often describes God's faithfulness toward creation, especially in the Psalms (e.g., Ps 33:5; 36:5-6; 57:10-11; 98:3; and 119:64), where it is usually translated as "unfailing love," "steadfastness," or "faithfulness." Human *hesed* towards others, including the creation, is to be grounded in God's *hesed*.[82]

The use of *hesed* is an intriguing suggestion, if for no other reason than this connection between God and creation. However, *agape* is the better choice for several reasons. First, *hesed*'s consistent contextual usage may not be as much of a positive factor as Braaten suggests. The multivalent quality of *agape* provides a greater flexibility in application. Remembering that the relation between humans and nature is a highly complex one, it calls for an ethic with sufficient plasticity to address a diversity of contexts. Love in the environmental sphere must be expressed in the proper manner; "we must love the right things in the right way."[83]*Agape*, because it may be expressed in a number of different ways, is open to extension in an ecological context in a way that does

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[80] Braaten, 11-12.

[81] *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Gen. ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. "*hesed*" by D. A. Baer and R. P. Gordon.

[82] Braaten, 12.

[83] Brady, *Christian Love*, 266.

not diminish its theological richness. In other words, it allows for a strong connection between divine and human expressions of love.

Secondly, *agape* has a far greater recognition value. Even though this may lead to more wide-spread misunderstanding, the term has a payoff in being easily connected with love. It does, as most technical terms do, require qualification and explanation. Lastly, it could be argued that *agape* and *hesed* are functionally equivalent terms. *Agape*, especially as I employ it, captures much of the meaning conveyed by *hesed*. Oord connects the two by virtue of a common linguistic tradition. Although *agape* is never used to translate *hesed* in the Septuagint, the two ideas are often paralleled. With Oord I want to ground my own appropriation of love in the *hesed* tradition.

4.4. Conclusion

In the final chapter, I will unpack further the way that *agape* can be relevant in the ecological sphere. More importantly, I will demonstrate how the concept may function as a ground for a Christian approach to environmental ethics. In doing so, I propose that ecotheology move beyond its fixation with Stewardship, appropriate New Testament language of *agape*, and develop a new language to motivate communities to greater ecopraxis.

This proposal for ecotheology will take the form of three anthropological principles that give shape to an *agapeic* environmental ethic. Two will address human identity in relational terms and the third will give direction to living out *agape*. Adopting a relational anthropology provides ecotheology a better footing for building an ecological ethic, since it better reflects ecological perspectives on human relationality. By

understanding this relationality in terms of *agape,* I bring into the philosophical

discussion the significant weight of Christian tradition.

CHAPTER FIVE:
AN *AGAPEIC* ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

"If the foundation of all doing is the relationship of the self to God that inspires acts of love, then the beginning of environmental ethics is the appreciation of Spirit in nature. When the Spirit is present, love issues forth as sensitivity to nature."
--James Martin-Schramm[1]

In this final chapter, the critique of Stewardship and an analysis of love as a normative framework for ecojustice, gives way to a constructive proposal that seeks to take environmental ethics beyond the Stewardship paradigm by going beyond the foregoing authors' ideas on love. The previous chapter argued that a robust concept of biblical *agape* provides a more comprehensive and less problematic conceptual framework for understanding human responsibility within the natural world. This chapter will delve into the resources of philosophy and theology to begin to flesh out an environmental ethic rooted in biblical love. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur and theologian LeRon Shults will provide important insights in developing my *agapeic* approach.

An important part of this construction is seeing how *agape* serves as a bridge for connecting self and action. It is probably more accurate to say that within anthropology—the study of human nature—*agape* is the character of both the self and the agency of the self. This chapter will help make that connection by arguing for a philosophical and theological relationality that makes sense of the ecological perspective of human nature given in Chapter Three. The rich theological depth of *agape* lends to its easy appropriation in a relational construct: it is a term used to describe both God's essential nature and the manner of God's relating to the world. A relational view of the human person does not draw a strong distinction between self and agency. *Agapeic* agency of this

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[1] James B. Martin-Schramm and Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), 35.

sort is manifested because of and out of one's *agapeic* self. In a relationally-constituted

notion of the self, we are what we do in the broadest sense of the way we live our life.

Ricoeur's contribution is in providing a conceptual framework for seeing human

identity as an essentially ethical self. Our identity emerges out of how we relate to our

world and to others. Self and agency are inseparable dimensions of human existence.

Shults then helps to see this connection theologically in terms of spirituality, and to see

how *agape* may form the shape of that spirituality. Furthermore, *agapeic* agency is

magnified when our identity and spirituality is transformed within a redemptive

relationship with the God who is love. Both suggest that we only love truly when we

become love.

Although my proposal is more properly an approach instead of a model, the

criteria for constructing and evaluating ethical models are applicable for constructing this

approach also. *Agape* as a conceptual grounding for ethics has a clear rootedness in the

Christian tradition. It is a long standing practice in the church to see love as the

normative guide to human behavior. A significant part of this final chapter will be to

demonstrate how an *agapeic* approach is also consistent with interdisciplinary data. The

kind of anthropological relationality demanded by contemporary ecology and philosophy

of self come together in a robust application of *agape* as the idealized character of the

relational self.

An *agapeic* approach meets the third criterion of scope because it is capable of

application in virtually any socio-relational context. Wherever human agency is

manifested, it may be characterized as loving or non-loving. As an ethical grounding for

modeling human agency, *agape* guides the determination of what is normative behavior in

any context. By virtue of its rootedness in the Christian tradition, it also takes on the

ethical vision of that tradition. Love is not only prescribed by Christianity's most basic norms, but enabled by the transforming and empowering work of the Spirit. Humans love not just because they are commanded to, but because of what they are becoming.

5.1. Responsibility and Participation

Before moving on, a few preliminary matters are in order. An adequate approach requires clarification of how I will use the concepts of "responsibility" and "participation." These notions establish the context and manner of human response to ecological problems.

5.1.1. Responsibility

Adhering to belief that humans have a God-given responsibility to manage, cultivate, dominate, subdue, or tend the planet has shaped Stewardship ethics. This responsibility comes in the form of a vocation or mandate for humans to serve as God's representatives on Earth. What is unclear, however, is what our responsibility looks like. What does it look like practically to be a Steward of the environment? Some critics have argued that humans have no responsibility to the environment other than to leave it alone as much as possible. Stewardship argues that our capacities as humans render us uniquely capable to carry out the divine task. Critics argue that while our capacities of reason are (somewhat) unique, they institute neither an ecological superiority nor an ability to control ecosystems. What are we to do? In what ways, if any, are we responsible for the planet?

I think the best approach is to understand human responsibility in light of relational identity. In Paul Ricoeur's terms, our selfhood is mediated in our capacity to

respond in solicitude to others; this is what makes us unique as persons. Humans are "responsible"—capable of response—by virtue of our abilities to evaluate, deliberate, and act accordingly. Human uniqueness is a moral distinction, and that implies responsibility for our valuations, deliberations, and actions. The question is: to what, to whom, and for what are we responsible? As Christians, we confess that we are immediately responsible to others and ultimately responsible to God for the character and impact of our relationality.

Because human agency is a primary source for ecological problems, the crisis itself creates a kind of presence (a presence of condition) that confronts us (collectively) and calls us to appropriate (collective) response. Response requires nothing less than a reconstitution of human agency, a transformation in the patterns of human being-in-the-world. Christianity teaches that love is the prescriptive pattern of human behavior. Understanding love as a dimension of human *becoming* serves as a catalyst for transformation of sinful agency. Becoming more just expresses *being-loving*, which is facilitated by an intensification of our relationality with God. The dynamics of dialectical identity, agency, and presence shape a transformation of human intentionality from self-serving trajectories to self-giving and solicitous ones.

5.1.2. Participation

We can say that loving agency is displayed in an ecological context when humans choose to participate within the self-organizing processes of an eco-system. "Participation" here means to live in a way that does not contribute to the degradation of the ecosystems of which we are a part. This is analogous in many ways to the kind of participation in the common good of society that we are called to by God's grace.

Participation of this sort may be construed in terms of a dialectical identity, agency, and presence that is mediated by Spiritual union with God in Christ. When we *know*, *act*, and *are* "in the Spirit" we become participants in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). This dialectical participation between divine and human transforms us as our relationality— with God and others—is intensified in the presence of the truly infinite, Trinitarian God. This transformation by the Spirit *is* life.

When we are integrated in an ecologically healthy manner into the life-processes of the bio-physical matrix we call nature, we participate (dialectically, without absolute identity) in the life-giving agency of the Spirit. To participate in the Spirit in this way is to be in a loving mode that links us to God's love. Precisely because our experiences of love are grounded in a variety of ways of participating in Divine Love, there is a fundamental ineffability about true Love. We are faced by it, we participate in it, we are transformed by it, but we cannot define it any more than we can define God. It is the infinite Trinitarian life of love that serves as the inner condition of human experiences of love. To be aligned with life-rhythms—to participate in the self-organizing energy flows of a network of ecosystems in an ecologically healthy manner—is to participate in divine loving relationality. Likewise, when we are indwelt by the divine Spirit of love, the relational structures that inhibit justice and wholeness in the natural world are also brought to light and transformed as our relational behavior takes on the characteristics of love. The natural world itself is not changed, only the way that we relate within it individually and communally.

Lisa Sideris suggests that one way of facilitating this kind of participation in nature practically is through the practice of bioregionalism, which encourages people to learn the "logic" of their local places. In doing so, bioregionalism points us in the direction of

proper participation. According to Gary Snyder, a proponent of the practice, "it is not enough just to 'love nature'…Our relation to the natural world takes place in a *place*, and it must be grounded in information and experience."[2] Because our identity is shaped in part by our place, our identity as *agapeic*-selves will be tied intrinsically to the way we live in that place. This is true not only of the way we live with and for the others of a locality (both human and nonhuman), but also the degree to which we act to promote the sustainability and well-being of the locality itself.

5.2. Contours of an *Agapeic* Environmental Ethic

What is capable of serving as both a conceptual and an anthropological foundation for an ecological ethic? I agreed that Christian reflection on the matter had to begin with Jesus' command to love God and one another. Since Christian love can be understood in terms of both ethics and anthropology, it can be a sufficient ground for models of human agency in an ecological context.

Now I will lay out the principles and possibilities of what I will call *Agapeic* environmental ethics. This is not intended as a detailed and final construction, but rather as a set of valid thematic trajectories open to further investigation and development. These themes involve relational human identity in an ecological context, integrating love as an anthropological category, and developing an eco-relational *phronesis* to guide environmental decision making.

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[2] Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild: Essays* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), 39.

5.2.1. First Principle—Identity: Who We Are in Nature

The kind of relational structure of human identity presented here calls into question common notions that humans stand in a position of relating *to* or *over against* nature. Douglas John Hall's ontology of love discussed in the last chapter is a good example. Considering his affinities for an ethic of Stewardship, it is perhaps ironic that it is Hall who draws attention to this. In a discussion on loving parts and wholes, he reminds us that our experience—and therefore our attention—is first and foremost shaped by the particularities of everyday life and location. Love of the whole is never direct, but always mediated primarily through love of particular people, places, and things. Says Hall, "I seriously doubt that it is possible for anyone to love the whole without loving this or that particular part."[3]

The same can be said, I think, about the possibilities of relating *to* nature. We never engage all of nature in relationship, even as communities. Rather, I—or we, in the case of communities—only act directly toward the particular animals, plants, species, eco-systems with which we have immediate contact. My relationship is with individuals within a group, or groups within a whole, but never to the whole itself. Nature, as the sum total of the systems that comprise the natural world, is an abstraction. It is not a "thing" that can be related to.[4]

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[3] Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: a Biblical Symbol Comes of Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 128.

[4] I am aware of the concept of institutional or systemic agency, whereby participation in the system cannot be wholly separated from the effects on other bodies. For a hypothetical example, by contributing to an unjust capitalistic society, I am related to those affected by the demands of that society, and therefore responsible to them. However, this is not direct agency. In addition, this dynamic operates from whole to parts and not vice versa.

Relational, dialectical identity, therefore, emerges within the confines of particular relationality. "Nature" can be understood as the bio-physical matrix of creaturely existence within which creatures come-to-be what they are in relation to others. We do not relate *to* nature (as an entity), but *within* nature (as context and condition of existence). We seek to articulate not how we relate to nature, but who we *are* (or *are-becoming*) within the experience of our relational existence.

Our way of relating to others flows out of our identity. Hall reflects this when he calls people to *be* Stewards, not just do steward-like things. "Stewardship must be understood first as descriptive of the being—the very life—of God's people. Deeds of Stewardship arise out of the *being* of a Steward."[5] Human agency is rooted in human being. Likewise, deeds of love arise out of the *being-in-relation* of *agapeic* anthropology. Love is an appropriate way of grounding ecological ethics because the robust fluidity of the concept is sufficiently flexible to address the complexity of human relationality within nature. It is thus capable of responding to diverse relational contexts.

5.2.2. Second Principle—Love As An Anthropological Category

The second principle is the link between identity and behavior. While the definitions of love and *agape* provided by Oord and Post were helpful in their own way for getting us started on this investigation of love, I will point to the work of a philosopher and a theologian, Paul Ricoeur and LeRon Shults, respectively, to provide important insights in giving shape to the relational dynamics involved. Their work points the way to understanding love as a relational anthropological category. Ricoeur argues that love has a place in ethics through anthropology. Love cannot be abstracted by analysis because it

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[5] Hall, *The Steward*, 241.

is inseparable from embodiment, that is, from its manifestation in human (or divine) agency. Love, then, can be seen as first of all an anthropological category, a dimension or character of human relationality. In Shults, the superabundance of love that Ricoeur speaks about is linked to the Holy Spirit so that our action and being takes on the character of love when it operates under the influence of the life-giving Spirit. Love in this sense transcends notions of sentiment or even affectivity. To love is to engage in relations that are not solely external to the self, but intrinsically part of the shape and constitution of selfhood. Furthermore, it provides a way of grounding acts of love in one's very being.

Love and Philosophy: Paul Ricoeur

As we saw in Chapter Three, Stewardship's fatal flaw is reliance on an inadequate anthropology. Not only did Stewardship's anthropological assumptions fail to take into account contemporary sensibilities on the constitution of human nature, they also offer scant impetus for moral agency. For Stewardship the drive to become moral agents is not an integral part of the structure of human being, but directed from without by the force of an injunction.

By contrast, Paul Ricoeur's work in philosophical anthropology offers a foundation upon which to build an environmental ethic grounded in Christian love. Because his scholarship is operative in the interplay between theology and philosophy, it is readily available for appropriation into an explicitly theological framework. I will highlight his major work on philosophical anthropology, *Oneself as Another*.[6] This work is important because the ethical forms an integral dimension of human selfhood, not just something external to it. Particularly helpful is his discussion on how the dialectic of ethics and

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[6] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

morality provides the shape of human being-in-the-world. I will also look at elements in a later work on justice appropriately titled "Love and Justice."[7] There he presents a dialectical relation between justice and love that moves us toward the development of an ethic of loving human agency within nature.

Dialectic of Ethics and Morality

Ricoeur is a tensional philosopher, operating conceptually within a multiplicity of dialectics. For him, "dialectic" refers to an identifiable moment in the process of interpretation. The influence of Hegel is undeniable, but Ricoeur's employment of the principle is more refined. Like Hegel, the dialectic involves identifying key oppositional terms in a debate, and then proceeding to articulate their synthesis into a more complex concept. However, this synthesis does not share the uniformity of a Hegelian synthesis. Ricoeur's method entails showing how the meanings of two seemingly opposed terms are implicitly informed by, and borrow from, each other. Within the dialectic, the terms maintain their differences at the same time that a common "ground" is formed. However, the common ground is simply a shared presupposition.

Of importance to this project is Ricoeur's reflection on the dialectical relationship between ethics and morality. The key part of his contribution in this section is the way he distinguishes between ethics and morals in terms of what is good and what is obligatory. "It is, therefore, by convention that I reserve the term 'ethics' for the *aim* of an accomplished life and the term 'morality' for the articulation of this aim in *norms*

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[7] Paul Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," in *Figuring the Sacred* , ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 315-329.

characterized at once by the claim to universality and an effect of constraint."[8] This is, in effect, a mediation between the concerns of Aristotle's teleology and Kant's deontology, with methodological primacy being given to the ethical aim. He correlates these two concerns to the notions of self-esteem and self-respect, which themselves form a dialectical relation.

In establishing ethics over morality, Ricoeur suggests that the goal of ethics should be *aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions*.[9] Here "good life" has a social meaning, as in "a way of life." In the narrative unity of a life, the estimations applied to particular actions, and the evaluation of persons themselves, are joined together.[10]

He eventually demonstrates that even though ethics are given a place of primacy in the dialectic, it is necessary to test ethical aims by means of moral norms.[11] This has the effect of orienting the *telos* of ethics toward a generalized universality. At the same time, Ricoeur wants to show how morality must return to ethics in order to resolve *aporias* that arise when one seeks to apply universal norms to difficult practical cases. In the case of conflict, the aim of the good life may override the demands of moral rules in favor of the demands of solicitude.[12] Practical wisdom has the task of crafting conduct that will satisfy the exception required. For the purposes of this project, grounding ecological ethics, I

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[8] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* 170.

[9] Ibid., 172.

[10] Charles E. Reagan, "The Self as Another" *Philosophy Today* (Spring 1993): 12.

[11] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 169ff. The issue is treated in detail in Studies 7 and 8.

[12] Ricoeur gives examples from the end and beginning of life. The first calls to mind the case of the obligation to tell the truth to dying persons. The obligation is qualified by compassion for particular patients who may be too weak to stand the truth. The latter considers the ethics of abortion and the moral considerations that would permit the termination of a pregnancy. *Oneself as Another*, 268-273.

want to focus on the dynamics of the ethical aim, as well as the need to develop a practical

wisdom capable of negotiating conflicting moral norms.

If the "good life" is the goal of ethics, it is lived *with and for others*. Ricoeur

introduces the key theme of *solicitude*, which means concern for others. Solicitude does

not contradict self-esteem, but rather stands in dialectical relation to it. In other words,

the self is not diminished in the concern for others, but rather is found in the relation.

Part of Ricoeur's aim is to safeguard a self that is both intersubjective *and* responsible.

Ricoeur suggests that solicitude is the character of the relation between the self

and the other, and is based on the exchange of giving and receiving. It is through

solicitude for the other—friendship—that we establish relations of mutual esteem. It is

here too that we encounter the suffering other. "Suffering is not defined solely by physical

pain, nor even by mental pain, but by the reduction, even the destruction, of the capacity

for acting, of being-able-to-act, experienced as a violation of self-integrity."[13]Implicit in

selfhood, then, is the notion of responsibility, which serves as the connection point

between narration and ethics. Am I responsible? Am I someone who can be counted on?

How do I evaluate my own actions?

Ricoeur then expands his ethical goal of the good life from interpersonal relations

to institutions. The virtue of solicitude for the other is extended to the virtue of justice.

By institutions he means the structures of living together that facilitate the distribution of

roles, responsibilities, privileges, goods, and rewards. Justice adds equality to solicitude

(at the institutional level) and extends solicitude's range to all humanity, rather than just

interpersonal relations. As a guiding virtue of institutions, "distributive justice" is the key

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[13] Ibid., 190.

intersection between the goal of ethics and the deontological focus on norms. I will discuss Ricoeur's understanding of justice in the next section.

All together these considerations shape an ethical life. In *aiming for the 'good life' with and for others in just institutions*, human beings have a way of projecting their valuations into a meaningful future. In narrative terms, the ethical aim sets the parameters of possibility for the kind of life-story that can be written by us.

Even though Ricoeur privileges ethics over morality, he affirms that the ethical aim cannot move forward without universalizable moral norms. The norms help to safeguard the ethical aim from corruption. However, an ethics of obligation "produces conflictual situations where practical wisdom has no recourse…other than to return to the initial intuition of ethics, in the framework of moral judgment in situation; that is, to the vision or aim of the 'good life' with and for others in just institutions."[14] His goal, then, is to develop a "practical wisdom" (*phronesis*) which allows us to decide in difficult particular cases without falling into a kind of arbitrary situationism.[15]

Ricoeur's aim is to develop a practical wisdom capable of negotiating the complexities of an ethico-moral life. For this reason, the universality of morality must return to ethics as its guide, even as ethics must pass through the screen of moral norms. Teleology and deontology are dialectical poles. A teleological view of the goal of ethics needs universal moral rules as a necessary means to accomplish the goal; on the other hand, the application of these rules to difficult particular cases calls for an appeal to the ultimate *telos* of morality. The dialectic of ethics and morality is played out in the making of moral judgments, which is the application of moral rules in particular situations. The

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[14] Ibid., 240.

[15] Reagan, "The Self as Another," 16.

mediation of the dialectic is manifested in *phronesis*. The result is a reflective equilibrium between the requirement of universality and the recognition of the contextual limitations affecting one's judgment.

Ricoeur's study on ethics and morality is valuable to *agapeic* environmental ethics because it provides an ethical framework for thinking about human agency in regard to non-human nature. His notion of solicitude is the first step toward developing an eco-moral relationality, and his emphasis upon *phronesis* provides the necessary vehicle for the application of *agapeic* behavior. Furthermore, his ethics is not something that stands outside of human identity, but forms an integral part of it. To be human is to be ethical. To be practically active is to be moral.

Yet some questions remain: can an ethic of solicitude be extended to all *living things*? Does participation in life processes count as a kind of reciprocity, which could ground solicitude for nature? In violating the capacity of non-human organisms to participate in those processes which sustain them, do we not create a kind of obligation in ourselves? What does *phronesis* look like in the sphere of human relationships to the non-human?

While discussion to this point has laid the foundation for understanding the conditions of embodying and evaluating human agency, the following section will take the first step in investigating the relational dynamics of love in regard to non-human nature. This is important because relationality forms the context for how humans live in, with, and for the natural world.

Dialectic of Love and Justice

In *Figuring the Sacred,* Ricoeur devotes an essay—appropriately titled "Love and Justice"—to the way "love" has been used in ethical analysis. He rejects attempts to seek "basic normative content" in the concept of love or to make love an "ultimate normative standard, criterion, or principle for judgments of value and obligation."[16] Ricoeur seeks a mediation between disproportionality and sentimentality in the dialectic between love and justice, and is highly critical of the attempts of analytic philosophers such as Gene Outka who seek to break down the concepts into common conceptual elements.[17] A better way, he suggests, is to analyze them in terms of kinds of discourse, that is, how they speak to us.[18]

Ricoeur begins his investigation of love by drawing on three aspects of the language of love shaped by the biblical tradition, each indicative of the "strangeness" of the discourse.

The first aspect is the link between love and praise. Love is identified as sharing characteristics of poetic discourse of praise. This discourse is manifested in hymns and benedictions (biblical poetry) which operate according to a different logic than descriptive discourse.[19] The poetic nature of this discourse amplifies its meaning and rejects the

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[16]Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," 316.

[17] Ricoeur names only Gene H. Outka, *Agape: an Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972). Another prominent example would be Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953).

[18] Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," 317.

[19] See 1 Cor 13, Ps 1:1, and Matt 5:3 as examples.

possibility of simplification necessary to subject it to analysis. The phenomenon of love simply cannot be abstracted from embodied practice.[20]

The second aspect is what Ricoeur terms the "disturbing imperative" to love God and neighbor. If the imperative is understood in terms of obligation (Kantian deontology), there is a strangeness about commanding someone to love, an eminently voluntary act. Ricoeur calls this a poetic use of the imperative, which links with the discourse of praise in biblical poetry. The connection between the love commandment and discourse of praise reveals that the love commandment is irreducible to the moral imperative. The command to love someone is not like the command to pay one's taxes or not kill one's neighbor.

The third aspect under consideration is the expression of love as a feeling. The "love me!" of the commandment confronts us and demands a response. This confrontation—this demand on the beloved—is the catalyst for the dynamism of loving expression. The feelings of love become existential effect through our response to the particular demand. Ricoeur sees a common phenomenological source for the manifestation of feelings of love of all kinds. Therefore, he rejects the strong dichotomy between *eros* and *agape*. A metaphor "expresses what we might call the substantive tropology of love: that is, both the real analogy between feelings and the power of *eros* to signify *agape* and to put it into words."[21]

From discourse on love, Ricoeur moves into the discourse of justice. His purpose is to define features whereby love and justice can be set up in a dialectical relation. Ricoeur begins by examining those features of justice that seem most opposed to love.

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[20] Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," 318.

[21] Ibid., 321.

Justice, in contrast to love, is identified linguistically with the prose of Law or the formal rule, which concretizes the ideal of justice as a social practice. To see it in this light offers some of the necessary features, even while recognizing that it is an incomplete picture of what justice is. The features that emerge in this characterization of justice result from identifying justice as *distributive* justice. Society is seen as a system of distribution (of roles, tasks, rights, duties, goods, costs). Individuals have no social existence apart from the distribution rule that confers on them a place within the whole. Justice, then, is the foundational virtue guiding the process of distribution: to render each his or her due.[22]Virtue only enters the sphere of justice through the general concepts of "distribution" and "equality."

Having established the poles of the dialectic, Ricoeur sets out to bridge the poetics of love (the hymn) with the prose of justice (the formal rule). Confrontation of the two emerges when one or the other makes a claim on an individual or social practice. In earlier reflections on the hymn (poetics of love), love was not connected to praxis, but praised for its own sake. In the reflections on law (discourse of justice), there was no reference to love. Love was only considered as a possible motive for justice. Ricoeur argues, though, that both love and justice are addressed to action, each in its own fashion, for each makes a claim on action. For this reason, it is imperative to examine the two in relation, and not simply in isolation. Dialectical tension between the two "may even be the occasion for the invention of responsible forms of behavior."[23]

Ricoeur has termed the juxtaposition of loving one's enemy and the golden rule as the formation of a new hyperethical commandment. It is "hyperethical" because while the

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[22] Ibid., 322.

[23] Ibid., 324.

command to love is ethical (due to its statement in the imperative), it goes beyond this in

its link to a pattern of praxis. Love, as gift, takes on the shape of a moral norm. The

recognition of our life as a gift puts humanity in a position of obligation to the source of

life—whether that be God or the natural world or both.

Ricoeur argues that it is vital to maintain a living tension between love and justice,

between superabundance and equivalence. The principle of morality, which is summed

up in the golden rule and formalized in the rule of justice, is required to guide the

superabundance of love. Because love resists universalizing in terms of norms or universal

rules, it requires grounding in justice in order to express itself in the dynamics of

superabundance. Without this grounding, love has no footing. On the other hand, love

acts as a corrective against the perversion of the golden rule. Without love, the golden

rule is susceptible to a utilitarian maxim of "I give *in order that* you will give." The

command of love reverses the dynamic: "Give *because* it has been given you."[24] It is the

superabundance of love that transcends the formalism of justice, upon which it depends

for its being. This is the power of *restorative* justice; justice is manifested in the wholeness

or reparation of the relation in question. The understanding of justice itself is

transformed when held in tension with the command to love—even one's enemies.

Justice is the necessary medium of love, while love enters the practical and ethical sphere

only under the aegis of justice. *Phronesis*, then, unites love and justice as it applies both

appropriately to specific situations.

Ricoeur's recourse to moral judgment recalls his search for *phronesis* in his

discourse on ethics and morality. In *phronesis* we see the convergence of three dialectics:

between selfhood and sameness; between ethics and morality; and between love and

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[24] Ibid., 328.

justice. Each form a dimension of human being-in-the-world, with the latter two concerned with the prescriptions of agency and praxis. In the development of practical wisdom, humans develop the capacity to negotiate appropriate agency within the relationships that constitute them, which is the shape of their identity. In this light, anthropology and ethics are inseparable components of an analysis of lived experience. An engagement with one component must recognize and demonstrate the link between the two.

Ricoeur's analysis has moved us closer to understanding how an ethic of human agency can be grounded in love—and how love can guide ecojustice—by clarifying the context in which love can be made manifest in ethical human behavior. But some issues need resolving. For one, a dialectical relation between two self-aware others (persons) is presupposed here. Is it possible to understand this in a way that addresses the effect of our relations within the natural world? Perhaps the very nature of the otherness of the natural world constitutes a different kind of responsibility? Is responsibility to the suffering person different from responsibility to a suffering planet? To whom or what, then, is responsibility directed, and what is the proper character of our response?

Love and Constructive Theology: LeRon Shults

Most of these issues can be resolved by further reflection on the nature of human relationality. In particular, a theological account of human existence thematizes *agapeic* love in a way that bridges the gap between philosophical and ecological construals.

Linking to Ecotheology

LeRon Shults's work in theological anthropology and pneumatology serves as such a bridge. His analysis of the dynamics of spiritual transformation offers a helpful way of thinking about loving agency in an ecological context. The expansion of intentionality through intimacy with God creates the dynamics by which one extends love beyond interpersonal relations to the realm of ecological relations.

This move begins first of all with the contention that the divine Spirit may be linked theologically with the spirit of life (*ruakh*). Human agency has its source within the *ruakh,* which is manifested in the life processes and systems of the planet. By identifying parallels between life in the Spirit and biological life and psycho-social life, the boundaries and limitations of biological systems may be seen as deriving from and aligning with the activity of God. In other words, the ecological and spiritual share a common divine source. Life and agency in the Spirit will not undermine or by-pass ecological well-being.

The parallel between spiritual and biological life is displayed in Paul's dichotomy of Romans 8 where living in the "flesh" brings death and living in the Spirit brings life and peace. When we are living in the Spirit and participate in an ecologically healthy manner in the life-processes of the planet, human agency manifests peace. A Spirit-ordered agency is not destructive to life, but upholds it. Nature does not require human agency for its life, but depends upon ordered behavior to avoid its death or degradation at the hands of that agency.

Just and loving eco-praxis can be understood, then, as a form of redemption or conversion. The transformed agency that results in eco-praxis *is* the transformed agency of the human spirit in the Christian experience of redemption. The dynamics of the experience of redemption are at play in both social- and eco- justice. The change in

behavior manifested by a transformed way of life will play out in both the social and

ecological realms, not as different kinds of ways of life (from each other), but as different

manifestations of the same transformed agency. Commitment to a new way of life is the

fundamental principle of conversion.

As human relations are transformed, the believing community manifests love and

justice in their interpersonal relations. This has direct implications for eco-praxis. The

redemption of human relations is the most 'intensive' of the transformed relations. The

dynamics of transformation that culminate in redeemed human relations also structure

redeemed relations to nonhuman others. This may be manifested directly toward

ecosystems or indirectly via human justice—that is, in the reparation of human injustice,

the sinful behaviors that degrade both humans and nonhumans are eliminated or curbed.

I will now turn to Shults for some key insights into the dynamics of loving human

agency.[25] This not only brings Ricoeur into the theological sphere, but also demonstrates

a way of talking about how loving agency is manifested in concrete relationships in the

natural world. A key theme running throughout Shults's scholarship is what he calls the

"philosophical (re)turn to relationality" and the implications this has had on the

formulation of Christian doctrine. This conceptual shift, along with insights from

contemporary science, has been the impetus for his key writings in theology.[26] The basic

premise lies in a shift of ontological categories since Kant from a primacy of "substance" to

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[25] His key works include: F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003); F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005); F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

[26] Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology* and Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God.*

a privileging of "relation."[27] The result has been the emergence of the theme of "relationality," and the reshaping of many traditional theological categories. For the purposes of this chapter, I want to focus on Shults's insights into the way these conceptual shifts have altered the landscape of pneumatology and spirituality.

Shults's recent work, *Transforming Spirituality*, continues his re-forming theme into the theological locus of pneumatology. Shults also forays back into theological anthropology by holding a strong link between Spirit and spirituality, which evidences itself in the process of spiritual transformation.[28] The Spirit cannot be understood if it is abstracted from the human experience of transformation. His dynamic pneumatology, linked to a relationally-oriented anthropology through the thematic of spirituality, creates the conditions for the themes of love and ethics to be cast in terms of selfhood. In other words, Shults, like Ricoeur, incorporates the dynamics of love within an ethical dimension of human being. Two key themes in this work are the concepts of "intensification" and "transformation." Each bears on life within nature.

Dynamics of Intensification

Shults proposes that spiritual transformation not be thought of in linear or isolated ways, but in terms of an ongoing process of the qualitative "intensification" of relationality.[29] He fleshes out this dynamic by way of the interrelated themes of intensity, intentionality, and intimacy:

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[27] For a detailed investigation of the "philosophical turn to relationality," see Chapter 1 in Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*.

[28] Shults, *Transforming Spirituality,* 14-22.

[29] Ibid., 29.

> A sufficiently complex form of relational *intensity* is necessary for human life, and consciousness requires some form of *intentionality* in relation to another. Human personhood emerges as this intentional intensity takes form as a longing for *intimacy* in relation to a personal other. An intense tending toward intimacy is itself an intimation of personhood.[30]

Our intentional intensity in relation to others shapes our selfhood, both for good or ill. Human relationality is characterized by movements both "toward" intimacy and "away" from painful interactions. When intimacy is achieved, even in its destructive or unhealthy forms, the tension does not dissolve, but rather is intensified. Redemptive intimacy emerges in and through the transformation of the tension and intimacy that shape our lives in relation to God and one another. This redemption "transforms our interpreted experience of the intensity of creaturely life, so that our intimate tending to others, to ourselves, and to God is increasingly characterized by faithfulness, love, and hope."[31]

How does selfhood fit into this picture? Shults operates under the fundamental assumption that to be a person is to be in relation, and personhood is mediated by relations to others within systems of relations.[32] He is adamant that we need a concept of the self and human spirituality that accounts for the communal dynamic of mediated personal experience.[33] As a starting point, he offers Kierkegaard's description of the self as spirit outlined in *Sickness Unto Death*:

> A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to

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[30] Ibid., 30.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Shults, "Current Trends in Pneumatology," paper presented at the Nordic Systematic Theology Conference, Copenhagen, Denmark, January 4-7, 2007.

[33] Shults, *Transforming Spirituality*, 56.

itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself.[34]

While Shults will modify Kierkegaard, he sees this formulation as insightful in recognizing that this relational notion of selfhood requires grounding outside of itself. It requires an Other that is not itself for it to be itself.

Anthropology is again connected to theology through pneumatology; the Spirit of the biblical God is affirmed as the origin, condition, and goal of human existence. In the biblical tradition, spirituality is intimately related to creaturely life. All life is constituted and upheld by the presence of the Spirit of Life (*ruakh*). Shults connects the process of intensification with creatureliness: to be a finite creature is to exist in the tensional field of space-time. Without tension, there is no life. In the broadest sense, all creatures display a dimension of spirituality.

Human spirituality is a unique form of relational intensity, however:

Personal human life exists in the same tensive field of creaturely finitude upheld by the Spirit, but it experiences this field as a *self*-intensification in relation to other creatures. A person's spirituality is the form of his or her life, whether anemic or energetic, anxious or peaceful, in relation to self, others, and God.[35]

We may think of human spirituality as the way in which we live in the world, which manifests and constitutes our experience as persons oriented to others in time and space.

Christian spirituality, therefore, ought to be understood in these relational terms. Rather than simply designating the religious dimension of an individual life, it addresses the dynamic movement of one's whole life as a person in relation. Christian spirituality has to do with the transformation of human lives through spiritual union with God in

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[34] Quoted in Shults, *Transforming Spirituality,* 56.

[35] Ibid., 59.

Christ.[36] Believers experience this in the divine calling to the form of life manifested in Jesus Christ. Participating in this form of life is transformative for human knowing, doing, and being.

Transformation: dialectical identity, agency, and presence

Shults connects his investigation into Spirit and spirituality to his earlier reformative writings through a shared matrix of theological inquiry, a methodological structure that provides a thematic unity to separate works. The basic structure of this matrix is the evaluation of a range of theological loci through the orienting themes of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. He adds to this matrix three dimensions of spiritual transformation, which correspond to desiring Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. In the intensification of our relationality with God and others, we experience the transformation of becoming wise, just, and free. The Spiritual union that mediates these three transformative intensifications is explicated in terms of three dialectics: *dialectical identity* experienced as the intensification of faith, *dialectical agency* experienced as the intensification of love, and *dialectical presence* experienced as the intensification of hope. For the purposes of the dissertation, I will highlight and develop especially the dynamics of becoming wise and just, which is the intensification of love by way of dialectical agency. By doing this, I will demonstrate further how love is extended beyond human relationality into the natural world.

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[36] Ibid., 61.

Becoming Wise

The longing for wisdom corresponds most closely with desiring the Truth. Shults embraces a Hebraic notion of truth (*emet*), which is not primarily about abstract assertions, but about concrete relations of "faithfulness" (*emunah*).[37] Wise persons are identified not simply by the propositional content of their intellects but by the way in which they bind themselves in faithful relations within community. "'True' persons are identified by the way they manifest faithfulness, the way in which they identify with others."[38] These relations in turn shape our identity as persons. How we relate within nature, then, shapes who we are, and a re-forming of that relationship within nature in turn re-forms who we are. This is the fundamental challenge of an ethical sort (Ricoeur) that goes beyond eco-morality. This challenge becomes the pre-understanding and predisposition out of which ecojustice springs.

In the intensification of faithful relationality with God and others, we are called to find our identity in the Spirit. How does this make sense without collapsing into either the extreme of loss of self, on the one hand, or an artificial intimacy on the other? Shults illustrates this through the notion of *dialectical identity*, expressed in Paul's "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God..." (Gal 2:20). The "I, yet not I" forms Paul's identity.[39] The believer is called into Jesus' identity, which was his way of knowing and being-known in intimate

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[37] Shults, "Sharing in the Divine Nature: Transformation, *Koinonia*, and the Doctrine of God" in *On Being Christian...and Human: Essays in Celebration of Ray S. Anderson*, ed. Todd H. Speidell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 112.

[38] Shults, *Transforming Spirituality*, 71.

[39] Ibid, 82.

fellowship. In adopting this identity, we learn to live a way of life that represents

appropriate human response to the faithful divine Spirit. Christian identity, therefore,

participates in Jesus' relationality, including relationality within the natural reality of the

cosmos.

This call is experienced as threatening by those who want to hold onto their own

way of being or fear loss of self in the relation to God. Shults calls this epistemic anxiety.

In embracing the intensification of faithful relationality, in allowing the Spirit to transform

our identity into Christ-likeness, we experience grace. "This gracious constitution of the

self liberates us from the tension of an ego-centric life."[40] We become wise as the

intensification of the Spirit "expands our intentionality" so that we are able to act

faithfully in relation to others. This extends to non-human others as well as we live

faithfully within the intersection of ecological and social systems.

Becoming Just

The longing for justice corresponds most closely with desiring the Good. This

becoming has to do with ethics and the transformation of human agency. Desiring the

Good is manifested in the experience of longing to love and be loved in peaceful

fellowship. This longing "can only be satisfied as our agency is transformed by the Spirit,

who forms us into a just community that manifests true love as Christ did: by laying down

our lives for one another."[41]

If becoming wise had to do with the transformation of our way of being bound in

faithful relations with one another, becoming just has to do with the transformation of the

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[40] Ibid, 90.

[41] Ibid., 95.

way in which we direct our agency in relation to finite others. "Transforming spirituality is not merely about changing particular functional behaviors...it is about *becoming just* through spiritual union with God in Christ."[42]

In our relating with finite others, we find ourselves confronted by those in need and by those who seek to restrict our own agency. A transformative intensification of loving agency in the Spirit is required to act in life-giving ways. The Spirit in this context is presented as the origin, condition, and goal of human *acting* (in contrast to human knowing or human being). In this sense, God's omnipotence is understood as the condition of human agency, not as a competing agency in and of itself. The Spirit calls us to participate dialectically in God's agency, illustrated again by Paul in his contrasting life in the flesh with life in the Spirit.

Acting in the spirit displays the same "I, yet not I" illustrated above: the believer acts *and* it is the Spirit who acts "in" or "through" the believer. This acting is displayed as a way in which the whole person orients his or her embodied longing to love and be loved, powered by the gracious agency of the Spirit, to bring about the good life.[43] Theologically, this is understood in the concept of God as love. God's life is the mutual love of the Trinitarian persons; the eternal loving and being loved is the goal of human moral desire. It is the agency of the Creator that graciously constitutes the conditions for creaturely participation in the good life (the life of God). The agency of those who "live in the Spirit" is linked to and empowered by the infinite love of the divine life. Human capacity to love is intensified as we are connected spiritually with the God who is love.

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[42] Ibid. Emphasis in text.

[43] Ibid, 108.

Acting in the Spirit has direct implications for living life with and for others, and that means the web of cosmic nature as well. As Shults points out, "acting in the Spirit takes shape in the redemption of human relations, sanctifying the people of God so that they manifest divine love as a community of justice participating in the arriving reign of divine peace." The Christian community becomes just as it participates in the reconciling agency of the divine Spirit and is conformed to Christ's way of acting in the world.[44] "It was precisely as Jesus' agency was empowered by the Spirit that his own way of serving transformed the relational structures that inhibited justice and love in human community."[45] Likewise, when we participate dialectically in God's love, the relational structures that inhibit justice and wholeness in the natural world are also transformed. The way that humans relate within it individually and communally impacts the capacity of natural systems and non-human organisms to be what they are.

The call to act in the Spirit of Divine Love results in a transformed way of orienting ourselves with others. In our concrete relations we are empowered to manifest love. Love is the fulfillment of the law (justice); therefore, becoming just involves becoming an agent who manifests love. Intentionality itself is transformed as our desire is oriented wholly toward and within the infinite Good.[46] Shults connects this experience of transformed intentionality to Jesus' experience of loving God and others. His life demonstrates a way of acting in the Spirit that participates in the Father's love for the world. Jesus calls his disciples to dialectical agency: love as I have loved you. At this point, the dialectical

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[44] Ibid, 111.

[45] Ibid, 119.

[46] Ibid, 116.

agency exemplified in Jesus can be understood to mean a call to followers of Christ to act in accord with their Christ-given participation in the Father's love for the world.

Moreover, the longing for freedom corresponds most closely with desiring the Beautiful. Shults has reformulated this not in terms of a simple aesthetics, but as an ontological category experienced in the wonder and awe of existence, and this includes response to the existence and beauty of non-human natural beings. Human *being*, like human *identity* and *agency* is called to be "in the Spirit." Shults casts this as a *dialectical presence*, which governs the way persons are "present" to one another. The relational dynamics of being-present to self, others, and God shape the coming-to-be that is the human spirit.[47] Humans face what Shults calls ontological anxiety when we recognize our inability to control the presence of others or to avoid being crushed by that presence. Our longing is expressed in a desire to belong-to and be longed-for in relationship. "Only by sharing in the hospitality of divine grace can the human spirit become habituated to a way of life that graciously welcomes the other, providing space and time for redemptive transformation."[48] Only then can we experience true freedom.

In this relational context, the difference between love and *agape*—and between other "kinds" of loves—can be seen as one of intensity and responsiveness, and not one of kind. *Agape* is no longer viewed as a kind or subset of love, but as a particular form of relational intensification mediated by responsiveness in a given context. As I am faced or confronted with a situation that demands an ethical response, my relationality with that entity intensifies according to the demands placed on me. The demands of interpersonal relations are not identical to those of non-human entities, even if they also require a

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[47] Ibid., 138.

[48] Ibid,, 148.

response of love. This is where Oord's definition of love can be helpful: acting

intentionally in response to others to promote well-being. Even his limited definition of

agape as acting in response to that which generates ill-being can aptly apply to an

ecological context. Even if one is wary of predicating "suffering" of a degraded

environment, such as the case with Sideris, the environment still often presents itself to us

in a state of ill-being. To act in love, in *agapeic* love, is to respond to the source of

degradation in order to promote well-being. The weakness in Oord's definition of *agape* is

his limiting it as a response to a negative condition or experience. Environmental

degradation will always be constituted by a condition of ill-being, but not all ecosystems

are in such a state. Many localities are characterized by ecological health, and I do not

want to say that an *agapeic* response is not appropriate in those contexts. For Oord, *agape*

would not even be possible within a healthy ecosystem.

However, this need not be seen as choosing a different kind of love, but as

manifesting a manner of intensification appropriate to the context. The nature of the

singularity that confronts us ethically sets the parameters of response. My proposal is that

the natural world, more specifically natural entities, is loved in a manner appropriate for

promoting its well-being. This applies to both human and non-human encounters alike.

For example, the moral standards and expectations for familial relationships differ from

those governing professional relationships. What may be appropriate in one setting—

affection and intimacy in the family—is not in the other. How one responds to relational

conflicts in those settings is likewise different and guided by customary norms. In the

case of the natural entities, considerations are measured by such things as value, scale,

and long-term impact in a given locale. Threat to an endangered species' survival—like

the Panda's—evokes a different kind of ethical and moral response than does threat to a

squirrel's survival. Strip mining confronts us ethically in a different way than the cutting of a single tree. Each response, though different, can still be characterized as loving if it appropriately directs behavior and being toward ecojustice, that is, toward well-being in an ecosystem.

The link between love and anthropology is maintained in the reality that the phenomenon of love cannot be abstracted from embodied practice of justice. The superabundance of love disorients traditional notions of justice—even environmental justice—and forces a reorientation. True justice is the practical embodiment of love in its minimal demand of respect for the other, but not an embodiment of the totality of love. In environmental ethics, it is the conjugation of ecological sensibilities with love (understood in anthropological terms) that points toward a disorienting ecological anthropology. As the ecologically-sensitive, loving-self is confronted by the otherness of creatures and systems within the demands of morality, it forces a reorientation and refiguration of human behavior that results in ecojustice. Ecojustice brings a change in identity, and a change in identity in light of a Ricoeur/Shults ethic opens love to influence behavior in the natural world, and not only in the social and interpersonal world.

5.2.3. Third Principle—An Eco-relational Phronesis: Becoming Agapeic

This leads to my third principle: the development of an ecological *phronesis*. The task is not without its challenges, though. The sphere of relationality that exists between moral agents (between persons) carries a range of complexities not encountered in non-personal relations. The moral agent demands a more significant response than natural entities, whether animal, plant, or system. Specifically present in interpersonal relations are those dimensions demanded by solicitude, reciprocity, and mutuality (i.e. forgiveness

or reconciliation). These do not exist in the same way—if at all—in non-human

relationships. That being said, the state of the environment also carries real but different

demands for responsibility.

One of the challenges of an ethic of love is discerning appropriate responses in

particular situations. Ricoeur suggested that this calls for developing a practical wisdom

(*phronesis*) to negotiate the dialectic of the ethical aim and the moral norm. But what

does this look like in an ecological context? Applying Ricoeur's dialectic of the ethical aim

and moral norms, there are four discernible norms that help guide an eco-relational

phronesis: locality, sustainability, sufficiency, and responsiveness. Each of these parallels

and complements James Kay's Adaptive Ecosystem approach to environmental care

discussed in Chapter 3 by providing practical principles for eco-friendly living. They are

guidelines for healthy ecosystem participation and environmentally appropriate

responsibility. Since ecosystem health is the aim of an environmental ethic, I propose that

the following norms are the appropriate principles to shape environmental morality.

Locality

By locality I am referring to the scale of measurement by which we evaluate human

behavior. It also refers to the geographical focus of re-oriented relational energy. It is

where we are to be *agapeic*. While a select few may have the education, skill set, and

opportunity to address environmental problems outside of their home region, most

people will engage these issues within their own locality. Although ecosystem health

must be measured by a number of different scales governing its nested and

interconnecting hierarchies, human involvement and impact can be evaluated at the

intersection of individuals and their environment.

According to Wendell Berry, the local community is just such an intersection, the place in which we actually connect with the global ecological crisis.[49] The problem with the environmental movement, he suggests, is that they have too long emphasized problems at the abstract level of "global" or "planetary" concern. This promotes either anxiety or apathy: "how, after all, can anybody—any particular body—do anything to heal a planet?"[50] As long as the problem is planetary, the ability of any one person to address it is dwarfed. This is, in essence, a problem of scale. Without denying the reality that the ecological crisis is a global one, our environmental morality must be directed at the particularity of our local places. The problems of our planet are the problems of our local places. Berry surmises:

> The question that *must* be addressed, is not how to care for the planet, but how to care for each of the planet's millions of human and natural neighborhoods, each of its millions of small pieces and parcels of land, each one of which is in some precious way different from all the others. Our understandable wish to preserve the planet must somehow be reduced to the scale of our competence—that is, to the wish to preserve all of its humble households and neighborhoods.[51]

I agree with Berry, and add that his attention to the local is not only an effective strategy but a moral norm that applies an ethic of love extended to natural beings.

Accomplishing this reduction from abstract to concrete is a matter of how to love.[52] Berry, much like Hall in Chapter 4, stresses the importance of loving the whole by loving one's place in the world.   He rightly recognizes that love for a locality binds us to it and motivates behavior that contributes to its care. However, the focus must extend

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[49] Wendell Berry, "The Work of Local Culture," in *What are People for?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 153-69.

[50] Wendell Berry, "Word and Flesh," in *What are People for?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 197.

[51] Ibid., 200.

[52] Ibid.

beyond mere affection for a local place; the love one shares for a locality ought to be a characteristic of how he or she contributes to and participates in the health of the place. This is an instance of the general moral principle that benevolence has to become beneficence. *Agape,* as a characteristic of human relationality, is about the *way* that we live in our local communities just as much as it is about the way that we live in relation to one another. The latter is, of course, an important dimension of this, but it does not constitute the whole of living *agape.* If to be *agapeic* in human relationships is to manifest a particular relational intensity, to be *agapeic* in an ecological context is to understand how those relations shape a way of living at the ecological-societal interface. In both of these dimensions of human existence, the appropriate outcome is the well-being and health of the Other. The norm of locality directs our becoming *agapeic* first and foremost to the local community in which we live.

Sustainability

If locality is about *where* we love, sustainability is a measure of *how* we love. This principle is often employed to refer to an ecosystem's ability to supply sufficient resources to meet the basic needs of—at least—humans, if not also for all the non-human members of that system. Embedded in this notion are assumptions about a system's "stability" or "ideal state." Discussions of sustainability are also often connected with the value of preservation.[53] Environmental action in these cases is seen as maintaining the stability of an ecosystem so that it sustains its ability to provide basic resources.

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[53] See e.g. James B. Martin-Schramm and Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), and William Gibson, "Theology and Ethics for New Mission," *Church and Society* 80 (March/April 1990): 5-15.

However, an open systems approach to understanding ecosystems forces us to look at the idea of sustainability in a new light. If ecosystems are self-organizing open systems, then traditional concepts of "integrity" and "stability" are no longer possible.[54] Ecological integrity is no longer about preserving a particular state of affairs, but about maintaining the process of self-organization. A system's integrity concerns its capacity to organize and maintain itself in a fluid operating state. Very often this includes multiple operating states. Change and unpredictability are "natural" byproducts of this kind of energy-dissipation system.

Sustainability in this context concerns the intersection of ecological and societal systems. It is ultimately about maintaining the context which allows for the desired states of self-organization. Human (societal) concerns must be balanced against ecological ones. As the two interdependent forces mutually shape one another, the context that allows this dynamic process is what must be preserved. In this way, it is neither the human nor the non-human concern that has *de facto* primacy over the other. Rather, the ability of these systems to adapt to changing conditions and energy demands takes priority. If this capacity is maintained, then the system may undergo significant changes in structure without diminishing its integrity as a self-organizing system.

One example would be the topographical changes at the undergraduate institution where I teach. Over the course of a century the expansion of the campus into the surrounding wooded foothills forest has resulted in terracing the hillsides. While archived pictures of the original campus reveal the significant extent of the topographical changes, the development of buildings and roads has not altered the sustainability of the local ecosystem. It continues to function as a sustaining system to most of the flora and fauna

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[54] See discussion in Chapter 3.

that predated human habitation. Accordingly, the norm of sustainability interprets this situation favorably even though it does not exemplify maximum preservation. This interpretation has important applications world-wide. Deforestation, for example, does not meet the normative meaning of sustainability, since it does not sustain a context in which social and ecological systems can continue their self organization. The forest ecosystem simply ceases to be.

For humans to live sustainably is to order a way of life in a manner that supports the desired operational states of the systems in which we live. This norm helps achieve the aim of ecological health by giving a measure of the impact that our lives have within an ecosystem. Insofar as our individual lives merge with those of our local community, the scope of ecological impact increases, as well as the need for measuring by the standard of sustainability. To manifest *agape*-formed identity is to live in ways—often sacrificially to us personally—that promote the adaptability of our localities.

Love of this kind requires us to acquire at least a rudimentary understanding of the ecosystemic relations that constitute our localities and to be willing to be involved in the socio-political forces that shape human involvement in them. In this way people are both individually and communally responsible. According to an *agapeic* norm we adopt eco-friendly ways of living individually, and we promote—often politically—ways that our communities may do the same.

Sufficiency

In North America, a key contributor to environmental degradation is a socio-economic system that promotes and is driven by consumption. This in turn has produced byproducts like wastefulness, hoarding, overconsumption, and inequitable distribution of

wealth. While none of these are new features to human societies, the scale of these byproducts has been exponentially greater in our post-industrial age. The enormous rate of consumption, combined with the reality of global population explosion, have put a tremendous strain upon many local ecosystems to provide the basic resources to support these socio-economic structures.

In recognizing that our current rate of consumption threatens the sustainability of ecosystem integrity, the norm of sufficiency provides another guideline to *how* we manifest *agape* in our local communities. Sufficiency at both the individual and communal level involves recognizing the limits of an ecosystem's ability to sustain a rate of consumption or pollution and consciously redirecting behaviors in order to maintain its integrity. Much of the ecological restoration work in and around the Great Lakes region is a result of this recognition.[55]

For those of us who live in highly consumptive societies, it requires a change toward sacrifice and accountability. We must know when to say "when," and live within those boundaries. This is the sacrificial dimension of *agape*, and brings with it the realization that most of us live well beyond the needs of basic sustenance. Berry chastises:

> We must achieve the character and acquire the skills to live much poorer than we do. We must waste less. We must do more for ourselves and each other. It is either that or continue merely to think and talk about changes that we are inviting catastrophe to make.[56]

To live sacrificially in sufficiency means adopting a new way of life respecting *agapeic* presence within ecosystems. It is doing one's part to be a change-agent through refocused

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[55] See e.g. James Kay and Henry Regier, "Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ecological Integrity: Insights from an Ecosystem Approach," in *Implementing Ecological Integrity: Restoring Regional and Global Environmental and Human Health*, ed. P. Crabbe, A. Holland, L. Ryszkowski and L. Westra (Kluwer: Environmental Security, 2000), 121-156.

[56]Berry, "Word and Flesh," 201.

patterns of living. For those on the other end of the economic spectrum—those in impoverished societies—sufficiency looks much different.   Where people do not have enough for basic subsistence, ecopraxis may demand more consumption for the sustainability of the socio-ecological context. This is especially true in cases where deficiency is not linked directly to an ecosystem's ability to provide. Survival and basic necessity an important threshold to keep in mind. We should not expect those below that threshold to sacrifice; sufficiency for them is about getting enough to survive. Whether overconsumption or under-consumption is the issue, both problems require changing societal structures that threaten sustainability.

Responsiveness

Full *agapeic* participation in ecosystem health demands that we not only understand the impact of our societal way of life within a network of ecosystems, but that we actively engage in monitoring and adapting our lives to changing conditions and contexts. This includes, but is not limited to, influencing community behaviors on an ever-increasing scale.   We must be willing to adapt the way that we live to fit the demands of the ecosystems we are a part of. If we—communally—strain our locality, then we—individually and communally—must be willing to make the necessary changes to protect and sustain it. As conditions change the context of socio-ecological relations, behaviors that once posed no threat may become degenerative. More likely, we lose sight of the way our lives and choices affect the environment around us.

James Kay suggests that an adaptive ecosystem approach to sustainability and integrity gives us the necessary guidelines for appropriate responsiveness within self-

organizing open systems.[57] The fluid and dynamic nature of these systems demands

regular attention and adequate decision-making strategies.

> The formulation of a sustainable society involves realizing a vision of how the landscape of human and natural ecosystems should co-evolve as a self-organizing entity. Decision-making comes to be understood for what it has always been, finding our way through partially undiscovered country rather than charting a scientifically determined course to a known end point. Decisions must be made about which of the ecological possibilities (i.e. attractors) to promote and which to discourage, thus effectively defining ecological integrity in that situation...Decisions must also be made about how to deal with the inherent uncertainties, what risks to take, what contingencies to plan for, what backups to have in place. These decisions must be informed by science, but in the end they are an expression of human ethics and the socio-political context that they are made in.[58]

Kay argues that the process of carrying out this vision begins and ends with the

formulation of a narrative. At the beginning stages, this narrative provides a description

of the ecosystems involved and includes alternate possible states of condition. The

narrative is sufficient to support a framework of issues upon which ethical judgment

comes to bear. Through a collaborative process of deliberation, a communal vision of

future possibilities is selected.

This deliberation identifies which self-organizing entities best support a

sustainable balance between the social and ecological forces of a network of systems.

From there a strategy and infrastructure are put together that will encourage and promote

the desired operating state. The final stage of the process is also embedded in a narrative.

Community participation in the chosen strategy and supporting infrastructure is mediated

through the narrative as it provides a vision of possible ways of being and acting. Insofar

as members of the community alter their behaviors to align with this vision, they embody

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[57] James J. Kay et al., "An Ecosystem Approach for Sustainability: Addressing the Challenge of Complexity," *Futures* 31, no. 7 (1999): 721-42 and Kay and Regier, "Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ecological Integrity: Insights from an Ecosystem Approach," 121-156.

[58]Ibid., 144.

these new ways of being and implement the strategy. Monitoring and adaptation continue as the impact of implementation is evaluated.

Responsiveness as a norm has obvious value as the engine that drives the changed behaviors demanded by sustainability and sufficiency. It is the active and motivational dimension of *agape*. Love also informs the shape of our response by speaking into the values that govern the decision making process. We manifest *agape* in our local community by understanding the structures and context of ecosystem health and orienting our lives to support them. Living this way *is* loving. It is not just an outflow of love but is a love appropriate to the context. It is a kind of relational intensification— between social and ecological forces—that parallels the *agapeic* intensification in interpersonal relationships. *Agape* is affective, active, and existential. When I reduce my consumption, support green political initiatives, or decrease my carbon footprint I am loving.

Within a relational framework, responsibility and participation are interrelated dimensions of becoming *agapeic*. The recognition of what constitutes an appropriate responsiveness and participation can help formulate both an ecologically healthy ethical aim, as well as ecologically supportive moral norms. The embodiment of these in loving agency manifests a spiritually transformative relational *phronesis*. In becoming wise and just through the expanding of our intentionality and the *agapeic* intensification of our relationality, we take the first step in addressing the ecological concerns that face us.

5.3. Case Study: Bishnumati River, Kathmandu, Nepal[59]

David Waltner-Toews and his associates detail an example of communal *phronesis*
among those living along the Bishnumati River in Kathmandu. The citizens there have
followed a strategic community plan to restore their polluted and desolate river system.[60]
Without this active engagement in monitoring and adaptation, destructive behavioral
patterns will continue. In order to illustrate how an eco-relational *phronesis* can result in
environmental action, I will look in greater detail at the efforts of a community in Nepal to
restore a degraded ecosystem. In 1991, the riverbanks of the Bishnumati River that border
Wards 19 and 20 in Kathmandu, Nepal were an ecological disaster. One observer noted:

> In the early dawn, by a series of small fires, water buffaloes are pithed and
> slaughtered beside a trickle of muck that was once the Bishnumati River. Vultures
> wait in the branches of a few nearby trees. Below them, between the groups of
> men eviscerating the carcasses, dogs and pigs forage, and people bathe, defecate,
> and come to fetch their household water.[61]

The conditions created both ecological and social burdens upon the community,
particularly concerning population health. Community members embraced an Adaptive
Management strategy—such as the one mentioned in chapter 3—in order to address these
related burdens. I want to show how this strategy is congruent with an *agapeic* approach
to environmental praxis.

The citizens of Kathmandu began with an analysis of the problem. Not
surprisingly, high rates of disease were connected with the presence of open piles of

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[59] The account of this study is found in David Waltner-Toews et al., "Perspective Changes
Everything: Managing Ecosystems from the Inside Out," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*
1, no. 1 (2003): 23-30.

[60] David Waltner-Toews et al., "Perspective Changes Everything: Managing Ecosystems
from the Inside Out," *Frontiers in Ecology* 1, no. 1 (2003): 23-30.

[61] Waltner-Toews, "Perspective Changes Everything," 23.

garbage and slaughter waste, which promoted parasite and rodent population growth and decreased the overall water quality. From this analysis, the community began to draft and implement initiatives to improve slaughtering facilities, recycling, and composting. The reduction of garbage was seen as a first step in recovering environmental and social health.

The second step was to evaluate the challenges to removing the garbage that was still left. At this scale, the problems were more diverse and complex. Each job associated with trash removal (tractor drivers, drain unblockers, and especially street sweepers) faced socio-economic barriers to doing their jobs well. Street sweepers in particular, who are typically women, were overwhelmed by the inefficient garbage disposal practices of the community, and burdened by their own financial and educational deficiencies. The Ward's community leaders produced a revamped set of rules and regulations for street sweeping and helped to fund educational initiatives directed at households and street vendors to reduce waste and improve the efficiency of disposal. They also began to provide protective equipment and hygiene training for the sweepers, which greatly reduced exposure to disease-causing parasites, and funded literacy training and day care. The result was a noticeable reduction in garbage and disease and an eventual restoration of the river ecosystem. By 2001, the availability of quality water was greatly increased. Gardens and parks now exist where there was once only erosion and offal.

The four norms of an ecological *phronesis* given above are evident in the efforts of the Kathmandu community. *Locality* is easily identified by the focus of efforts in Wards 19 and 20 of the city. The needs of these Wards demanded that attention be concentrated in this area and not on general measures to be carried out by the whole city. The specific solution engaged locally specific problems. Community energy was spent on addressing

the local situation with local measures. This was their problem and eventually their solution.

The impetus for change was a desire to curb the degraded integrity of the river ecosystem. Degradation was evident not only in aesthetically unpleasant views and smells, but also in the declining health of its human and animal populations. The procedural and educational initiatives became an attempt to maintain or restore the *sustainability* of the system by eliminating or reducing the forces that threatened system integrity. These initiatives were guided by an increased awareness of what constitutes *sufficiency* in the locality. Ecosystem health required that the citizens of those Wards change their patterns of consumption and waste. Recycling and composting efforts went a long way in reducing the amount and kind of waste generated and improved collection/cleaning procedures greatly decreased the presence of that waste in the streets and river. *Responsiveness* is most evident in the fact that the citizens actually did something about their problem. Community leaders were not content to merely discuss the issues or pass insignificant regulations. They committed resources to help enforce and evaluate regulations, and developed practical ways to improve the process of waste removal. Because of these efforts, the people who live in along the Bishnumati River are learning to live in an eco-just manner within the system. Their sensitivity to both human and ecological needs lead to changes that eventually resulted in increased health for both.

However, these are just the evidences of a latent *agapeic* environmentalism. *Agapeic* ethics is about more than changed behaviors, but about transformed identity and relationality. The primary reasons for the degradation of this area of the Bishnumati River were the attitudes and behaviors of the local citizens. While the Adaptive Management strategies provided an impetus for changed behaviors, these remain largely external and

dependent upon enforcement procedures for continued compliance. Long term solutions, however, will depend upon the ability to change the attitudes and dispositions of the people. Until the reasons for an ecojustice relationality are internalized, then ecopraxis will be dependent upon the quality of enforcement.

For the changes in the Kathmandu Wards to become truly *agapeic*, the lives of the people living in that locality must be transformed. As they take on a converted way of living, which involves recognition of and submission to the needs of their eco-social systems, the community as a whole moves toward becoming more wise and just. This results in a transformed way of orienting themselves with each other and within their environment. In their concrete relations they are empowered to manifest love. Therefore, becoming just involves becoming an agent who manifests love. Intentionality itself is transformed as individual and community desire is oriented wholly toward and within the greater Good. This will always remain an unreached (and unreachable) ideal, but the striving toward this ideal may be enough to sustain real *agapeic* ecopraxis.

5.4. Conclusion

Chapter Five has worked out three thematic trajectories that move ecologically-oriented theologies beyond the problematic Stewardship model. I believe an *agapeic* ethic emerging from a relational anthropology can serve as a much needed corrective. Not only does it align with a long-standing tradition of grounding ethics in love, but it incorporates that tradition as a dimension of human existence. This is to say that an *agapeic* ethic re-situates the best available normative perspectives on human presence and interaction with nature in reference to the core of Christian revelation, faith, and discipleship. Re-situated, an *agapeic* ethic generates an ecosystemic *phronesis* and four specific moral norms. The

agapeic model of ecojustice does not invent a totally new set of norms, anymore than Christian ethics in general introduces wholly unknown moral codes, but it does what Christian ethics does: incorporate the best practical moral wisdom and processes of decision-making into the horizon of faith where it enters into a human/divine relationship and becomes a visible witness to love for God. And that is nothing less than to have explained how and why the ethic, morality, and *phronesis* of ecojustice are integral to Christian faith and discipleship.

Furthermore, it has the capacity to serve as the foundation for further diversity of models of human ecopraxis. Just as love manifests itself in different ways in different contexts, so too can an ethic of love built on an anthropology of radical relationality. The multi-contextual nature of human relationality demands such flexibility. By linking anthropology to the Christian conceptualization of *agape*, I am offering a resource for constructing a new ethic of love in ecotheology.

CONCLUSION

In the face of a human-generated ecocrisis and in light of Stewardship's inability to provide a viable model of human being and agency in the world, I have argued for an alternative approach to environmental ethics. The appeal to *agapeic* love built on a relational philosophical anthropology provides such a model and is guided into practical action by way of ecologically-sensitive norms.

Overview

The first part of the dissertation set out to map the current landscape of environmental literature as it has responded to the reality of a planetary, human-generated ecological crisis. Despite these many and varied attempts to change human behavior, humankind remains the driving force behind environmental degradation. Christianity too has sought answers to overcome humanity's destructive tendencies. Within the church and Christian theology, the image of the environmental Steward has gained widespread popularity. This trend was evidenced through a careful study of official church documents and the writings of environmentally-minded theologians. Although my focus was primarily upon churches and theologians in the Protestant tradition, noted Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox sources have also adopted the idea.

The job of the Steward (or Manager/Caretaker) is presented as a model of how humans ought to live in the world. Non-human nature is classified as a "resource" that requires good management so that it continues to provide goods for humankind. God has given this task to humanity as bearers of His image, and we are obedient in so far as we care for His creation. Ecological problems are the result of poor Stewardship and a failure

to manage the resources well. Living in the world is likened to an economic venture in which the goal is get the resources to last as long as possible. Implicit in this idea is an understanding of how humans are related to the natural world and what kind of responsibility that they have within it. The norms of environmental ethics are in turn governed by this sense of place and responsibility.

In the last few decades, the idea of environmental Stewardship has come under significant critique on a number of fronts. I chose to focus on the anthropological assumptions of separation and mastery implied within the paradigm because, I argued, these are what shape the course of human activity in the world. In Chapter Three I brought these assumptions to the fore and demonstrated how they failed to square with a contemporary ecological view of humanity embedded within nature. James Kay's work in ecology was particularly helpful in presenting a paradigm of human existence emerging out of an entangled web of social and ecological relations. By identifying ecosystems as self-organizing, holarchic open systems, we are able to see that human sociality does not stand over against ecosystems but forms an important dimension of an integrated whole. Furthermore, the nature of such systems precludes the possibility of mastery or even predictable control, both essential to the idea of Stewardship. If this is so, then Stewardship *cannot* model human ecologically healthy activity in the world. To attempt the kind of mastery and control fostered by Stewardship may actually create conditions of abuse through unintended and unanticipated consequences.

As Stewardship has fallen under greater and greater scrutiny, alternative models of Christian engagement with the natural world have been presented that propose to move beyond the limitations and problems of the previous model. After surveying a number of these, I ultimately determined that they too were unsatisfactory based on a specific set of

criteria. What I suggested Christians need is a new model of human agency for environmental ethics that is both ecologically sensible and theologically faithful. However, rather than focus on the construction of my own alternative model, I took a different track. Because I agree with the notion that the human-nature relation is too complex to be pictured in a single model, I am offering an alternative understanding of human persons (anthropology), and more specifically, an understanding of human agency (love). This amounts to an approach to modeling rather than a singular model or ethic itself.

I decided to begin with a reframed notion of *agape* love, a longstanding theme in Christian ethics. After reflection on the nature of *agapeic* love as that which seeks the good of another, it was deemed worthy as a foundation for ethics in general and potentially for environmental ethics as well. Building on my argument that anthropology entails ethics, I utilized philosophical and theological resources to present three principles of a relational anthropology of love. The three principles are: 1) that we think not of how we relate to nature, but who we are within nature; 2) that we think of love as the optimal character of human relationality; and 3) that we develop an eco-relational practical wisdom to guide human behaviors with and in the natural world. Throughout the last chapter, *agape* served as the conceptual bridge that linked ecology and theology. A relational anthropology is congruent with an ecological notion of the self, but also with the fundamental idea of *agapeic* love. Love is understood not just as something we feel or do, but something that we are (or become). *Agapeic* agency flows out of the *agapeic* self. Humanity manifests *agape* in the social sphere when it seeks the well-being of others. In so far as human sociality is embedded in ecosystems, *agape* is manifest in ecological relations as well. Where the well-being of other creatures—and of the system itself—is

considered, *agape* is present. I concluded by arguing that four ethical norms can guide *agapeic* behavior: locality, sustainability, sufficiency, and responsiveness.

In essence I have presupposed a relational anthropology that is consonant with an ecological sensibility. I am not really arguing for an anthropology, not really for an ethic, and certainly not a model. My understanding of love provides an ethical grounding for a multiplicity of models. An ethical model rooted in *agape* could take many forms. For instance, it could be argued that Wirzba's Servanthood model could be *agapeic* in certain socio-political contexts. As an approach to grounding ethical models, it informs the way those models are constructed and applied appropriately.

Implications

A major contribution of this approach to environmental ethics is its ability to address a wide-range of eco-social issues. If anything is to be learned from the extensiveness of the ecocrisis is that it involves more than just the well-being of non-human organisms. The complexity of the interrelation of social and ecological relations points to the interconnectedness of social and ecological problems. Issues like environmental racism and population pressures on ecosystems blur any sharp distinction between human and "natural" concerns. To be human is natural and even the sphere of culture is not separate from the natural world. This also means that human concerns are every bit as valid as those of non-human species.

An *agapeic* environmental ethic addresses both the ecological and social by working toward the transformation of those behaviors that are detrimental to both. Environmental racism, for example, can be seen as an extension of systemic racial attitudes that perpetuate the marginalization of the ethnic poor. They are more likely to

live in degraded environments and in proximity to the industries that threaten

degradation than those with access to wealth and power. It is environmental in that the

marginalization extends beyond the lack of socio-political participation to the very lack of

a healthy place to live. To be *agapeic*—both individually and communally—is to seek the

health and well-being of others, and this includes the conditions of their habitation. To

manifest *agape* in these situations is to work for the transformation of both lives and

habitats. It is my contention that the attitudes and behaviors that drive social

fragmentation also drive ecological degradation. If these attitudes and behaviors can be

transformed, then a redeemed way of life with and for others will also yield a redeemed

way of life within ecosystems.

Does this mean that an *agapeic* ethic is only for Christians? While I am proposing

a kind of personal and relational redemption available only through the work of Christ

and Spirit, I do not want to restrict this only to those with a confessional orientation to

Christianity. I want to argue that it is possible for all people to manifest *agape* in their

social and ecological ways of being in the world. This is possible if we concede the

possibility of degrees of participation in God's divine activity, a participation that is not

dependent upon a conscious confession of faith. In other words, I want to suggest that it

is possible to think about participating in God's loving work—and thus manifesting

genuine *agape*—in a broadly existential sense, whenever we exhibit behaviors and

relations that promote the health of ecosystems and the well-being of the species within

them. If that is the case, one would not have to be a Christian in order to be *agapeic*.

Ultimately, all activities that are in line with God's purposes are modes of cooperation

with the divine Word and Spirit whose infinite, ongoing creative-redemptive activity is

not limited to the human nature of Jesus and so not limited to the visible reality of

Christianity. However, I do not want to neglect that there is something significant about

having a genuine faith in Christ; that this redemptive relationship allows for a fuller

participation in God's love. In this way it is open to all, but arrived at most fully via the

gospel.

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