

THE SEATTLE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

A TRINITARIAN *IMAGO DEI*: HOW REIMAGINING GENESIS INFORMS AN INTEGRAL
AND FUNCTIONING CREATION THEOLOGY

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Abstract

The Genesis *imago Dei* tradition has informed an untenable perspective of humanity as sole image bearers of God. This paper proposes a new model of the *imago Dei* that is threefold in nature: an inter-animating relationship between the human, the planet Earth, and the cosmos. The Trinitarian pattern of the Godhead reveals the inherent interrelatedness of all creation and provides the co-responsive framework for a new model of the *imago Dei*. This requires new ecological models of God that provide a deeper understanding of God's immanence within the natural world and transcendence throughout a sacred evolutionary cosmology.

The hierarchical telling of the Christian creation story and humanity's casted role will be critiqued by examining Sallie McFague's Monarchical Model of God and how it informed humanity's disconnect from the natural world. This severing has led to an anthropocentric presence that has devastated the global ecology. New models of God alongside scientific expansion, specifically McFague's Earth as God's Body model and Thomas Berry's Universe Story, are examined for their ecological perspectives that overcome the nature-human divide.

A creation-centered spiritual tradition that recasts our understanding of humanity's role within the *imago Dei* will affirm our interrelated presence in our particular places, and our role within a sacred cosmogenesis. With this recovered sense of humanity's profound interconnectedness, the Christian tradition can convert the primary Genesis story into one that creates functional lived expressions, vigorous environmental ethics, and integral connections to the other-than-human world and our planet.

Preface

Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are.—José Ortega y Gasset¹

I came to The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology with a deep and driving desire to know more about my tradition's sacred stories and how they contributed to understanding myself in connection to my homescape—both the particular place in which I live, and the planetary home we all inhabit. In truth, it is more accurate to say that it was my awareness of the lack of connection to a place, and the subsequent disregard for it, that drove my question and concern. Throughout my four years at this institution, I have carried this query with me. In a very real sense, it illuminated the process of entanglement as I attempted to follow threads and untie the knots of strings that connected the Judaeo-Christian sacred cosmology to an escapist narrative that has left much of the Western Christian world disconnected from the land, this planet, our home.

For each “eco” hermeneutic I would explore around a given course, I continued to come up against a fundamental problem that appeared to have roots in the Genesis creation story. If the world was created good, and humanity was made in the image of God, how did we get to a place in human history where our very presence was destructive to the goodness of creation all around? Sure, “the Fall” and human sin was a readily easy answer, and it was certainly one I received as I wrestled with the sense that there was something else to the story that we had forgotten, that if we could only remember we might discover that our human presence on this planet might be one of blessing and life-generating flourishing potentiality for all of life.

¹ Quoted in Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 20.

This intuition has guided me into profound Creation theologies that have felt simultaneously transgressive and redemptive. My research and writing has taken me deeply into the wounds our planet suffered in places like the Marshall Islands and Flint, Michigan, and to eras of our human history like the European colonization of the Americas and enslavement of African people. It has connected my female body to the body of this world, and has empowered me to understand how inherent and critical this connection is. And I have had to confront why this connection is so profound, and address the painful cultural foundations upon which much of Western Christianity is built. I have had to come against the stories I have been told as a white, female growing up in a Western, American, evangelical Christian context; stories that both empowered my dominion over the natural world, and subjugated my womanhood along with the world.

This paper is about transforming our most foundational stories, about renewing them so that their power can foster an embodied sense of being at home here on Planet Earth. I argue that our current state of planetary affairs invites a retelling of the Judaeo/Christian Creation story with a distinct examination of the casted role and meaning of humanity as the collective Image Bearers of God. There is more to this traditional story and it must be remembered for the narrative, and our place within it, to become functional. It should be converted into a compelling and contemporary cosmology that, while maintaining poetic wisdom, affirms the inherent interrelatedness with all of creation—plants and planet, creature and cosmos alike—and reimagines the *imago Dei* tradition from this place of deep and mutual inter-relationship. Our traditional story of creation can be recast through the use of new metaphors and sacred evolutionary cosmology. The wisdom can re-emerge to affirm our co-participatory role as a

member within the *imago Dei*. Our sacred cosmology must declare the sacramentality of all things, and that only through our mutual relationship with others, the Divine, and the other-than-human-world can we truly embody our role as a participant within the *imago Dei*. Hegemonic Judaeo Christian stories have told us that humanity is the Image Bearer of the Divine, an androcentric crown of all of creation.

What if we had stories that changed our understanding of the *imago Dei*? What if our stories of origin didn't cast humanity as **the** image of a monarchical God, but rather as an equal and important member within the *imago Dei*? Looking to the ternary template of the trinitarian pattern of the Godhead, this three-fold inter-relatedness informs my proposal that the Image of God is actually made up by the cosmos, the other-than-human world, and humanity. In other words, if the pattern of God is Trinity, and we are made in God's image, then that pattern must be integral to our existence as well. When these three entities (cosmos, humanity, and other-than-human world) are harmoniously brought together in inter-communal relationship, instead of within binary constructions, then the Image of God is made manifest on Earth, and the eschatological hope for a peaceful, heavenly home becomes a reality on our present planet.

Part 1. A Particular Story: Restoring the Land. Restoring Ourselves.

“The universe is made of stories, not atoms.”

Muriel Rukeyser

Introduction to Cheasty Greenspace

The shocking staccato of a lone M60 unloads into the forest filling the air. A strange-bird-like call answers in response. Tucked amongst the overwhelming English Ivy towers and sharp Himalayan Blackberry walls, strewn mattresses are habitat to both syringes and streetwalkers. The foul odor of feces and rotten food mixes with the residual tang of fornication and fear, layered upon decades of human-dumped garbage and debris. Stolen goods are hidden and found, rerouted through the overgrown invasive underbrush to avoid being spotted. And the bird-like call screeches through the branches and leaves once more. Perched on a muddy knoll with back to the trees and facing the structured, regulated life of the city, sits a lone figure clothed in threadbare layers of mismatched sweaters and socks sending sonorous signals through the air. These are distinct from the now-silent warbles and trills that should be present in this urban forest; these particular shrieks offer an alerting call for those illicitly trading in sex and drugs.

Stay out of these woods, was the explicit message. These woods are scary, bad, and degraded; and people don't belong there.² So fear-filled is this forest that neighboring immigrants and refugees are known to make gestures to ward off the evil eye when they walk on

² In addition to personal experience that would affirm this recent history of Cheasty Greenspace, one can find more information on hidden weapons, unsolved murder cases, and vegetation destruction at the following sites: CBS News, “Mysterious ‘Moleman’ Digs Massive Ditches in Seattle Park,” July 31, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mysterious-moleman-digs-holes-in-seattle-washington-park/>; Jennifer Sullivan, “Seattle Police Search Beacon Hill for Remains of Missing Everett Woman,” *The Seattle Times*, November 28, 2012, <http://blogs.seattletimes.com/today/2012/11/seattle-police-search-beacon-hill-for-remains-of-missing-everett-woman/>.

crumbling sidewalks beside the trees' shadows. So avoided is this forest that neighbors living on opposite sides of the wall-like greenspace maintain veils of social and racial distinction and separation, and go to great lengths to drive around the woods to access neighboring community assets. A fugue-state surrounds this forest; neighbors have chosen to file their fear away into a state of forgetfulness, neglecting this natural world and creating a chasm between the people and a place that could serve to create harmonious, interconnected community.

This is the story of Seattle's Cheasty Greenspace as it was when my husband and I moved next door to it in 2004. And this was the land that began to call out to me, imploring that I begin to reimagine how this particular place could be restored with a renewed story; how reconciliation with this land held a key to the unity of our community. As I witnessed the hotbed of activity flowing to and through these woods, I wondered how these trees could be experienced without my dominant feeling of fear and separateness. For every stolen vehicle that was left in front of my house, for every ton of garbage and waste that was dumped upon the forest floor, for every red-eyed dealer that understood this landscape could cover his traded addiction, I began to be curious if we could imagine something profoundly different for this space. It was as if the woods began to whisper to me, to call out to me, to summon me to restore an ancient story—one where the dignity of the land and the people were intimately interconnected, where the natural world thrived, and all living things flourished together in harmonious inter-relationship. I began to realize that this particular forestscape was a contributing part to the equation that left so many people wondering about the physical and social health disparity of our community—human and other-than-human alike.

Seattle's Rainier Valley, racially and economically diverse, and historically underserved, has the highest chronic health and crime rates in the city. This area is also an identified "Open Space Gap Area," meaning a community with no access to open green spaces within a half mile of residences. The irony of a neighborhood where children's lives are at risk of vehicular hit-and-runs, and gun-shots fill the air more than bird-song, while a massive 43 acres of forest sits within the very midst of this community is glaringly obvious. The inherent connection between holistic human health and the state of this forest demanded my attention. The state of this forest and its ecological well-being began to offer itself as an accompanying answer to the chronic questions around oppression and poverty in our community. The trees offered insight into the well woven roots of injustice and environmental degradation, and how an interrelated relationship with them could inform a sense of being deeply at home both in our particular neighborhood, and subsequently, on our planet.

Transforming a Green-space into a Green-place

To imagine how Cheasty Greenspace could contribute to extending one's sense of home beyond the stoop to the resident cedars would mean a complete community paradigm shift. It would require replacing fear with a spirit of reclamation. With a bold assertion that things were not how they were meant to be, our community could transform these woods by reclaiming them as part of ourselves. It would mean challenging the status quo, demanding a change in how we participate with this place. It would mean saying again and again with every rootball of blackberry pulled, and every black garbage bag of waste removed that we are *meant* to be in relationship with one another and the land. And this story-line shift would require time and

tenacity. For to change a script of domination and disconnection to one of empowerment and kinship would require peeling back layers of misunderstanding, misconception, and bad policy. If we could create a new story of this space that would affirm our collective, inherent value and mutuality, we would rediscover a deep sense of belonging to each other, the natural world, and the numinous.

And so the slow and laborious work of changing the narrative of this particular stand of trees from one of separation into connection began. The trees extended the invitation to reconcile ourselves to them—to restore both the land and our sense of interconnectedness to it—and in so doing, discover a deep and meaningful sense of *home*. There was a suffering, a missing part of our humanity, within the community due to the disconnection from this natural world that was in our immediate midst. The fear and low-grade anxiety in response to a degraded and dim wood inhabited by illegal deeds had taken root and impacted how people engaged one another and the world around them. Strangers' eyes shifted to the concrete upon passing a neighbor. People clutched their bags and slouched their shoulders in a protective posture when passing the woods instead of looking up through the trees with awe and wonder. Children were cooped up indoors on couches with their computers, more familiar with the gaming sounds of “waka-waka” and “ring-ding” than with the sound of rushing wind through trees, or the gurgling of a seasonal spring underfoot. Home had become the place you hid within to be protected from the furtive flurries within the forest.

Slowly, a small group of neighbors began the work of ecologically restoring this human-damaged and degraded urban forest, and upholding a vision that a restored woods could provide

safe and welcoming access to nature.³ And in the process, we began to restore our sense of selves, our community, and the very idea of how expansive and inclusive our homes actually are. Our home didn't end at the door's threshold or porch; our homescapes began to stretch and reach beyond our boundaries, much like the tendril reaches of a tree's roots push and press through soil. Our homes expanded outwards and into one another, to and through the forest. Our roots began to mingle with those of the cedar and maple, salmon berry and hazelnut. And we discovered that while we restored this land we were beginning to re-inhabit this place with a felt-sense of *home*. We experienced that it was included in us and us in it. We needed each other to be healthy and well. Cheasty Greenspace was becoming a "primary referent."⁴

Some urban environmentalists were skeptical about our efforts seeing it as an outside interest group's justification for ongoing human intervention and destruction of urban natural systems. Other more immediate neighbors were afraid these restoration efforts would increase crime and provide easier access to their residential neighborhoods. While the invasive-plant-dominated forest had legitimately fostered a decades-old culture of fear based on the illicit behaviors occurring within, the real loss came with the resulting denial of fully inhabiting our particular locales in ecologically sustainable ways. Local urban families had no connection to

³ As noted in Daniel T. Spencer's "Restoring Earth, Restored to Earth," *EcoSpirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, eds. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 421: In 2002 the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER) defined ecological restoration as "the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed." Says Spencer, "Implicit in this definition is that human agency has been the primary, if not exclusive, source of the degradation of the ecosystem to be restored—hence the question of moral responsibility for restoration has emerged as a key component of ecological restoration."

⁴ The primary referent is a concept that theologian and historian Thomas Berry used to describe the power of a place as a lens by which one understands and critiques social establishments such as politics, economics, religion, and education. All decisions that one makes in life are filtered through the health and well-being of a "primary referent." For Berry, his primary referent was a field of white lily flowers that he encountered when he was 11 years old. This idea of a primary referent will be revisited and picked up throughout this project. While he speaks often about this meadow-experience, one can find a reflection on this moment in idem, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 12-13.

this place, their particular ecological locale; they didn't know their wildlife neighbors or the function and form of native plants and trees. They didn't have exposure and experiences within the woods that would create a sense of responsibility to it. Without storied connections with the Hazelnut trees, red-tailed hawk, and spring-fed Snowberries, neither the people nor the woods as a whole would find their purpose or meaning within our urban ecosystem. Inter-relatedness, interconnection, and even the grand sense of awe and wonder that can be experienced in nature were meaningless concepts without having safe and welcoming access to the natural world to cultivate this connection. Establishing unprecedented access to this forest wasn't about habitat destruction. This was about engaging the belated work of creating kinship with the natural world within our community, and subsequently, expanding our notion of kinship entirely. This was about an ecological restoration that not only aimed to restore the deteriorated landscape into a healthy native habitat, but also restored a deep sense of community and the inherent interconnection between these two. A healthy, whole, and happy neighborhood required turning toward this land with a desire to create meaningful relationship.

Changing Cheasty's Story: The Great Work

Wendell Berry, one of the greatest cultural critics and environmental activists of our time, understands that while we are inherently members of a macro-ecosystem, a deep seeded connection to a place isn't achieved through scientific understandings or biological theories. He argues that the cultural sterility of these concepts can have the opposite effect on a community, causing people to turn *away* instead of turning *toward* the land due to lack of meaningful relevance. To find one's place within an ecosystem requires an introduction to the names and

experience of the very real places that make up one's homescape. Says Berry, "The real names of the environment are the names of rivers and river valleys; creeks, ridges, and mountains; towns and cities; lakes, woodlands, lanes, roads, creatures, and people."⁵ For people to desire a connection to the land known as Cheasty Greenspace, we had to begin the work of reclaiming and renaming the features of this forest from ones that conjured fear, to ones that created familiarity.⁶ We had to become intimate with this place, increasing our familiarity deeply with its many facets, to have it return as an integral part of our community. Berry has said this of the great work of "gaining a deep sense of" what it means to be at home on this planet:

And the real name of our connection to this everywhere different and differently named earth is "work." We are connected by work even to the places where we don't work, for all places are connected; it is clear by now that we cannot exempt one place from our ruin of another. The name of our proper connection to the earth is "good work," for good work involves much giving of honor. It honors the source of its materials; it honors the place where it is done; it honors the art by which it is done; it honors the thing that it makes and the user of the made thing. Good work is always modestly scaled, for it cannot ignore either the nature of individual places or the differences between places, and it always involves a sort of religious humility, for not everything is known. Good work can be defined only in particularity, for it must be defined a little differently for every one of the places and every one of the workers on the earth.⁷

⁵ Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, and Community: Eight Essays*, (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 33.

⁶ Examples of this effort include restoring a prominent area that was used for prostitution, and inviting neighborhood children to claim the area as their own, which included naming a particular tree "The Castle Tree." A network of social trails that were developed as a result of drug and stolen good trafficking was used as a template to design a recreational trail loop that has been named the Hazelnut Loop due to the amount of naturally occurring native Hazelnut trees in the forest.

⁷ Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, and Community*, 34.

And so we start with a renewed story of good work, of reclamation that not only restored the land, but also our souls and that of our community. Thomas Berry would call this the Great Work, a work in which we are each called to participate.⁸

For me, Cheasty Greenspace, this particular stand of trees in Southeast Seattle, Washington is evidence of the transformational power of telling a new story through ecological restoration. Through Cheasty, I've learned that old narratives maintain the status quo and that traditional scripts can continue a dysfunctional trajectory of foundational aspects of a story. And I've also learned that through my particular place, I have a deeper sense of my connection, and impact upon, our planet. The biggest story of the twentieth century, as Larry Rasmussen notes in *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, is the fundamental change in the relationship of human culture to the natural world: never before have humans been powerful enough to alter or destroy planetary life-systems. Rasmussen poses this challenge in response to the traditional stories we have told-and that imbed our culture: "If the great new fact of our time is that cumulative human activity has the power to affect all life in fundamental and unprecedented ways, then *what ought to be is* precisely what needs to be taken into account....How *ought* we to live, and what ought we to *do* in view of a fundamentally changed human relationship to earth, a relationship we only partially comprehend?"⁹ Humanity has made itself its primary referent, and in so doing has betrayed how we are meant to be postured on our planet. What we *out to do* will require our

⁸ The Great Work was Berry's primary thought carried through much of his thinking and writing in regards to the end of the Cenozoic Era, the pivot point of the Anthropocene Age, and the much-needed movement towards an Ecozoic Age. It would be the Great Work that would "carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner." Idem, Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 3 ff.

⁹ Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 5.

imagination and a willingness to remember how we are meant to be here. The transformational story of Cheasty Greenspace becomes the potential micro-model for the big impacts renewing our significant stories—and our roles within them—can bring.

Rasmussen argues that we ought to change our story and view of nature.¹⁰ This change in storytelling sensibilities, small as it may seem, can have large consequences. This is what I will explore through the thesis of this project. I will trace the connection of a particular story, one that is well known in the Judaeo-Christian Western world, and how it has cleaved the natural world, and the planet upon which we all live, from our human-centered lives. I will examine why such a story was written, and influenced so much of how humanity has lived upon Earth. The stories we tell communicate inherent ways of understanding the world and our role within it. They speak to our sacred traditions, biases, and how we understand the present and imagine the future. They become ways both to pardon and promote ideologies and theologies.

Stories bring together imagination and reality, and negotiate between belief and doubt to make the world more understandable, to help us make sense of the mysteries and contradictions at the heart of our everyday reality.¹¹ Our stories, whether told at bed-time, around dinner tables, or from the pulpit, help us make sense of the macro course of human history and the very micro details of our unique and personal lives. From the single cell to the cosmos, stories fill in the enormous space in between. Within these narratives is a desire to know that God exists. Here lie

¹⁰ Sallie McFague might suggest the following in response to Rasmussen's provocation, "A Christian [view of nature] is extending the radical, destabilizing, inclusive love of Jesus Christ to the natural world and this praxis is best begun...by developing real relations with some particular places, lifeforms, entities of nature." A Christian response isn't one that continues the binary theologies of dominance or distance. Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 24.

¹¹ Edward J. Chamberlain, *If This is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?: Finding Common Ground* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2004), 2.

our grasping attempts at creating stories of our world, the value of other-than-human-life, and the place of humanity within it all.

My experience in Cheasty, and what informs my proposal of a ternary patterned *imago Dei*, is ultimately a story about soil—the Genesis *adamah* from which we were formed—and how this foundational essence calls us to look upward toward the stars in wonderment and awe. Not upwards in a way that causes longing for another celestial home or cosmic kingdom, but upwards to the cosmos. For the stuff that makes up soil are the same elements that make up the stars, and our selves as well. In this posture of interconnection, we discover who we really are. We are not meant to be independent and separate from the land, and the process that created it. We are all connected—humanity, humus, and the heavens. And it is time that our most fundamental story tells us such—that together we are all the image of God.

Part 2. A Sacred Creation Story: Creating Connection or Chaos?

*Stories have to be retold or they die, and when they die,
we can't remember who we are or why we're here. -Sue Monk Kidd¹²*

Introduction

I have a hunch that upon reading the well-worn words from the creation account in Genesis Chapter 1 there is little consternation for many North American mainline Protestants; it is read with a sense familiarity and understanding. This is the traditional story from the Judeo-Christian scriptures of humanity's emergence into the world. It is deeply woven into Western

¹² Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2002), 6.

collective consciousness and informs interpersonal understanding, concepts of God, and the value of the natural world. My earliest memories of this story are mixed with Lysol-smelling Sunday School classrooms, brightly colored flannel board cut outs of plants and people, and Dixie cups of goldfish crackers and patent leather shoes. It was within the story circles of this cultural context that the entire arc of the universe was condensed to seven days, and I—simultaneously loved and rejected by this Creator God—along with my collective human race, was the “crown of glory,” the ultimate reason all of creation had been brought forth into existence. Despite the storied inherent goodness of the divinely handcrafted landscapes and homemade creatures, there was no doubt left in our five year old minds that all of this was created for us to use. Humanity was the final chapter in this cosmic story and it began and ended with us as the ultimate expression of God.

This Christian cosmological story provided meaning, established “the great chain of being”¹³ within a geocentric and hierarchical world picture, and provided elemental insight into how humans were to understand and relate to God. As the “crown of creation” and the “image bearers of God,” humans were bestowed divine rights on this planet in accordance with a theistic understanding of God that was ultimately distanced from the natural world God created. The role of stewardship became a “bait and switch” for dominance. 5,000 years after this particular story began to be told, humans’ progressive presence on this planet is far from a crowning glory, but instead the instrument of its degradation.¹⁴ The power of a story that is told by the powerful,

¹³ Formulated originally with Aristotle, the *scala naturae*, or Great Chain of Being, is a classical understanding of the metaphysical order of the universe in which beings are categorically linked from most basic forms of life to the most perfect, and are given hierarchical value.

¹⁴ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1988), 50.

and that places humanity as the sole image bearers of God, is that it becomes hegemonic, conferring entire societal world views beyond a religious narrative. Without careful evaluation, the Genesis creation story can continue to mislead a fundamental understanding of humanity's place on the planet.

Storied Selves: How A Christian Cosmology Informs Being

We know who we are by the stories we tell.¹⁵ This is a potent reality of stories, one which may surprise the modern Western mind. Modern living has reduced the sparkle and imagination from much of how we move through our lives. We believe we live on fact and reason, so to expose the possibility that how we understand ourselves and our surroundings is based on story might feel extremely vulnerable, and not at all in alignment with the facts and figures of the twenty-first century. Our current cultural understandings are outcomes of stories, stories long told that have been woven into the very fiber of how we understand the meaning of our lives. They are powerful markers that inform how we are exposed to, and experience, the natural world. However, when cultural markers indicate that something is wrong with the story, or at least in how it is being told, it is critical that the story be revisited and reimagined in ways that are life-giving and life-enhancing.

¹⁵ Brenda L. Murphy and Jo-Anne Musie Lawless understood that when a culture cannot tell their place-based stories, cultural genocide can occur. Neil ten Kortenaar demonstrates through his work with Aboriginal peoples in Canada who have not been silenced from telling their stories, that they know and speak their own stories; they know who they are and where they are because they tell stories. Although English Canadians are often positioned as having been the only ones to tell their story, it is those on the margins, speaking in different languages or with different accents, who have articulated, through stories, the basis for their relations to the land and their self-awareness as human beings. ten Kortenaar suggests that it is White Canadians who have forgotten their stories because they let "scientists and accountants do the thinking for them, let government represent them, and let history books do the telling for them." Brenda L. Murphy and Jo-Anne Musie Lawless, "Climate Change and the Stories We Tell," *Journal of Canadian Studies* Volume 46, No. 2 (Spring 2012), 205.

By converting key aspects of our primary Genesis creation story, I hope for an integral ecology for all of life on earth, and that we may all live into our web of communities with mutuality and respect of our interrelatedness. This work will require casting a new role as Image Bearers of God that will enable humanity to be present and at home on our planet in paradigm shifting ways. This endeavor has been shared by many. Their work has compelled me to hear a new story, and to become a storyteller of reclamation in my own right.

The current desperate state of our planet is alarming and sobering. We have contaminated the air, the water, the soil; we have dammed the rivers, degraded the rain forests, and destroyed animal habitat on an extensive scale. How did we get from a place of proclaimed goodness (Genesis 1:31) to a place of mass extinction and species loss? How did humanity's stories turn us away from the expansive beauty and interrelatedness of deep time and biodiversity, especially as the perceived "crown of creation"¹⁶ who allegedly reflect God's own relational richness? I believe that answers to these questions lie in the theological imagination that allow for a much-needed critique of the functionality of casting humanity as the primary image of God in the Genesis cosmology.

Through a heuristic, metaphorical theology we can retell Genesis 1 in a way that is less human-centered and tell the story to imagine a three-fold interrelatedness of the *imago Dei*.¹⁷ The goal of this narrative reconstruction is to create a deep sense of home and interrelatedness on our planet—mutual connection to one another, the cosmos, and the other-than-human world.

¹⁶ Genesis 1:29 (The Voice)

¹⁷ I will model my approach after Sallie McFague's "heuristic theology," one that lacks the scope of systematic theology and instead enables a focus on current political and social concerns (nuclear annihilation, degradation of the environment, mass extinction of species, and global warming).

Only in this right relatedness will our role *within* the *imago Dei*—as collective Image Bearers of God—be fulfilled, and a flourishing earth community at *home* on our planet will be the grand and intended result, truly the “crown of glory!”

An Ego-Centric *imago Dei*

Theologian Sallie McFague argues that a right reading can change the world.¹⁸ In Genesis 1 the story teller takes on the omniscient narrator, presumably God, and powerfully provides the symbolic language for what it means to be human and why we are here in this world:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”¹⁹

When God is telling a story about how the universe and our planet was created, and the story line affirms that humanity is separate from and categorically better than the rest of creation, problems arise. Humans begin to behave in superior and domineering ways similar to a god anachronistically set apart from the natural world. This story line sets up this word of God in Genesis as a weapon advocating for human superiority and dominion, and against the inherent sacred value of the natural world. Mark Wallace argues that the story line that established nature

¹⁸ A claim made by Sallie McFague that is elaborated upon and argued in her books on hermeneutics: *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1975); *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1982); and *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1987).

¹⁹ Genesis 1:26-28 (New Revised Standard Version)

as the domain of human beings, God's viceregents over the entire created order, also created the *contemptus mundi* tradition.²⁰ This contempt of the world, which is the natural outcome of this hierarchical casting of characters in Genesis 1, has had important moral consequences, of which we will look at later.

A human dominated story is elevated as fundamental, despite the fact that humanity has only been a participant in the on-going story of creation for a hair-breadth of time. Without careful evaluation, the Genesis Creation story will continue to mislead us about how we understand ourselves as a people who live upon this planet. Aruna Gnanadason finds the dualistic, foundational teachings of Christianity, which are based on the two accounts of creation in the book of Genesis, flawed as they have allowed for earth-negating attitudes.²¹ Generally, Genesis 2 is treated as the more fundamental, in part because it is the older version of the two stories.²² For instance, Genesis 2:15, which reads "the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it,"²³ has been translated in the New Revised Standard Version as "to work it and take care of it." This newer translation positions the person in an ecological context, where the integrity of the earth and the human are mutual.²⁴ But in Genesis

²⁰ Mark I. Wallace, "The Wild Bird Who Heals: Recovering the Spirit in Nature," *Theology Today* 50, no. 1 (April 1993), 21.

²¹ Aruna Gnanadason, "Yes, Creator God, Transform the Earth! The Earth as God's Body in an Age of Environmental Violence," *The Ecumenical Review* 57, no. 2 (April 2005): 165.

²² Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land: God's Call to Reconcile with Creation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 18.

²³ Genesis 2:15, Revised Standard Version

²⁴ Even with this more integral version of Genesis 2:15, the anachronistic Divine mandate to move towards an agrarian society is evident. The truth of human history, however, is that till agriculture has decimated and compromised much of the earth's soil for the past ten thousand years in ways that repeatedly fail to acknowledge that creation forms a vast and indescribably complex and organic whole. For a theology on regenerative agriculture, see Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land: God's Call to Reconcile with Creation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 127-129.

1: 28, the problems emerge. This verse refers to the human empowered to “fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion...over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” The words “subdue” and “dominion” are problematic. An ecofeminist critique understands the Judaeo-Christian teachings of Genesis Chapter 1 to be at the root of our environmental problems. Ian McHarg, in *Design with Nature* writes:

The great western religions born of monotheism have been the major source of our moral attitudes. It is from them that we have developed the preoccupation with the uniqueness of man, with justice and compassion. On the subject of man-nature, however, the biblical creation story of the first chapter of Genesis, the source of the most generally accepted description of man’s role and powers, not only fails to correspond to reality as we observe it, but in its insistence upon dominion and subjugation of nature, encourages the most exploitive and destructive in man rather than those that are deferential and creative.²⁵

While increasingly more broad-thinking Christians understand *the theology of dominion* to no longer be the standard by which to live upon this earth, based on the understanding of the destruction and violence it has conceived, regrettably, it “remains the reigning one where it counts most in practice.”²⁶ This practice of hierarchical dominion can be traced back to ancient Hebrew stories and earthen scars, both of which bear the insidious mark of human domination.²⁷ It allowed biblical writers to imagine that humans occupied a more exalted position in the natural order than the nature-based pagan religions conceived. One example is a passage from the Hebrew Bible’s book of Psalms declaring that God made humanity “a little lower than God,” with “dominion” over God’s creation, putting “all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the

²⁵ Ian L. McHarg, *Design with Nature* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), 26.

²⁶ Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 228.

²⁷ Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (March 1967): 1204.

paths of the seas.”²⁸ Another Psalm asserts: “The heavens are the Lord’s heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings.”²⁹ Environmental historian Clarence Glacken noted that one of the key ideas in the religious and philosophical thought of Western civilization, which is derived from Christianity, is that humans, however sinful they may be, occupy “a position on earth comparable to that of God in the universe.”³⁰ This theological anthropology begot an ego-centric *imago Dei*, one that was ultimately concerned with the primacy of human affairs and progress. This anthropocentric understanding of the human as the apex of creation and measure of all things required God to reign hierarchically as well. Ultimately, this way of understanding God and humanity required a disconnection and separation from the natural world, which would be reduced to inanimate material and resource for the sustenance of human life.

The degraded state of our global environment demands we now look deeper to the Word behind the words—the Metaphor behind the metaphor. We must return to the original blessing behind Divine creation, to the *dabhar* that is intrinsic to the blessed act of creating.³¹ It is telling that the Hebrew word for blessing, *berakah*, is closely related to the word for create, *bará*.³² This suggests that a creation is necessarily a blessing, when it is done from actions born out of the intended form of the *imago Dei*. When humanity broke with an interrelation with the whole

²⁸ Psalm 8:6-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

²⁹ Psalm 115:16 (New Revised Standard Version)

³⁰ CJ Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 155.

³¹ The Hebrew word *dabhar* is defined by Gerhard Von Rad, the scholar of wisdom in the Hebrew scriptures, as wisdom or the word behind creation, “the primeval world order, as the mystery behind creation of the world.” Gerhard Von Rad quoted in Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Sante Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1983), 37. Also note that in “wisdom literature as a whole it is rather wisdom that is spoken of as creative. CF Proverbs 8:22.” Alexander Jones, ed., *The Jerusalem Bible* (New York: 1966), p. 1095, note h.

³² Fox, *Original Blessing*, 46.

of creation, and assumed the role of the *imago Dei* apart from the rest of planetary life, an ego-centric way of being restyled in *bará* ensued. An attempt at the Divine Image that was apart from the three-folded pattern of relational community resulted in a cutting and conquering presence on the planet.³³ Humanity attempted to be enthroned as the “crown of creation” and in so doing broke relationship with the rest of the created world and, ultimately, to essential qualities of the Divine. Thomas Berry cuts to the heart of the issue with this misunderstood reading of Genesis when he says, “Our ultimate failure as humans is to become not a crowning

³³ My claim that humans are not the sole *imago Dei*, the Images Bearers of God, will be further explored later in this project. At this point, I will simply state my premise that a right understanding of the *imago Dei* is a three-fold relationality between humanity, the natural world, and the Cosmos/Divine. It is only when we are in a mutual state of inter-communion within this triad that we embody the image of God. When we act apart from this constant state of interconnectedness, we move into the role of dominator, and our creative actions are reduced to the cutting and conquering acts of *bará*. The act of *bará* as an act of “cutting” is found in Joshua 17:15. *Bara’*, meaning “to create,” becomes the Piel (added intensity) of בָּרָא “to cut or clear” when taken away from powerful activity performed by God and misappropriated by man. Creation of a nation—this is the undergirding narrative of the Book of Joshua, and therein lies the inherent meanings of the Piel of *bara’*. As noted earlier, the King James Version of Joshua 17:14-15, which is set in the context of two chapters of land distribution to the house of Joseph, has Joshua instructing his followers to *bara’* (cut) down the trees in the forested high country to make more room for their expansiveness. It is likely that Joshua was accustomed to think of God creating the world as a clearing away of the elements of chaos and confusion, and reducing them to order; therefore, in this command, Joshua is exhorting the House of Joshua to take up divine action and create order through what is unavoidably an act of destruction. Through the act of deforestation and domination, Joshua is enacting a colonizing and war-tactic behavior that is still used today: cut down the trees of the original inhabitants and thereby destroy their eco-culture; and as the now-dominant power, use the resources to create for yourself. Commentaries on this passage are in agreement that there was an ancient stand of extensive forest in this region, and that Joshua was encouraging the House of Joshua to turn their complaints into action and enlarge their borders by taking matters into their own hands by dispossessing the original inhabitants of the country by cutting down the trees for their own advantage; partly for the building of more cities and towns, and partly for preparing the land for the use of pasture (Bible Hub, “Matthew Poole’s Commentary on Joshua 17,” Bible Hub, 2016. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/poole/joshua/17.htm>). However, by looking closer at central aspects of Hebraic culture and behavior, one can devise the primary facets of humanity’s relationship with God and how that relationship affected culture. My critical distance also allows for the tension of the text to unfold, and for ambivalence and questions about the traditional reading of the text to emerge beyond the unquestioning reading providing by tradition and doctrine. It is through these approaches that a close reading of Joshua 17:15, specifically looking at the Hebrew word בָּרָא-*bara’* in this verse, demands we consider the human action of clearing land in contrast with God’s creative activity in cosmogony, and how this is able to provide a deeper understanding of historical land-use policies that continue to inform how trees are valued today.

Indian social scientists Gadgil and Guha, when reviewing India’s ecological history during the British colonial period, underline the role that Christianity has played in rejecting the attribution of sacred value to nature, and that it has in fact sometimes prescribed “the deliberate destruction of sacred trees and sacred groves.” Their research has uncovered that in regions of Christian-converted populations, drastic changes have taken place with how land resources are managed. In non-Christian tracts of land, sustainable traditions are maintained. Gadgil Madhav and Ramchandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1992), 29.

glory of the earth, but the instrument of its degradation.”³⁴ I believe that by retelling essential elements of the primary creation story of Genesis that reconnect us to our planetary place, we can become agents of healing and grace! However, this will only be possible through recognition and reconciliation of the way in which this Christian story has justified such domination.

McFague: Monarchy & Metaphor

We must critically examine the metaphors that are traditionally used in how we interpret the Hebrew creation story in Genesis 1-2:1, and its impact on Western Christianity. All parables and myths are metaphors, and every theology hinges on a “root-metaphor.”³⁵ Rather than being seen as a problem or introducing a crisis, metaphorical language is a powerful tool for discovering, communicating, and critiquing meaning. The work of process and ecoliberation theologian Sallie McFague’s work lays the foundation for how we ask these hard questions around our most foundational faith stories, how we find and focus on the meaning of these stories, and how it applies to our lives and the world.

From McFague we learn how metaphor, simile, and parable are all tools that enable the discovery and communication of meaning. This is especially relevant in the current political and economic crisis, which is inescapably linked to our theological stories that have formed the backbone of Western thought and culture. In our current state of affairs, we continue to see policies set and regulations undone for the sole benefit of the human, particularly the Western,

³⁴ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1988), 50.

³⁵ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 54.

white, upper-class male. Our modern age continues to see humanity functioning, as noted by Glacken previously, as the “God of the universe.” This of course is a metaphor. And as soon as a metaphor is in use to direct and determine our cultural behaviors, MacFague is on high alert for significance. No metaphors, no meaning, as she argues: “There would be no known fact or truth or feeling without metaphor.”³⁶ Where you find meaning, she claims, you should explore the metaphors and understand how they work, because parables “give rise to thought” that ultimately become the lens of our reality.³⁷ Indeed, McFague argues that we cannot know anything except through the lens of language and metaphor: “Metaphor follows the way the human mind works;” it is “the way of human knowledge.”³⁸ Her boldness and courageous curiosity to imagine new metaphors invited later theologians to extend her arguments and look critically at the patriarchal and monarchical language that has been traditionally used to describe and understand God.³⁹

When we are able to step far enough back from our stories, we are able to notice the elements of their construction and can become curious about how and why these foundational elements were used. If we recognize that the primary creation story, which has had the most significant impact on the emergence and development of the Western world, develops God’s

³⁶ Sallie McFague, *Parables*, 47; see also *Models of God*, 192, n37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 55, 62.

³⁹ Many contemporary theologians have constructed aspects of their theologies around the role of the imagination and new ways to utilize metaphors, particularly process theologians Elizabeth Johnson, Catherine Keller, and Ivone Gebara. In *She Who Is* (1992), for instance, Johnson reconstructs the language and theology of the Trinity to find a more inclusive and faithful language for theology and talking about God, one that draws not just on contemporary feminist theology but also on the longer historical tradition that had not been heard or acknowledged. The limitations of the father–son metaphor can be overcome, Johnson argues, if we are not afraid to consider new metaphorical language. Johnson makes extensive use of McFague in her work. See John T. Hardwood “Theologizing the World: A Reflection on the Theology of Sallie McFague,” *Anglican Theological Review* 97:1, 111-125.

character as one that is equally king over and removed from creation then we begin to reveal an important crack in the story. For if humanity is made in God's image, then we too rule over a world from which we are detached and disconnected. In what is assuredly the most famous essay ever written about religion and the environment, the historian Lynn White Jr. argued that medieval Judeo-Christian ideas were at "the historical roots of our ecologic crisis."⁴⁰ Citing passages in the Bible that separate God from nature and grant humanity dominion over all, White wrote: "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen." He also believed that much, if not most, environmental degradation is directly traceable to Christianity's radical anthropocentrism.⁴¹

Humanity's use of symbols and metaphor for God provide insight and understanding for how we relate to ourselves, our planet, and the Divine. The religious metaphor for God (and subsequently humanity) as a sovereign overlord is the dominant and prevailing *monarchical model* where God as King relates to the world as the absolute ruling monarch. McFague contends that this model is so pervasive in mainstream Christian culture, that it is not even recognized as a metaphor of God. However, this monarchical picture, and its implications, are dangerous, and has resulted in a pattern of "asymmetrical dualism" between God and the world, in which God and the world are only distantly related and all power rests on God's side.⁴² If God is all powerful, and exists apart from the world, humanity exists in the tension of the subservient serf, and the earth isn't that better off as creation is viewed as void of the Divine.

⁴⁰ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (March 1967): 1205.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1205.

⁴² McFague, *Models of God*, 64.

In the monarchical model we exist to serve a God in a world that is godless, and the psychological impacts of this model are vast: it encourages a sense of distance from the world; it attends only to the human dimension of the world; and it supports attitudes of either domination of the world or passivity towards it.⁴³ Indeed the monarchical metaphor of humanity being the “crown of glory,” is more rightly “the glory of the human has become the desolation of the earth.”⁴⁴

Desolation and Disregard: Storied Marks on Skin and Soil

While the signs of human domination are everywhere in the natural world, it is most damning in the historical connection with patriarchy’s disregard for women and indigenous peoples. It is the same mind that was unleashed through monarchical monologues that has sought to control nature, and the sexuality of women and indigenous peoples.⁴⁵ The intimate connections between despoiling of the Earth and subjugating women is felt in the lyrics of this Protestant hymn’s word-choice of “probe”:

Yet, you have made us less than gods
Surpassing all but you
With heart and mind with strength and will
To search for what is true.

Into our hands You’ve placed all things
The earth, the sea, each place
We’re called to *probe* [emphasis added] for secret gifts

⁴³ McFague, *Models of God*, 69.

⁴⁴ Thomas Berry, “Teilhard in the Ecological Age,” *Teilhard Studies* no. 7 (Fall 1982), 57.

⁴⁵ Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 55.

And venture into space.⁴⁶

The insinuations of this word, and of the dominion theology inherent within these lyrics, cross over from the body of the earth to the body of the woman.

To demonstrate this connection of subjugation of earth and women's bodies, there is an old Grail story, "The Tale of the Well-Maidens," that speaks to many of our current environmental dilemmas that are rooted in patriarchal tales of God as King and men as the ambassadorial lords. The story goes as follows:

Long, long ago, even before the reign of King Arthur, the land was blessed with enchantment and great fertility. Throughout the realm, maidens stood guard over the sacred wells, offering their healing waters in golden cups to any journeyers who might pass. Indeed, some say that these were the very waters of inspiration, offering transport between the worlds. The maidens themselves may have been Otherworldly, but the tale does not say. In those days, when the veil between the worlds was thinner, these distinctions were not so sharp.

All was well, with the land bounteous and the people content, until the King conceived a desire to possess one of the well-maidens. He stole her sacred cup, carried her off, and raped her. His men followed his example, raping the other maidens. In response to these unheard-of acts, these violations against nature itself, the maidens withdrew themselves and their magic from the world. The wells dried up, and the regenerative powers of the land were destroyed, leaving it barred and devoid of enchantment. By seeking domination over others, the King and his men had diminished the world.⁴⁷

This story illustrates a key point of ecofeminism that finds resonance with McFague's monarchical model of God: that the despoiling of the Earth and the subjugation of women are intimately connected. As stated by Gomes and Kanner, "It is not a coincidence that when

⁴⁶ Fred R. Anderson, 1986, *Presbyterian Hymnal, Human no. 162, Winchester Old, Este's Psalmes 1592*, as found in Aruna Gnanadason, "Yes, Creator God, Transform the Earth! The Earth as God's Body in an Age of Environmental Violence." *The Ecumenical Review* 57, no. 2 (April 2005): 165.

⁴⁷ Adapted from Caitlin Matthews, *Arthur and the Sovereignty of Britain: King and Goddess in the Mabinogion* (London: Arkana, 1989), as found in Mary E. Gomes and Allen D. Kanner's "The Rape of the Well-Maidens: Feminist Psychology and the Environmental Crisis" in *Ecopyschology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 112.

women are raped, the land becomes parched and desolate, and when ‘feminine’ qualities are oppressed, the human mind is cut off from participation in mystery and left with a disenchanted world.”⁴⁸

In male-controlled cultures, which have grown out of anthropocentric cosmologies, it is common to find patterns of dominance and oppression directed at both women and the natural world.⁴⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, known for her work in post-colonial theology, provides a sobering look at this embedded connection, and brings in the critical strand of race, as it manifested in global colonialism: “Race, gender, and class intersected in the Western colonial project because it involved the subjugation of dark-skinned people, the transmission of white, male power through the control of colonized women, and the imperial command of natural resources and the accumulation of capital.”⁵⁰ Brandishing the Doctrine of Discovery, 14th century colonizers were empowered by this deep seeded interpretation of the Genesis story, believing they were created to subdue and dominate the whole of the earth—to rape and pillage indigenous women and their homelands. Maps of these newly conquered territories were drawn and referred to in erotic

⁴⁸ Gomes and Kanner, 112.

⁴⁹ Delores S. Williams argues that the assault upon the natural environment today is but an extension of the assault upon black women’s bodies in the nineteenth century. “African-American women have begun developing Womanist Theology and have labeled this assault upon the environment and upon black women’s bodies as sin. In some womanist theological quarters, this sin has been named ‘defilement.’ Different from the traditional theological understanding of sin as alienation or estrangement from God and humanity, the sin of defilement manifests itself in human attacks upon creation so as to ravish, violate, and destroy creation: to exploit and control the production and reproduction capacities of nature, to destroy the unity in nature’s placements, to obliterate the spirit of the created.” Delores S. Williams, “Sin, Nature, and Black Women’s Bodies,” in *EcoFeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1994), 25. This is capitalistic consumption where value is given to the extent that the thing is a resource and can provide steady and increasing monetary return. Ecoliberation Theologian Leonardo Boff provides more economic and ecological scaffolding for this connection between the environment and human life, specifically for poor, women of color in his books, *Ecology & Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); and *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Philip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

⁵⁰ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 211.

language, explicitly probing earthen openings, while they colonized the bodies of women and their reproductivity.⁵¹ These were bodies of land and women that were claimed, colonized, and killed in the name of Manifest Destiny. This sense of divine entitlement feeds into what Willie James Jennings argues is a Western Christianity that “lives and moves within” a “diseased and disfigured social imagination.”⁵²

How do we even begin to move away from the sobering reality of how profoundly a doctrine of dominance has played out in the history of the Western world, when every global border drawn has been drawn by sexual separation and subjugating relationships? For these maps don't simply roll up and get placed upon a shelf. These maps, which were imagined and drawn by entitled men, have penned ownership and exploitation upon black and brown bodies, bodies of water, bodies of land, and countless bodies of animals. The actions against life guised under the infected human-imagined “crown of glory” continue to this day through environmental

⁵¹ Kwok Pui-Lan provides fuller clarity around this connection between the symbolism of foreign land as a female body to be possessed. She writes, “Catherine Keller’s careful reading of Christopher Columbus’ descriptions of the Americas shows that he imagined the mysterious land as like the lost Eden, having the shape of a pear, culminating at something like the nipple of a woman’s breast. The serious measuring and mapping of the nipple of paradise, for Keller, was not just cartography, but *carto-pornography*: ‘The continent looms as forbidden fruit, the virgin body ripe for plucking, the mother breast ready to suckle a death-ridden, depressed Europe into rebirth.’” Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 226.

⁵² Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 6, 293.

injustice, which brings together oppressed human beings and polluted nature.⁵³ Flint, NoDAPL, Arctic Refuge drilling, Amazon deforestation, the BC Pipeline, the US/Mexico Wall, and countless other environmental exploitations continue to toe the disconnected line between the land and vulnerable populations. They are directly linked; the misuse of one leads to the inevitable misuse of the other. If Christian theology has been this ambivalent about the diversity of creation, wherein lies our hope? I believe that our hope lies in re-telling our foundational story in such a way that demands a radical engagement with the world.

Part 3. A Planetary Story: New Models and Stories for Our Time

McFague: Earth as God's Body

McFague has explored the interconnections of ecology, feminist embodiment theology, and aesthetics. In response to the destructive effects of the traditional monarchical model, MacFague offers a constructive theology shaped by the understanding of the ethical power of metaphor, in the case of her ecological theology the ethical power of viewing the world as God's body is a significant and much needed metaphor. The shift to a metaphorical model of the world as God's 'body' is in the hope of providing an imaginative vision of the relationship between

⁵³ Aruna Gnanadason's work explicitly deconstructs how an envisioned earth community fails in the context of a utilitarian reading of Genesis 1-2. She speaks to the ongoing work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) who has noted the environmental injustice of the common practice in the US of landfills being placed in African American neighborhoods. Idem, "Yes, Creator God, Transform the Earth as God's Body in an Age of Environmental Violence," *The Ecumenical Review* 57, no. 2 (April 2005), 160. Sallie McFague takes the position of the WCC, that deep systemic changes are needed to develop a new ecological vision. She sees liberation of the poor and the well-being of nature as two sides to the same coin. In her words: "If poverty and discrimination are to be alleviated, so also minor life-style changes such as recycling and car-pooling are little more than band-aids on nature. We no know that human systems, especially economic ones, are inextricably locked with natural ones. A 'social ecology' [here she borrows a term coined by Leonardo Boff] defines the human/nature in such profound ways that justice and liberation for the one are inextricably bound up with justice for the other." Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 169.

God and the world that highlights their interdependence and mutuality.⁵⁴ She shares, “I have discovered the body to be central to Christianity, to feminism, and to ecology. The organic model suggests, I believe, a possible way to rethink humanity’s place in the scheme of things.”⁵⁵

McFague’s argument for the alternative *earth as God’s Body* metaphorical model addresses these core issues, and invites seeing all of creation as a theophany. The natural world becomes revelatory and offers showings and expressions of God. The world as God’s body is a way of re-mythologizing our sacred stories and elevating them to a planetary and cosmic scale. While it invites the whole cosmos to participate in the divine unfolding and meaning of life, it also gives deep value to the very essence of creation. It allows for a planetary scope down to the particular particle. This model allows for God to be seen, sourced, and sacramentally present in and through the world and leads McFague to pose “that we as worldly, bodily beings are in God’s presence.”⁵⁶ The world becomes not only a source of the sacred, but a place that must be profoundly cared for.

McFague’s *earth as God’s body* model of understanding God provides the much-needed recasting of the traditional monarchical model that has allowed for anthropocentric echoing of a God seen as Lord, dominant, hierarchical, detached, distant, demanding, dualistic, and

⁵⁴ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 60.

⁵⁵ McFague, *The Body of God*, x.

⁵⁶ McFague, *Models of God*, 77.

triumphalist.⁵⁷ A new metaphor for God that is imminent and panentheistic (not to be confused with pantheism. God is the tree=pantheism. God is in the tree=panentheism) has the potential to introduce a right understanding of the interrelated relationship that is inherent to an integral ecological understanding the Imago Dei and how humanity is to co-participate in being an image bearer of the Divine in an Ecozoic age.⁵⁸

Lynn White, Jr. also keenly observed, “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them; human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion.”⁵⁹ Religion communicates through metaphor and the Church desperately needs new ones. The model of the world as God’s body provides a way in which to identify a living involvement of God in the world. The God who is incarnate in the world is a God at risk. In the context of this model of God, sin is the turning away not from a transcendent power but from the interdependence with other beings, including the source of all beings. Theologian John T. Harwood has examined McFague’s theological metaphors and sees how by creating new ways of understanding God, we

⁵⁷ McFague sees traditional patriarchal, imperialistic, and triumphalist metaphors of God in grim light (monarchical model). For her this language is idolatrous and irrelevant. Our current ecological crisis supports that the image of God humanity created informs how we live anthropocentrically on Earth, and this human centered version of the *Imago Dei* needs to be reimagined. MacFague believes we need new images and metaphor that can speak to the age in which we live. Here is where the interrelated work with Thomas Berry and *The Universe Story* becomes relevant. Science and cosmology has provided our modern age with a new understanding of reality; for theology to still work within a framework of assumptions about reality from a very different time is “blatantly wrong-headed.” Charles Birch, “Models of God (Book),” *Ecumenical Review* 40, no. 2 (April 1988): 294-296.

⁵⁸ The term “Ecozoic era” was coined by Thomas Berry in conversation with Brian Swimme for their book, *The Universe Story* in order to describe the geologic era that Earth is entering – when humans live in a mutually enhancing relationship with Earth and the Earth community. Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story: For the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding Cosmos* (NY: HarperOne, 1994).

⁵⁹ Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (March 1967): 1204.

can have new perspectives of problem solving in the Anthropocene, the Age of the Human, where humans are single-handedly destructing the earth on a biological and geological scale:

McFague has created a new climate for theology by understanding that global warming is a theological problem, just as hunger and poverty are. Arguments about metaphor and models are her most original and distinctive contributions to theology. She calls her approach “heuristic theology,” meaning that it lacks the scope of systematic theology and that it enables a focus on current political and social concerns (nuclear annihilation, degradation of the environment, mass extinction of species, and global warming).⁶⁰

If one uses the model of the earth as God’s body, if one appreciates and understands creation as organically interrelated, one would, or at least might, act differently toward it than if one used the model of creation as a kingdom. While the king-realm language seems to make sense to the within the Western Christian tradition, McFague argues that that is simply because we have become accustomed to it. We are culturally conditioned to understand God in Western culture monarch terms and as a result, see our planet as God’s realm, where we as God’s viceroy act with dominion. This metaphor puts too great a distance between the Divine and Earth, whereas the metaphor of the world as God’s body verges on imminent proximity.⁶¹ This model allows us to play with form and figure and imagine that through the knowledge of the earth as God’s own body, there is an intimate immediacy to the knowledge of that which is occurring to mountain, sea, and plain. Just as we are internally related to our bodies, says McFague, so God is internally related to all that *is*—the most radically relational Thou.⁶² This “Is-ness,” in the words of Meister Eckhart, is God.⁶³ If all that is created, all that is around us is God, the simple question

⁶⁰ Harwood, John T. “Theologizing the World: A Reflection on the Theology of Sallie McFague.” *Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 111-125.

⁶¹ Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, 70.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶³ Matthew Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart* (Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 1983), 12.

is, “Would we treat it any differently?” Would we continue to probe and plunder the earth of all its resources if, instead of cavities to be colonized, they were the very heart of God? McFague’s new model allows for a deeply imminent experience of God and God’s suffering. Through this model, insofar as God as Spirit is enfleshed within creation, then God suffers pain and loss whenever the biotic order is despoiled through human arrogance.

Gaia and Gardens-Impacts of an Anthropocentric Age

Patriarchal metaphors and language threaten the survival of the world. Every metaphor breaks down at a certain point, but what happens when I am lead to see the world as God’s Body? Will this metaphor break down just as we are beginning to see the cracks within patriarchal symbols and metaphors? The Gaia Theory becomes a helpful segue at this point, a scientific theory that suggests that Earth herself is alive, that she is actively coordinating the temperature of her atmosphere and the salinity of her oceans.⁶⁴ The earth is a living cell; it is God’s body in all of its forms: people, plants, animals, climate. This concept of the universal self is not a standard part of our theological lexicon; although other theologians and scientists would use it, it is helpful to hear McFague wrestle with this idea in her distinct voice:

Like Teilhard de Chardin, I have come to realize that I cannot love God or the world, but must love both at once. As I age, my eyes and ears have been opened, and I drink in the world and find God there as well. I feel more certain of that all the time: it is why the body metaphor makes sense to me—whether in beauty or suffering, it is the flesh of the world that sustains us physically and spiritually. That is, I believe, radical incarnationalism at the heart of the Christian witness:

⁶⁴ The theory, originally put forth by James Lovelock in the 1970’s, proposes that Earth is a vast self-regulating organism. Ecotheology would find resonance with this theory and support in the creation spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin, whose evolutionary insights providing a sweeping scope of cosmic vision for salvation history for all of creation. Teilhard’s thoughts would mesh well with the Gaia hypothesis, for he sees the planet Earth as a living organism, not only spatially, but across time. For more on the relevant connections between Teilhard, Gaia, and ecotheology see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 243.

the world as God's body and ours. God is found here, not somewhere else. ...Just as Weil, Woolman, and Day experienced God physically, through the body of the world, so do I.⁶⁵

In her book *Metaphorical Theology*, McFague sites Gordon Kaufman's 1982 presidential address to the American Academy of Religion. This statement supports that the Church has been operating from a harmful monarchical metaphor of God, which has conflated with the symbology of the human:

In view of the unprecedented possibility that we may well annihilate not just ourselves but life as such on our planet, the traditional symbols of the Judeo-Christian tradition may be not merely irrelevant but harmful. Consider the implications of dependence on an almighty, patriarchal God to save humanity and earth from nuclear disaster. The traditional imagery for God tends to support either militarism or escapism, but not the one thing needful—human responsibility for the fate of the earth.⁶⁶

Our Western religious traditions see the human as an exclusively gifted creature endowed with the skills to subdue all of creation and with a transcendent soul that manifests the divine image and likeness. The philosophical impact of this pervasive perspective has been to understand the soul as one that is only home when liberated from this material plane. While this reductionistic view seems to take in account the whole of evolutionary development—a creature of the soil elevated to the pinnacle mirror image of the cosmos—it gets stuck and fixated on the primacy of the human above all else.

Yale Senior Lecturer and Scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker says it this way, “Ironically, religions emphasizing the uniqueness of the human as the image of God meet market-driven applied science and technology precisely at this point of the special nature of the human to

⁶⁵ Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 185.

⁶⁶ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (New York: Fortress Press, 1982), x.

justify exploitation of the natural world.”⁶⁷ This human-centered hermeneutic, also known as anthropocentrism, has led to the dominance of humans in our modern era, now called the Anthropocene.⁶⁸ The cumulative impact of our traditional story has endorsed and emboldened a way of being where the planetary scale of human impact is unquestionable. Humans live out their storied existence in such a way that there is now decreased biodiversity, revised biogeochemical cycles and novel combinations of climatic and ecological conditions arise from the existence of people everywhere.⁶⁹ By elevating the uniqueness of the human, the rest of the created world becomes simply a surplus stage upon which we enact our enshrined ideals of progress. The great Chain of Being becomes a spectrum along which a doctrine of dominance allows the human to domineer and subdue any body deemed a resource.

By going back to the earth, back to the fine grained humus of our very backyards, we may uncover truths far deeper than those written in Genesis. We may find the word behind the word as it were; the truth behind the truth. We may find the essence of our interrelatedness. We need to recover an interpretation of the text that identifies more with the hovering Spirit brooding

⁶⁷ Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, “The Movement of Religion and Ecology: Emerging Field and Dynamic Force,” in *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, eds. Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm (New York: Routledge, 2017), 5.

⁶⁸ Rick Potts, the director of the Human Origins Program at the National Museum of Natural History says this about the Anthropocene: “What would it be like to have a different starting point in discussing this Age of Humans—one where we envision intended and purposeful consequences. What will it take to shape a world that is positive, meaningful, beneficial to life, in general, and to human welfare? I’ve come to see the Anthropocene, therefore, not as a debate about a new geological era but rather as a way of thinking—a way of thinking about our identity, and what it will mean to be human in the future.” Rick Potts, “Being Human in the Age of Humans.” *Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian* (Winter 2013): 27. Potts affirms the need to evolve our narratives that are no longer functioning well. He argues, “Critical to imagining life in the Anthropocene is the importance of narrative in continually reshaping ourselves. The ongoing revision of that narrative shows that we—and our altering tendencies—are embedded in a very dynamic natural world and fully interconnected with it. Revising the entwined human-and-nature narrative to reflect this point is, I believe, essential in how we will shape the future.” Potts, “Being Human in the Age of Humans,” 30.

⁶⁹ Rick Potts, “Being Human in the Age of Humans,” *Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian* (Winter 2013): 27-31.

over an emergent inter-communing creation than a theistic and transcendent King that places a ruling and subjugating scepter in the human hand. For when we work intimately *with* the universe and follow its rhythm we engage in the creative work of *dabhar*, not the disconnected damage that results from *bará*. Only if this occurs will the deep systematic changes that are needed to develop a new ecological vision be addressed and transformed. Instead of positioning ourselves over and against the natural world, we can align with and learn much from it.

Poet and womanist author Alice Walker gives us a starting place from the spiritual lessons she has learned through her struggle against racism, homophobia, and sexism about the earth. She has a memorable description of her late mother, a woman with modest means, working ecstatically in her garden:

I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible—except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe is the image of her personal conception of Beauty.⁷⁰

Whilst all backyard gardens are different in that they are in different zones and have varying soil ph's (a great metaphor for eco-womanist theology!), the common element is that we can all seek out liberating elements of our inherited gardens, our traditional stories, and once again “find it to be very good!”⁷¹ We need to move intentionally to a subject-subject relationship, which affirms the intrinsic value, integrity, and goodness of all of creation.⁷² This will naturally draw us into understanding our image of God anew in terms of relationality and imminence.

⁷⁰ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 241.

⁷¹ Looking at Creation in progress, “God saw that it was good” five times and “found it very good” after the sixth day (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

⁷² Sallie McFague, *Super Natural Christians*, 7-9.

Thomas Berry: A Sustaining Story Through Sacred Science

It's all a question of story, and how our stories tell us *where* we are, and through the *why* we are, *who* we are. We are in trouble now because the primary Christian cosmology is showing its cracks through the collapse of our ecosystems. The original story, our Genesis story—the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it—is not functioning properly. The derelict and destroyed biodiversity of nature affirms this, pleading with humanity to remember another story. The Genesis creation story sustained us for a long period of time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with a life purpose, energized action. It consecrated suffering, integrated knowledge, and guided education. We awoke in the morning and knew where we were.⁷³ But we now look around, and it is no longer familiar. Meadows and forests, even neighborhood empty lots filled with particular weeds from a particular place, are no longer there to connect us to memories and remind us of why it is important that we are present in this time. Our Hebrew Bible story tells us to look for the goodness that should be found in the natural places that were created before us, but they have rescinded into the disfigured forms of mountains without tops, endless acres of scavenged and felled forests, and the sick and slick black of oil upon what was once life-giving water. We *must* express a new story that will lead us toward the exclaimed goodness of the created world so that we may be oriented to experience both the particular places as well as the planetary whole as a primary referent, a lens by which we create our local and global policies, and procedures.

By merging the numinous meaning within our Genesis creation account with scientific, ecological accuracy, I do believe we have the elements of a paradigm-shifting story. The power

⁷³ Thomas Berry, "The New Story: Comments on the Origin, Identification and Transmission of Values," *Teilhard Studies* 1 (Winter 1978), 4.

of an integral story has the potential to provide meaningful understanding of our solar system and our place within the planets; it can weave the human role through the story based on the humanities; it can affirm the inherent worth of the other-than-human world regardless of their utility to human needs, and allows us to reflect on the story through our religious traditions. We need a coherent and sacred evolutionary story that draws together science and religion in an integrated manner. A new story is needed that allows the inherent music of creation to once again be heard. The work of reclaiming this resonate song will require us to look at the work of cultural historian and ecotheologian, Father Thomas Berry.

Thomas Berry (1914-2009) was a historian of world religions and an early voice awakening moral sensibilities to the environmental crisis. An original, creative, and comprehensive thinker, especially regarding the critical nature of our global environmental crisis, his intellectual importance resides in his response to the ecological crisis by bringing together the humanities and science in an evolutionary narrative. He is known for articulating a “new story” of the universe that explores the implications of the evolutionary sciences and cultural traditions for creating a flourishing future; “functional cosmologies” that would urge the participation of the world religions, especially Christianity, with addressing environmental issues. The essential thought of Thomas Berry continues the work of Teilhard de Chardin. The way into the future is through a new type of religious orientation that Berry calls the “third meditation,” i.e., the mutual interaction of humanity and the earth. Berry feels that the vitality of such religious re-orientation has been lacking due to an excessive emphasis particularly in Western religious thought on the

story of redemption to the neglect of the story of creation. Such an imbalance has severed the human connection to the natural world.⁷⁴

Berry's essays analyze humanity's destructive relationship with the earth.⁷⁵ At the heart of this cultural antagonism are religious traditions, particularly Jewish and Christian traditions, that espouse either a negative attitude toward the body and to natural life, or that keep the focus on humanity and humanity's relationship to the Divine.⁷⁶ This analysis supports my proposal that the stories of origin found in Genesis 1 and 2, and the understanding of the *imago Dei*, have perpetuated an anthropocentrism that has ultimately had devastating effects on our planet. The story of Genesis as it has been told around Sunday School classrooms the world over has rooted in our collective consciousness with such an invasive hold that the trumpeted perspective of human glory has all but drowned out the inherent and interrelated goodness of the rest of the cosmos and created world. With the booming base-notes of timpani and tubas, humanity has

⁷⁴ Emmanuel Sullivan, "Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 25, no. 2 (1988): 282.

⁷⁵ Norman Wirzba has critically evaluated Berry's work and finds him to be deeply inspiring. Berry's essays analyze humanity's destructive relationship with the earth; at the heart of this cultural antagonism are religious traditions, particularly Jewish and Christian traditions that espouse either a negative attitude toward the body and to natural life, or that keep the focus on humanity and humanity's relationship to the Divine. Norman Wirzba, "The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 3 (September 2011): 777. This analysis supports my thesis that the stories of origin found in Genesis 1 and 2, and the understanding of the *imago Dei*, have perpetuated an anthropocentrism that has ultimately had devastating effects on our planet. Berry sees the need for a comprehensive religious, scientific, and economic vision that will enable humanity to find this world and this universe as our abiding and lovable home. What we need, according to Berry is a "modern world responsive to the spiritual—and the spiritual traditions responsive to the modern world," Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia City Press, 2009), 15. Here is where Berry's Universe Story takes shape. We need to bring together our growing understanding of the cosmos through evolutionary science with the wisdom of our religious traditions. Contemporary science and technology need to be open to the world's great indigenous and world traditions, so that the qualities that make us genuinely human—spiritual fulfillment, the experiences of beauty, wonder, and awe, cultural creativity—are not lost in instrumental and mechanistic thinking. And similarly, religions need to be open to the insights of cosmology and evolutionary science. Wirzba, 778.

⁷⁶ Norman Wirzba "The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 3 (September 2011): 777.

dominated the cosmic choir, an imbalance resulting in cacophony and disharmony. We were meant to hear and participate in the soundscape of the soil, song-birds, and stars!

“Tell the story that comes out of science, but tell it with a feel for its music!” challenges Berry. He saw the need for a comprehensive religious, scientific, and economic vision that would enable humanity to find this world and this universe as our abiding and lovable home. What we need, according to Berry is a “modern world responsive to the spiritual—and the spiritual traditions responsive to the modern world.”⁷⁷ Here is where Berry’s Universe Story takes shape, and one that compliments McFague’s transformative metaphor of the earth as God’s Body. Berry infuses the matter of our planet with integral and numinous meaning, and extends this sense with a far-flung gesture of interrelatedness to the stars. Technology has provided science with incredible insight into our galactic past and ever-expanding present. This developmental consciousness and growing understanding of the cosmos through evolutionary science needs to be brought together with the wisdom of our religious traditions. Contemporary science and technology need to be open to the world’s great indigenous and world traditions, so that the qualities that make us genuinely human—spiritual fulfillment, the experiences of beauty, wonder, awe, and cultural creativity—are not lost in instrumental and mechanistic thinking. And similarly, religions need to be open to the insights of cosmology and evolutionary science.⁷⁸ We must be able to integrate what Berry and cosmologist Brian Swimme call the “great flaring forth” of the origin of our universe within our religious stories. Berry argues that if religions are to survive (and if human life is to flourish along with the more-than human life on this planet)

⁷⁷ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York:Columbia University Press, 2009), 15.

⁷⁸ Norman Wirzba “The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 3 (September 2011): 778.

and have enduring relevance, they must turn their hermeneutical attention to the “scriptures” written into the universe. Only then will we overcome the hubris that separate human life from, and make us destructive toward, our planetary home.⁷⁹ With a consecrated connection to the planetary, our particular places and people become meaningful encounters with the Divine.

Thomas Berry: Integrating the Universe Story

Swimme and world religions scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker have worked extensively with Thomas Berry and his ground breaking insights of the human relationship with the planet. The work has been recast as the *Journey of the Universe*. This new telling of Deep Time isn’t intended to supersede our traditional sacred stories, but rather bring into focus the challenge of creating a shared future through the stories that we choose to continue to tell. Together, Swimme and Tucker ask these crucial questions: “The great opportunity before us today is to tell this new universe story in a way that will serve to orient humans with respect to our pressing questions: Where did we come from? Why are we here? How should we live together? How can the Earth community flourish?”⁸⁰ Swimme and Tucker present a sacred evolutionary cosmology that resonates with trinitarian relational theology and gives scientific credence to inter-animating patterns of relationship, “Before words, before brains, and before consciousness, there was the deep desire to exist, and the eventual discovery that it is only through relationship that we survive.”⁸¹ The pattern of interrelationship is what holds together the Christian Godhead, as well as terrestrial formation.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁰ Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 54.

⁸¹ Ibid., 54.

It is in this rhythm of relationship that God's design for poly-species intercommunion is seen. Autopoesis, the desire and drive toward interconnected life, was at the heart of creation from the very start. Swimme affirms that this billion year old interrelatedness, from the formation of planets to plants to people, is what brought forth humanity's unique symbolic consciousness. As humans began to journey through Earth's worlds, the particular preoccupation to make symbols gave birth to concepts and understandings of the Divine. Symbolic consciousness ceased control of life, and developed a world view that saw nature as a resource, a resource to be plundered and dominated. Humanity had begun to determine evolutionary processes; indeed, humans had become as powerful as the planet itself. In this evolutionary process, time and culture had folded back upon itself, complexifying planetary relationships and cosmic ones as well.⁸² What if we are the heart and consciousness of the universe? What if, through the Universe Story and sacred evolutionary cosmology, we discover that indeed we are the *imago Dei*, the cosmic consciousness, but only in the interrelatedness we have with all planetary life?

The Universe Story is a creation story for our time as it answers the traditional creation stories' questions: where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? This story attests to the unfolding nature of the universe. Creation *isn't* complete. It is in an ongoing dynamic state. The cosmology of Genesis has emphatically stated that creation was finished and complete with the creation of humanity. This story of crowned glory didn't account for the billions years of life-making processes that preexisted the human, making conditions perfectly right for their emergence; nor does it account for the continuing emergence of life that is ongoing

⁸² Ibid., 94-101.

today. It also doesn't account for the predatory impact humans have on the planet through the "blessing" of dominion. Our cosmology, the story of our human emergence, cannot be told without telling and knowing the Universe Story.

We must reinvigorate a conversation between cosmology, ecology, and Christianity. This will give birth to a new spiritual awakening that could quite literally bring heaven on earth, proclaiming that our home has been here all along. This can awaken us to the world that has been singing and has been reverberating with song for millions of years. We need to be able to hear, and join in the communion of the canticle of creation again so that we may tell a story of our journey that, in the words of Thomas Berry, will produce an "awe that invokes action; an ethic for the Common Good; and a Reverence towards responsibility."⁸³

Part 4. The Storied Role of Humanity: A Renewed Understanding of the *imago Dei*

A Trinitarian Model of the *imago Dei*

The way we have told our primary story of origin within the Book of Genesis has

⁸³ Thomas Berry, "Part 4-The Universe and Religion," Yale University video, 10:00, posted by Coursera, <https://www.coursera.org/learn/thomas-berry/lecture/K9RSP/part-4-the-universe-and-religion-by-thomas-berry>.

elevated humanity as the very image of God.⁸⁴ And how we imagine God to be, naturally, has recourse in how we mirror back that understanding as we have seen through McFague's monarchical model and its devastating impacts on how Western Christianity has presented people on earth. The current global situation of ecocidal ruination is incongruent with a Genesis narrative that affirms humanity as image bearers of the Divine in a life-enhancing role.⁸⁵ To live forward in a regenerative way will require more of us than simply taking on more green-lifestyle choices. It will require changing our stories. Lynn White, Jr. says it this way: "What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one."⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Mark Wallace, along with other ecotheologians, lay claim that an androcentric *imago Dei* is a social construction with ecocidal results. Wallace argues that the earth crisis is a religious problem "in the sense that the promulgation of particular theological teachings has led to the ravaging of earth communities, for example, the idea in the Genesis creation story that God, a heavenly being far removed from our planet, created human beings as God's viceregents to exercise 'dominion' over the earth. If God has given the earth to us as our private possession, then why not do with it what we want?" idem, "The Green Face of God: Christianity in an Age of Ecocide," *Cross Currents* (Fall 2000): 313. Lynn White, Jr.'s famous essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," also argues that the singular Christian claim of man being created in the image of God laid the foundation for Western Christianity to become the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen. This anthropocentric posture is what has resulted in the cataclysmic attitudes of "humanity being superior to nature, contemptuous of it, and willing to use it for our slightest whim." Idem, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* Volume 155, number 3767 (March 1967), 1204. Rosemary Radford Ruether also notably makes the connections between humanity as the collective bearer of God's "image," and Adam as the representation of divine rule on earth over the other animals of land, sky, and water. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 20.

⁸⁵ Lynn White, Jr. makes this argument about the connection between the treatment of the natural world and Christianity's assertion that humans alone are uniquely the image bearers of God: What did Christianity tell people about their relations with the environment? Christianity inherited from Judaism not only a concept of time as non repetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation. By gradual stages a loving and all-powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule; no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image." Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," 1205.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 1205.

In Genesis 1:24-27 God proclaims to make humanity in God's image and likeness; that they may rule over creation, increase in population, and subdue the earth. In a few verses, humanity becomes the viceroy for God, quickly climbing up the ladder of the Chain of Being, to receive the ultimate crown of creation. We have crowned the traditional God in our own image, "human, all too human," and in our anthropocentric approach to God, instead of emerging as a part of the *Imago Dei*, humanity has turned God into the *Imago Andro*, the *Image of Man*.⁸⁷ Richard Rohr argues that, "You become the God you worship. In other words, your image of God creates you. If you get the image of God wrong, everything else that builds on it is going to be inadequate."⁸⁸ The Genesis story, while giving us wonderful insight into God's character, has been predominantly told of a Christian God that is a powerful white-skinned monarch. How has this story impacted how we are presented on this planet? The image of humanity as God's proxy has had significant influence on our perceptions about and behaviors with the natural world. As I have noted in this project, the Genesis claim that in our God-likeness we have superiority and authority over a secular natural world has caused environmental devastation. If we step back from our intimate and long-held reading of this story, we can imagine how this way of understanding humanity's role within the natural world has done more damage than good.⁸⁹ Has

⁸⁷ Coyd Walker, "The Body of God (Book)," *Journal of Religion and Psychological Research* 18, no. 3 (July 1995): 176-177.

⁸⁸ Richard Rohr, "Trinity: A Circle Dance," *Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations*, February 27, 2017, <http://cac.org/richard-rohr/daily-messages>.

⁸⁹ Andrea Smith makes the connection between patriarchy's disregard for nature, women, and indigenous peoples. The colonial/patriarchal mind that seeks to control the sexuality of women and indigenous peoples also seeks to control nature. Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 55. This is symptomatic of an anthropocentric image of God. A patriarchal/monarchical model of God allows for humans to dominate and exploit woman and the natural world (Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "The Movement of Religion and Ecology: Emerging Field and Dynamic Force," in *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm (New York: Routledge, 2017), 5).

this crowning actually severed the song in which we were meant participate?⁹⁰ A new ecological ethic is needed to recover this song, and to participate in Genesis' idea of a "crowing glory." A creation based theology, which balances the role of humanity with the rest of creation, is needed to fully live into our *shared* role as the *imago Dei*, an inter-animating role that echoes the perichoretic circle dance of God's character: relationship and communion. For how we view the world and the bodies in the world is fundamentally connected to how we treat the world and the bodies in the world. This is the ethic toward which we must move, and we cannot do that without first changing our understanding of humanity's role in our creation story. This inter-relationship between humankind and the natural world will create a desperately needed inclusive, non-instrumental ecological ethic. We cannot bear God's image apart from the earth, as mutually constitutive and interconnected to each other.

I am suggesting that the *imago Dei* is an interrelated identity that is formed through the communion of the human, more-than-human world, and the divine creative energy of the cosmos. When humanity broke from this interconnected relationship, when we created a story that cast humanity alone as the image bearers of God, apart from the trees, salmon, and mountains, we began to *bará* (Hebrew for create *and* cut) an attempt at the Divine Image

⁹⁰ Descartes famously referred to the squealing of butchered pigs as the sounds of a machine being miscalibrated. This response is indicative of the invasive mechanistic thought of the Enlightenment and Industrial Age. The longstanding posture of dominance over the planet's living systems, depended on reducing any mystery of and membership within the biotic earth community. The industrialization of the planet has had devastating consequences to biophonic silencing. Zoologist and philosopher Neil Evernden tells the well-known story of how in the 19th century, many vivisectionists would routinely sever the vocal cords of animals before commencing operation. This meant that during the experimental procedure, animals would not scream. Author Derrick Jenson reflects on this, "By cutting the vocal cords experimenters simultaneously denied reality—by pretending a silent animal feels no pain—and they affirmed it by implicitly acknowledging that the animal's cries would have told them what they already knew, that the creature was a sentient, feeling (and, during the vivisection, tortured) being." Derrick Jenson, *A Language Older Than Words* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2000), 15. Our "crown of creation" has been misappropriated and been used to separate humanity from the more-than-human-world so that could view the natural world as a resource from which we are entitled to extract.

interpreted as above and other-from the rest of creation, a human attempt at embodying the *dabhar* (Hebrew for the word that is divine creative energy).⁹¹ Willis J. Beecher believes that this action of *bará* is derived from a sense of “to create as God.”⁹² He further goes on to say about the Piel of *bará*:

ברא expresses divine origination. The creation of the heavens and the earth is the instance of divine origination which has mainly attracted the attention of mankind. In our thoughts of creation two conceptions are especially prominent, namely, the reducing of chaos to order, and the construction of the world and its contents. Evidently, a derivative from the verb which expresses these ideas might appropriately describe men as reducing confused elements to order, or as constructing plans or objects.⁹³

There is an obvious difference here between the *debhar* of God and the *bará* humanity. When God creates, it is out of *ex nihilo*—it is out of nothing and is life-giving. Humanity’s capabilities are limited, and when employed, oft requires that something, either life or form, must be sacrificed for an act of creation to occur. Great harm is done when humanity attempts to create as the sole *image Dei* apart from the Primary Source; harm that is ultimately done to creation. For it appears that for man to *create* independent of God, he first must *cut*.

This resulted in a cutting and conquering of creation, instead of participating in Divine community. Human history calls us to witness nothing less than the total destruction of the

⁹¹ The discussion of *imago Dei* is necessary to eco-justice theology and is helped along by Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986). Hall states, “Humanity, as master of history, fashioning a world in accord with human design, has seen this kind of creating as the unspoken human vocation” (Hall, *Imaging God*, 51). There is excellent cross-referencing to support this specifically with the anthropocentric attempt at “creating” (HBR *bara*) in Joshua 7:8. When we try to image ourselves after God *apart from God, the other and extra-human life* we can only cut, maim, and kill. The gross deforestation that occurred in the Book of Joshua, as noted in a previous footnote on page 18, is evidence of an anthropocentric, monotheistically superior land ethic that allowed the Hebrew people to cut down trees and other cultures to dominate the land. In a word: divinely sanctioned colonization enacted by human viceroys, or *Image Bearers of God*.

⁹² Willis Judson Beecher, “Br’ in Josh. xvii. 15, 18, and Ezek. xxi. 24, xxiii. 47,” *Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, Including the Papers Read and Abstract of Proceedings for 2* (June 1882), 131.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 131.

planet Earth and all its living systems in consequence of this strange distortion of the human role within the ecology of Earth, which has emerged from within our modern, industrial Western world, which was itself born out of the biblical-classical matrix.⁹⁴ Separation and distinction are not the end-game of human's perceived crown of glory. Difference is the primacy of the universe, and is how the divine images itself in that differentiation always moves toward the inevitability of communion.⁹⁵ Ultimately, unity with all things is the *imago Dei*. We cannot circumscribe God around our own finitude and human-centered particularity. We cannot know the fullness of God, but we can imagine that the fullness of God exists beyond our human species to include the billions of years of creation and life that preceded humanity's emergence. How then can we deconstruct the anthropocentric understanding of what it means to be created in God's image from Genesis 1:27? I believe strongly in a biophilic response, and one that requires an interrelatedness that naturally flows out of MacFague's Earth as God's Body model and Berry's Universe Story. It would mean that precisely as the creatures we are, situated in a threefold relatedness to God, other human creatures, and extra-human ones, we would then be turned rightly toward God. In this inclusive stance we would image, or mirror, God's way in our own way.⁹⁶ Moreover, explains Larry Rasmussen, reading the Genesis account ecologically reveals that, like the human earth creatures, God's command to be fruitful and to multiply

⁹⁴ Thomas Berry, *Selected Writings*, 137.

⁹⁵ Richard Rohr thoroughly explores the idea of how the very nature of God is to create, and be, difference. The work of the creative energy of God is always to create and then to fully allow otherness; creating many forms and endless diversity, and fully inhabiting them. Rohr states, "In the beginning, was relationship!" Rohr bases much of his Trinitarian creation theology on the work of Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, who is quoted as saying, "Creation exists in order to welcome the Trinity into itself. The Trinity seeks to welcome creation within itself." Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 116.

⁹⁶ Larry L. Rasmussen, "Returning to Our Senses," in *After Nature's Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 45.

extends to the fish and the birds (1:22), and the command to govern is given to the sun and moon as well (1:18). Furthermore, the “crown of creation” is not so much Adam (the collective noun for human earth creatures) as it is the sabbath itself. With sabbath, not with the human, creation is complete.⁹⁷ And considering what we know from the Universe Story, we are still in the process of cosmic regeneration and creation. We are still moving towards a fulfillment of this on-going creation process!

If the cosmological evolutionary process, which creates the expanding host of galaxies, including the particularities of our home planet Earth, can be seen as holy we can view autopoiesis as evidence of the Divine Creator’s breath of life, which breathes the cosmos into existence and enfleshes itself in the creation. The stars are no longer the realm of science, they are home to the sacred, and the Source of all life. And so too, if we use McFague’s Earth as God’s Body model to understanding the nature of an interpenetrated material world, not only is there a hovering Holy Spirit, an insurgent, natural force throughout the biotic order, but the actual stuff of the natural world *is* sacred. This panentheistic understanding of the natural world provides for a biocentric role of the Spirit of God that is the breath of life within all of creation, including nonhuman as well as human creation. Mark Wallace maintains that the embodiment of the divine life in Jesus, the cosmological Christ, toward whom humanity finds its complete resolution, is the perichoretic union of a nature-centered model of the Godhead.⁹⁸ In

⁹⁷ Eco-Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff would term the sabbath as the “omega point,” the unknown end to which the universe continues to expand. He also expounds on this theory of the on-going, dynamic cosmic process placing a Christian cosmology within the realm of the sixth day. In this category of thought, cosmogenesis accompanies the evolution of matter. Humans are the product of the initial great explosion and inflation, and have participated in the emergence of life and the formation of consciousness. More complex forms of life and higher levels of unity and interiority are achieved in this great arrow of time. Therefore, it is inaccurate to say that the human is the fulfillment of sacred evolution as we are still embedded in a process of open systems, expansion and dynamic creating. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 44, 180-183.

⁹⁸ Wallace, “The Green Face of God,” 318.

perichoresis, God as Trinity subsists in interpersonal unity through incarnating itself in all things, from the cell within the soil, to the stars!

Building off of the rich work of Sallie McFague and her critique of the long told story of a monarchical God, and folding in her willingness to play with new metaphors for an imminent, biotic-embodied, earth-centered model of God, along with Thomas Berry's Universe Story afforded to us in a sacred evolutionary cosmology, we are invited to look again at our Genesis account and see how we might renew our understanding of what being an Image Bearer of God might mean from an integral reading of the text. I propose a new model of the *imago Dei* that involves understanding the Image of God to be a threefold interrelatedness between the human, the other-than-human world, and the Cosmos/Divine.⁹⁹

A trinitarian theology creates the framework for this suggestion that the intended *imago Dei* is to be found in the interpersonal unity of the personhood of the human, other-than-human world, and the cosmos. In this model of the *imago Dei* all three entities are somewhat akin to a "hypostases," three essences of the image of God that together fulfill, or complete, a holistic mirroring of the Divine. While each aspect, or personhood, is distinct and differentiated, their inter-communion creates the fullness of God. They each have the *is-ness* of God and mutually

⁹⁹ The power of symbols to transform conscious awareness is known to every religion. Some psychologies, such as Jung's analytical psychology, have investigated how this transformation process works. Ecofeminism must not ignore the significance of symbols and how they function. Indeed, some ecofeminists have recognized this. Rosemary Radford Ruether asserts the importance of symbols for the transformation of sexism, and in light of this project, the transformation of anthropocentrism as well: "One need not only to engage in rational theoretical discourse about this journey; one also needs deep symbols and symbolic actions to guide and interpret the actual experience of the journey from sexism to liberated humanity." Radford Ruether as quoted in Teal L. Willoughby, "Ecofeminist Consciousness and the Transforming Power of Symbols," in *EcoFeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1994), 133-148.

The insights of Jungian psychology enable us to understand and critique the use of symbols by ecofeminists, and the need for new ones. I would add that this expresses the critical need for McFague's models of God, the Gaia Hypothesis, and Berry's Universe Story. We desperately need to liberate the greater community of life within our planet for the sake of a flourishing future for all.

indwell one another. John Donne would call this inter-animation: the mutual animation of distinct entities.¹⁰⁰ The *imago Dei* comes to life within the inter-animation of the human, the more-than-human world, and the Cosmos.¹⁰¹ This renewed model of the *imago Dei* also fits within Berry's theories of sacred evolutionary cosmology. In the sense that the universe is filled with diversity and difference, we can attest to Thomas Aquinas' assertion that "difference" is the "perfection of the universe." Berry expounds on that by stating, "The reason [for this difference] is that the divine could not imagine itself in any single being, so the divine brought into being an immense variety of beings."¹⁰² Within the great diversity of creation, God is imaged.

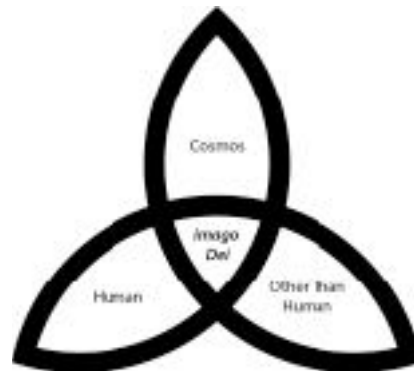


figure #1

¹⁰⁰ John Donne, "The Ecstasy," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed. Vol. 1. ed. M. H. Abrams (New York, London: Norton. 2 vols. 1993), 1095.

¹⁰¹ At this point, much work could be done around the social economy of the Trinity, hypostases, and the perichoresis. While that represents volumes of writing in its own accord, I would note that the perichoretic relationship of the three persons of the triune God (Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit) certainly is the framework within which I make this co-indwelling claim for the three-fold relatedness of the *imago Dei*. I take Boff's claims that the universe is trinitarian and apply his same rationale to the human. He argues, "By the joining of the three Persons in creating (perichoresis), everything comes interwoven with relationships, interdependencies, and webs of intercommunion. The cosmos is shown to be an interplay of relationships, because it is created in the likeness and image of the God-Trinity." Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 167. If humanity is also created in the likeness of the God-Trinity, then so too must our life be embedded in an interplay of interrelationality. Radford Ruether traces the line of Christian tradition that has ignored a holistic vision of a cosmological Christ that has had dire consequences on the tightly held anthropocentric understanding of God. Radford Ruether engages the work of Teilhard de Chardin and Matthew Fox to claim that Christ is the immanent Wisdom of God present in the whole cosmos as its principle of interconnected and abundant life. There is great opportunity here to cross-reference the Leonardo Boff and Bill Plotkin's eco-centric human development that requires an interconnectedness with the natural world. Teilhard's thought would mesh well with the Gaia hypothesis, for he sees the planet earth as a living organism. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 243.

¹⁰² Thomas Berry, *Selected Writings on the Earth Community*, 24.

The ecological view of the cosmos emphasizes God's immanence. God is in all and all is in God. Celtic Christian spirituality is a tradition that embraces this panentheistic understanding of God within creation. This creation-centered tradition developed in ways that affirmed the goodness of both the natural and the human world. Celtic scholar Ian Bradley argues, "To fulfill the Christian calling and walk humbly is to keep ever in mind the close ties that bind us to earth."¹⁰³ Bradley continues affirming that the Celtic tradition provides a model of relationship with the natural world that is interrelated. Quite foreign to them was the notion of domination, which has crept into the consciousness of the Western Christian mind as a result of a quite erroneous interpretation of God's commission to humankind in Genesis 1:28. Their conviction of communion with all of creation sprang from an inherent knowledge that the natural world is charged with divine presence just as much as the human.¹⁰⁴

Taking inspiration from this tradition and its use of artistic knot work that expresses the inter-communion of all of life, I believe that the Celtic Trinity knot perfectly expresses the new model of the *imago Dei* that I propose (see fig. #1). In this figure, the inter-animating aspects of the personhood of the human, other-than-human, and the cosmos is revealed. This is an invitation to explore what it means to be human in an expansive cosmos where all creatures have intrinsic value and are inescapably related. Kathleen Fischer articulates this as "implying an anthropology that embraces every living being (*biocentric*) and the entire cosmos (cosmocentric)."¹⁰⁵ The biocentric work of McFague's earth as God's body model and the

¹⁰³ Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2003), 58.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰⁵ Kathleen R. Fischer, "Christian Spirituality In a Time of Ecological Awareness," *Theology Today* 67, no. 2 (July 2010): 170.

cosmocentric work of Thomas Berry's Universe Story provide the particular and the imminent, and the planetary and transcendent together in a sacramentality needed to make this sacred knot-work as a new model for the *imago Dei*. Within the Trinitarian patterning of this figure, I suggest that we are only bearing the image of the Divine when we are in right, mutually-enhancing and affirming relationship within these three entities. Acting like a sacred Venn Diagram, when the inherent value and worth of these three entities, or personhoods, are in proper, over-lapping relationship, then the image of God is made manifest. This means that when these three aspects of the image of God are not inter-relating in a mutually-enhancing act of biotic relationship, humanity is outside of the *imago Dei*.¹⁰⁶ This image captures cosmological aspects of the Genesis creation story. However, instead of positioning humanity as the superior end result of Deep Time to take dominion over all of creation, this visual offers another, more life-enhancing way of being in communion with the story of creation.

An Eco-Centric *imago Dei*: Unity Within Diversity

An ecological, evolutionary read of the Genesis creation story not only accounts for the incredible interrelatedness of the profound diversity of life, but offers that within this very

¹⁰⁶ I agree with Mark Wallace on a significant point of difference with theologians Jürgen Moltmann and James Nash. Moltmann's masterful *God in Creation* belies an anthropocentrism that weakens his ecological doctrine of creation. Moltmann argues that human beings are the "apex of created things" because they alone are God's image-bearers, God's proxy," who mediate God's will and glory over the rest of creation (Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985], 187-190). James Nash makes a comparable appeal to the *imago Dei* tradition and its anachronistic legitimation of human beings as God's unique proxy and representative to other kinds of life forms. Nash takes issue with biotic equality (James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1991], 149). With Wallace I affirm that, "on biblical and ecological grounds, Moltmann's and Nash's value hierarchy is untenable," as history has proven that humans alone are not uniquely equipped to protect the natural order; in fact, humanity has shown the opposite to be true: that we alone are equipped to wreak devastation on the biotic balance of life on Planet Earth (Wallace, *The Wild Bird Who Heals*, 24).

complexity is unity. In the beginning, everything was one. Sallie McFague, provides fantastic insight into how we hold the diversity of life within the singular perspective of unity:

How should we, using the common creation story as our resource, speak of the unity that connects this amazing array of a diverse, complex, intricate universe of individuals? The unity is ecological, and, as such, it is very different than the oneness of the beginning... It is an organic unity inasmuch as we now know that everything that is related to everything else internally from the beginning.¹⁰⁷

The health and well-being of the planet as a whole, which includes humanity as a part of its ecology, is the *meant-for-ness*, the intention of the cosmic impulse that flared forth and brought forth life! The shape of God *is* diversity, and in a familiar, theological word that would be relationship. Therefore the Image of God is not to be conceived of as an isolated, independent role. Humanity is not THE *imago Dei*; rather, we are a part of it. Based on this idea of unity within diversity, the *imago Dei* is a trinitarian relatedness between the cosmos, humanity, and the other-than-human world.

Consider this proposed model from the perspective of social ecology. A “social ecology” defines the human/nature relationship in such a profoundly integral way that justice and liberation for the one are intrinsically bound up with justice and liberation for the other.¹⁰⁸ A model of the *imago Dei* that recognizes this deep and abiding unity topples the destructive Chain

¹⁰⁷ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 55.

¹⁰⁸ Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How Should We Love Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), 13. Inasmuch as justice is seen as a necessary characteristic of God, if we are to be Image Bearers of this God, then we too must be advocates of justice. Justice and liberation are the strands within our human/natural world cords that bind us all together.

of Being and honors the inherent dignity of creation as well.¹⁰⁹ An integral ecological reading of Genesis dismantles the notion that humanity alone undertakes the image bearing role of Creator and Dominator; instead, we see that all activity, all *being*, involves a three-fold aspect: human, spiritual, and natural.¹¹⁰ Writer and environmental activist Terry Tempest Williams speaks of this marginalized understanding of the Holy with a deep understanding that the biophany of our planet is the voice of God, expressing God's self through the beauty and ecology of the natural world: “The world is holy. We are holy. All life is holy. Daily prayers are delivered on the lips of breaking waves, the whispering of grasses, the shimmering leaves.”¹¹¹ Psalm 19:1-9 also maintains this sacred imminence of the natural world as well:

God’s glory is on tour in the skies,
God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.
Madame Day holds classes every morning,
Professor Night lectures each evening.
Their words aren’t heard,
their voices aren’t recorded,
But their silence fills the earth:
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.
God makes a huge dome
for the sun—a superdome!
The morning sun’s a new husband
leaping from his honeymoon bed,
The daybreaking sun an athlete
racing to the tape.
That’s how God’s Word vaults across the skies
from sunrise to sunset,

¹⁰⁹ The health of the planet depends not on the quantity and vitality of human beings (or on any of the other so-called higher mammals), but on the quantity and health of plants. The hierarchy of value and importance is reversed: we cannot live a day without the plants, but they would prosper indefinitely without us; in fact, given the rate of the desertification and deforestation due to human actions, plant life would improve with our demise. Paraphrased from McFague, *Body of God*, 59.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Berry, *Selected Writings on the Earth Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 86.

¹¹¹ Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 45.

Melting ice, scorching deserts,
warming hearts to faith.
The revelation of God is whole
and pulls our lives together.¹¹²

A healthy natural world not only embodies the Divine, but it provides the basics of life for all of life. God's glory is made manifest in the mountains, and God's creative compassion is seen in the seeds that grow into nourishing sustenance. Our well-being is tied up into the well-being of the earth. We will be well to the extent that we honor the world as God's body, which calls a person to transform one's anthropocentric beliefs and actions. When the world is experienced as holy, as truly the Body of God, it calls for being seen and cared for in its entirety.¹¹³

To uphold an inter-relational concept of what it means to be an Image Bearer of God would mean that we would perceive all things to be a part of God, all places to be a part of God, and all people to be apart of God. Division and divisiveness would cease. We could no longer be deified in our humanity; the only way that we could reflect back the image of the Divine would be to do so together. But this requires a paradigm shift for how we understand space and place. These are not simply stages upon which the primacy of human drama unfolds; rather, space and place needs to be understood in relation to the earth as the body of God—a web of interrelated and interconnected subjects and living beings which constitute the earth with its

¹¹² Psalm 19:1-9 (The Message)

¹¹³ *Pantheism* (Greek: *pan*=all; *en*=in; *theós*=God); that is, God in all and all in God. It holds that the world is a necessary mode of God's existing. From Divine immanence and transcendence emerges an intermediate category, transparency, which is precisely the presence of transcendence within immanence (Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 153). Cf. G.M. Teutsch, *lexikon der Umweltethik* (Göttingen/Düsseldorf: Vandenhoeck-Ruprecht/Patmos, 1985), 32-82; J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985); J.B. McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995) 97-112.

various ecosystems.¹¹⁴ This allows us to see, and live into the resulting paradigm shift, one where the body of God is a communion of subjects, not a mere reflection within the human form.¹¹⁵ This is a cosmology for our times and one that is expressed in an ecologic interplay of relationships. Boff sums this up perfectly with his argument that, “If God is communion and relationship, then the entire universe live in relationship, and all is in communion with all at all points and all moments.”¹¹⁶ The Trinity becomes the common sphere of existence and the model upon which all being and entities relate.

A three-fold, interrelated Image of God model provides the starting place for a much needed Christian ethical position on biodiversity and its inherent value.¹¹⁷ In early 2017, the Whanganui River in New Zealand and the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in India were granted the same status as a person. These bodies of land and water now have their own legal, living identity, “with all the corresponding right, duties and liabilities of a legal person.”¹¹⁸ To pollute

¹¹⁴ Annalet van Schalkwyk, “Space, Place and Ecology: Doing Ecofeminist Urban Theology in Gauteng,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 70, no. 3 (September 2014), 1.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Berry repeatedly observed, “the world is a communion of a subjects, not a collection of objects.” This primacy of the universe speaks to the unity of a single community. This wisdom intersects beautifully with McFague’s Earth as God’s Body model inasmuch as the same kind of infused unity and meant-for-ness is attributed to the ecological system of the Earth. This is panentheistic is theory and form, and provides the desperately needed meaning making for our planet that the Western world needs to live forward in significantly different ways from the extractive, nationalistic modes of which we are currently living under.

¹¹⁶ Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 156.

¹¹⁷ Environmental ethicist and ecotheologian Larry Rasmussen believes the *imago Dei* means that humanity is situated in a threefold relatedness to God, other human creatures, and extra-human ones. In this situatedness we would image, or mirror, God’s way in our own way. He further says that the *imago Dei* might be thought of in moral terms, that is, imaging God is acting in a godly way toward one another and other creatures. Imaging God is loving the earth as fiercely as God does. If we learn to re-read the Bible ecologically, we will find the interrelated threads that reveal themselves. Rasmussen would see the “crown of creation” as creation being complete, not simply complete with *Adam*. Larry Rasmussen, “Returning to Our Senses: The Theology of the Cross as a Theology for Eco-Justice,” in *After Nature’s Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology*, ed. by Dieter T. Hesel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 40-56.

¹¹⁸ Philip J. Victor, “This River Has the Same Legal Status as a Person,” *CNN*, March 16, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/15/asia/river-personhood-trnd/>.

or damage these rivers will be legally equivalent to harming a person. No longer constrained as a resource humanity could exploit, re-source, or manage, this move recognizes the sacred design of mutuality between planetary systems and people. In this revolutionary judicial law, these bodies of water have been given personhood. They are no longer simply a resource to be subdued, used, and dominated for the sake of humanity. They have inherent value simply for their *being*. This idea of the personhood of planetary features isn't entirely new. In 1972 legal scholar Christopher D. Stone argued in his famous essay, "Should Trees Have Standing?", that rivers and trees and other "objects" of nature do have rights, and these should be protected by granting legal standing to guardians of these voiceless entities of nature, much as the rights of children are protected by legal guardians designated for this purpose.¹¹⁹ Stone's argument struck a chord with U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. That same year, Justice Douglas wrote a dissent in the case of *Sierra Club v. Morton*, in which he argued for the conferral of standing upon natural entities so that legitimate legal claims could be made for their preservation. The river, Douglas wrote, "is the living symbol of all the life it sustains or nourishes—the fish, aquatic insects, water ousels, otter, fisher, deer, elk, bear, and all other animals, including man, who are dependent on it or who enjoy it for its sight, its sound, or its life. The river as plaintiff speaks for the ecological unit of life that is part of it."¹²⁰

The earth is beginning to have a voice through this acknowledged personhood that will demand its inherent right to liberated life. This is the voice of the poor, the voice of the oppressed, the voice of the absent. The earth's voice can now be included in the critical formula

¹¹⁹ Christopher D. Stone, *Should Trees Have Standing: Law, Morality, and the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹²⁰ William O. Douglas, *Nature's Justice* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2000), 293.

in how to serve the poor that has been advocated for by liberation theologians: “the preferential treatment of the poor.”¹²¹ This does not mean that we have the option to be committed to the poor; rather, this expressed primacy of the poor in Scripture is rooted in the unmerited love of God. This is the kind of renewed theology of creation that Teilhard imagined, and one that responds adequately to the anthropocentrism in Christianity, together with biblically rooted commitment to justice for the poor and vulnerable ones. To an extent, the ecological crisis, and in particular, the climate change crisis within it, have given rise to this earth-centered spirituality that sees all created things—rivers, forests, oceans, and all the creatures therein—charged with what Gerard Manley Hopkins called, “the grandeur of God.”¹²² Again, consider the words of Thomas Aquinas, who asks in *Summa Theologiae* whether the vast variety of life is the work of God. He answers that it must be, because God’s “goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone” and therefore “the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.”¹²³ Inherent in this claim is a theological affirmation of creation’s diversity, implying a value for that diversity over any single species, even our own.

This value is paramount to the perspective of a trinitarian-interrelatedness of the *imago Dei*. And if we were to extend the crown of glory to include all of creation, as well as the cosmos, we would have an integral embodiment of the Divine. Our ecological embodiment

¹²¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xxvi.

¹²² Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur (1877),” *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 1918.

¹²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, quoted in Kevin J. O’Brien, “Toward an Ethics of Biodiversity: Science and Theology in Environmentalist Dialogue” in *EcoSpirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, ed. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 180.

would reflect back the Divine; we would bear the image of the Creator with creation through our intercommunion. This would mean that to image God is to love the earth, and all its life-forms, as fiercely as God does. It would be this kind of fierce love that would thwart the relentless attacks on our wildlife refuges, critical habitats, and use of public lands for mining and drilling. Every encounter with another human being, with the other-than-human-world, and with the awe and wonder experienced when gazing at the stars would not only be an encounter with the Divine, it would be a full expression—and embodiment—of the *imago Dei*. I am fully convinced that without this three-fold relatedness within the *imago Dei*, humanity will continue to wreak havoc on our world with our false sense of Divine-import. A move towards a recovered sense of our selves in the greater context of our interrelatedness would fundamentally transform how we understand an ethic of land and the natural world; in a word: our home.¹²⁴

It is time for the fundamental story that feeds our concept of our self to emerge and evolve, or even *return to*, and rediscover the elemental truths and insights that sacred

¹²⁴ George H. Kehm understands an ethical ecology to be that which sees people, animals, crops and land as interrelated in a living whole whose wellbeing depends on honoring the Creator's will for each to exist and to have its rightful place in the whole. It is an ecology in which flourishing life is contingent upon doing justice, and ecological decline was a consequence of injustice—contempt for the Creator shown by violating what was right for God's creatures. George H. Kehm, "The New Story: Redemption as Fulfillment of Creation," in *After Nature's Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 95. This ethic must be cross referenced with *The Land* (Brueggeman, Walter. *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002). Brueggeman offers critical Hebrew cultural and societal understanding of a covenantal land ethic which understand a fundamental problematic detachment from the inherent value of land apart from anthropocentric use, and would see land as lifeless chaos awaiting the hand of man to tame and domesticate it. "We abuse land because we see it as a community belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." Aldo Leopold, 1966.

evolutionary cosmology provides.¹²⁵ The Unity that preexisted Deep Time flared forth into a vast diversity of life. God's self created the elements, that created the stars, that created the foundational building blocks of life on Planet Earth. The particles that exist in the stars, exist in the soil and the cells of all creation. Only together with the whole created order are we the *imago Dei*. Only when we can fully embrace this interrelatedness and integrity of creation will the crown of glory be worthy of resting upon our collective heads.

Re-Mythologizing: Finding Home Through a Lily Field

We are *where* we are. Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker remind us that throughout human history, when people have come into a new geographic location, they have symbolically become that place. For example, people who have followed the reindeer become "reindeer people." States Swimme and Tucker, "They walked the same pathways as the reindeer. They ate some of the same foods. At night, through their feasts and their dancing, they celebrated the thrill of being reindeer people."¹²⁶ The reindeer and their habitat became for the people a primary referent. The place became so integral to the community that it became imbedded in

¹²⁵ There is an urgent need today for a theology that includes the whole of creation in redemption. Only such a theology can correct the constriction of the Christian message that has been allowed to go on virtually unchallenged within the churches until recent times. The constriction is anthropocentrism. H. Paul Santmire called it *the-anthropocentrism*—a useful term that finds its foundation in Luther and Calvin's thought, and used by Karl Barth to "refer to a theology that focusses on God and humanity as its chief subjects." Neither version of anthropocentrism promotes a vision of the world that would include all species, ecosystems, and the entire biotic community as included in the salvation afforded by the Christian story. George H. Kehm, "The New Story: Redemption as Fulfillment of Creation," *After Nature's Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 89. This is Berry's position in sum (Berry, Thomas. *The New Story: Comments on the Origin, Identification and Transmission of Values*. Chambersburg, PA: Anima Publications, 1978); however, Kehm states that Berry has no biblical basis for his version of the new story (Universe Story), grounding it instead in his evolutionary view of the development of the earth community. Kehm asserts that any "new" Christian story that emerges, while absolutely being informed by evolutionary science, still must be informed by the biblical story. I think the inroad to this is through an accurate understanding of a Trinitarian interrelatedness of the *Imago Dei*: cosmos, human, and extra-human communities.

¹²⁶ Swimme and Tucker, *Journey of the Universe*, 93.

their collective culture and psyche. Their relationship to their place was their primary reality and value.

Thomas Berry describes when he was 11 years old and the family moved into the hinterland of their property. He went one morning in May down across the creek to where there was a meadow of white lilies. The grass was eight to ten inches high, and the lilies grew just above them. In this moment of standing amongst the lilies, Berry experienced the numinous. The land became a sanctuary. The antique Roman-Celtic word for one of the holiest places in Celtic spirituality is *nemeton*. In the old Gallic language, *nemeton* meant “sacred clearing.” The Latin word, which shares the same root with “numinous” meant “sacred woods.”¹²⁷ This was a between and betwixt place; a place where one feels the closeness of heaven and the Divine mix with the very ground at one’s feet. It is a place that becomes a primary referent; not only a place that one returns to in sentimentality and memory, but a place that becomes a lens by which one creates primary sacred communities. This sort of place-making, or *place-being*, requires a reconnection with the old knowledge that we are thoroughly enmeshed in the places we dwell in. I believe this is the pulsing reality that exists beyond the Genesis text as we have interpreted it. In our integral enmeshment with our dwelling places, we discover our kinship and bound relationship with the many other species who live in them. Through re-mythologizing our primary creation text, we also explore the mythology of place, which becomes an act of radical belonging, and foundational being.

That lily field was a place of radical belonging for Thomas Berry, and became a normative guide for how he related to that place, and subsequent places after. All his life he used

¹²⁷ Tom Cowan, *Yearning For the Wind: Celtic Reflections on Nature and the Soul* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2003), 90.

that place as his primary referent, the primary event that guided or oriented his relationship to the world around. In Berry's estimation, good politics would preserve that meadow, so legislature and voting measures would be addressed according to their impact on this meadow. So would a good legal system; a good religion would teach one a deeper meaning of that meadow; a good economics would learn to sow, cultivate land, and the meadow would be preserved. Berry found his *home* in that meadow; there ecosystems and economics conversed and supported one another. And his particular lens as a lily-person held that land in love for the rest of this life. It is important to underscore that this is not merely a sense of sentimentality. This is a profound radical engagement with our homescapes and our global habitat that engenders an interrelated kinship that carries the power of humanity's intended way of being.

Wendell Berry argues the particularity of a place carries this kind of connection and meaning. What if the power of place emanated from our Genesis story in such a way that we also found our primacy of belonging here on Earth? A re-mythologizing of our sacred story can create through it a connection to our planet very much like Thomas Berry's Meadow Experience. Our life within this macro-place then becomes the lens through which we gain meaning and mutuality, connection and communion. Our particular relationship with the natural world within our immediate reach is critical for a spiritual emergence that sees the earth, and the whole process that gave rise to it, as sacred. Paul Kingsnorth says this about this expansive way of understanding our relationship with the natural world around us:

But while we like to talk about 'the earth,' I'm not sure any of us can really relate to it. None of us has ever seen it, not as a whole. A planet is too big for our small minds; it seems more like a concept than a reality. What we can relate to is what we see and walk among. Any new religion, any new way of seeing, will probably grow from the ground

where we are. It will emerge from something small that demands our attention; something we love; something animate with the spirit of life.¹²⁸

We come radically *home* to ourselves, our particular places, and our planetary dwelling. When we know where we are, we have a greater chance of understanding *why* we are. Our meaning making is in direct relationship with our particular places as well as our greater planetary one. By changing our stories to embrace a certain sense of embeddedness, we can come to see places like Berry's lily field, and the whole of our planet, as our primary referent. The irony of the traditional understanding of the *imago Dei* within an anthropocentric read of Genesis 1-2 is that we have created humanity as the primary referent of creation. This positioning places humanity as the problem, as the curse and not the blessing I believe we were meant to be. The group of models and views held by McFague and Berry allow for renewed way of understanding our belonging to our place and planet. Through McFague we are provided a metaphor of an embodied God that allows us to find and encounter God in the particularities of our place. Through Berry we are called to see the Divine through the Universe Story; a story that traces the sacred impulse of life through the stars. Together these models give us the ability to shift humanity from being the primary referent as the sole *imago Dei*.

Reimagining the role of the human in the Genesis story is not about removing the human from its unique manifestation as something truly mysterious and Divine; its simply about de-centralizing the human. The way many have read the Genesis story forced us to make humanity the primary referent. When that occurs, humanity can only be destructive. This new model of a three-folded interrelated *imago Dei* requires a mutuality that maintains both the particularities of

¹²⁸ Paul Kingsnorth, "The Axis and the Sycamore," *Orion Magazine*, January/February 2017, <https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-axis-and-the-sycamore/>.

the natural world and our planetary placement as a primary referent. The human is no longer the primary referent. Practically, this means my wellness is dependent on the wellness of the bird. The bird's wellness is dependent upon the health of the forests. The health of the forest's wellness is dependent on the health of the human. Our mutuality with the natural world creates an upward gaze, a posture of reverence and awe and wonder that creates with it the trifecta that brings in within the three-foldedness the cosmos, or the cosmic divine. While God is imminent in the tree and the bird, and within humanity as well, the great spark of what is the *imago Dei* truly lights up when there is an intrinsic relatedness, inter-animation, between all three subjects. In this regard, aspects of the social trinity are made relevant in a Trinitarian perspective of the *imago Dei*.

Primary Referent as Profound Place-making

Ralph Waldo Emerson had Waldo Pond. Annie Dillard had Tinker Creek. Thomas Berry had the Lily Field. They had foundational experiences in particular places. These places provided profound feelings of connection both to the natural world and to the greater mystery within and beyond. It became the place by which they measured all else. Cheasty Greenspace has become mine. When I operate within an integrated understanding of the *imago Dei*, its three-folded nature also affects my primary referent, and all aspects of how I engage my community and culture are impacted. My experience with the educational system is impacted by my referent and its locale within the natural world, as well as its place within sacred-evolutionary cosmology. I no longer learn with a primary human-centered filter; rather, my filters layer like the Celtic Trinity knot, a sacred Venn Diagram, informing a referent perspective that holds the

inherent worth of a particular place within its grand planetary drama. Furthermore, my experience of the political system is revolutionized because it is no longer only human-centric. An ethic forms out of this interrelated patterning that expands to affirm the personhood and rights of the other-than-human world that is revolutionary. My experience of the economy, which shares its foundation with a sense of ecology, a sense of *oikos*, is transformed as it takes into consideration the natural world's right to relative wealth and growth as much as the human's. The way we design our cities, suburbs, and green spaces will no longer only attend to the human, but will again account for all of life. This model of a three-folded, interrelated imago Dei has the potential to transform the story of how humanity lives forward on this planet.

In Cheasty we are now engaged in a post-transformed story era. We no longer have to imagine another story for this place. A new story was imagined, and community and the land were both restored through this re-mythologizing of place. The very real effects of what a lived-experience is like in a post-story era are significant. Our neighborhood group reclaimed this land and reimagined how it could contribute to connection and community. Our gut told us that to live by living in communion with this land, we would also find harmony with one another. Over 40,000 volunteer hours and ~\$325,000 in grant money has contributed to the vision. A dynamic cross-section of neighborhood organizations, non-profits, universities, and co-ops are now included in a growing partnership who advocate for this place, and who fundamentally believe in the transformative power this particular place provides for its surrounding people. This power of health, wholeness, and happiness is only unleashed when there is a practiced mutuality with the land. This *meant-for-ness*, this pattern of interrelationship, manifests through a robust volunteer stewardship team that leads restoration community events twice a month.

Neighborhood high schools and preschools, after-school-clubs, and scouts now learn in and do service within this forest. Neighbors meet for walks on the now-built trails while students and workers commute through them to access public transit assets and safe routes to schools. A generation of urban children have now played in these woods, experiencing the joy, wonder, and awe of the natural world, and discovering for themselves a powerful and profound primary referent. A relationship that has immediate positive physiological impacts, and will also have long term consequences of how they are empowered to experience themselves at home and connected to this place and on our planet.

The particular place of Cheasty Greenspace provides an opportunity and strategy for cultural transformation. In this place, the natural world abuts all the trappings of an industrialized one, and one is faced with the realities of our ecological crisis: decaying economies, ethnic and class conflict, and wars. Underlying these devastations of modern times are epidemic failures in individual human development very much related to their disconnection from their place within the natural world. Author and psychologist Bill Plotkin believes that the way forward to a collective societal shift of wholeness and sustainability will be to progress from our current “*egocentric societies (materialistic, anthropocentric, competition based, class stratified, violence prone, and unsustainable) to soulcentric ones (imaginative, ecocentric, cooperation based, just, compassionate and sustainable).*”¹²⁹ Plotkin draws from the collective academy of cultural thought provocateurs ranging from Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, to Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell to imagine how to cultivate more mature human individuals to inform an evolution into a more mature human society. He believes that nature has always

¹²⁹ Bill Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008), 4.

provided and still provides the best template for human maturation.¹³⁰ Plotkin unpacks this further:

...every human being has a unique and mystical relationship to the wild world, and that the conscious discovery and cultivation of that relationship is at the core of true adulthood. In contemporary society, we think of maturity simply in terms of hard work and practical responsibilities. I believe, in contrast, that true adulthood is rooted in transpersonal experience—in a mystic affiliation with nature, experienced as sacred calling—that is then embodied in soul-infused work and mature responsibilities. This mystical affiliation is the very core of maturity, and it is precisely what mainstream Western society has overlooked—or actively suppressed and expelled.¹³¹

Western civilization has buried most traces of the mystical roots of maturity, yet this knowledge has been at the heart of every indigenous tradition known. In this light, we see that our self-imposed exile from an honoring relationship with creation has stunted God's design for human development, and even a proper revelation of God. Creation is imbued with the wisdom of God, and to stifle and ignore the inherent value of the created order, stifles the very voice of Wisdom in our lives. Our way into the future requires new cultural forms of the old ways of being in relationship with the earth. As urban-dense living increasingly becomes the norm for countries around the world, re-imagining how urban greenspaces provides the opportunity for a relationship with the wild world becomes critical. The health of our psyche, and the planet, depends on it.

And so we start with a renewed story of good work, of reclamation that not only restored the land, but also our souls and that of our community. Cheasty Greenspace, this small stand of trees in Southeast Seattle, Washington is evidence of the transformational power of telling a new story through ecological restoration, a re-mythologizing that has allowed this land to convey its

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹³¹ Ibid., 3.

wisdom, and invite relationship and intercommunion between all who live within this ecosystem. Through Cheasty, I've learned that old narratives maintain the status quo. Traditional scripts continue the trajectory of the most elemental aspects of a story. We remember the challenge Rasmussen poses in response to the traditional stories we have told and that imbed our culture: "If the great new fact of our time is that cumulative human activity has the power to affect all life in fundamental and unprecedented ways, then *what ought to be is* precisely what needs to be taken into account...How *ought* we to live, and what ought we to *do* in view of a fundamentally changed human relationship to earth, a relationship we only partially comprehend?"¹³² A Christian response isn't one that continues the binary theologies of dominance or distance. Sallie McFague might suggest that, "A Christian [view of nature] is extending the radical, destabilizing, inclusive love of Jesus Christ to the natural world...by developing real relations with some particular places, lifeforms, entities of nature."¹³³ This posture of extension is the time of the Great Turning.¹³⁴

Cheasty Greenspace has become my primary referent. Over 5,000 trees, plants and seeds have been planted in Cheasty Greenspace. Trails have been designed and built by neighbors' hands to provide safe and welcome access to the natural world. In a very real sense, this has been a practice of true *dabhar*: active, imaginative and playful creation within the context of relationship. If we would have approached the trees simply as a commodity, valued simply as a

¹³² Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 5.

¹³³ Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 24.

¹³⁴ The Great Turning is a name for the essential adventure of our time coined by Buddhist scholar and philosopher Joanna Macy. It is the shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization.

human-benefitting resource; if we would have approached the woods as ripe real estate, they would have been cut down. We would have *bará-ed* them. Instead, our community had to inject our story of Cheasty Greenspace with a responsive pulse for the ecological and social challenges of our time, which took a particular form in our neighborhood. There is a seasonal spring that bubbles over and flows down hill alongside the Hazelnut Loop, although it seems to be preferring to cut into one particular section of the trail. Martin, a neighbor and an engineer is good at fixing this. There are two one-hundred year old Big Leaf Maple trees that bend into and around one another, like two lovers twisting into an embrace. My husband has held my hand at this tree-couple and has said that is like us. I love coming into the woods and looking at these trees who have spent their lives together. I have labored with birth pangs on these trails; the same ones on which later my children have learned to walk. I hear the songs of the birds here, and the unique psithurism of the rustling leaves. This land is my home. It has told me more about myself and how to live than any other book or wizened mentor. The grandeur of the universe becomes palpable in this place; here I have found what it means to mirror the image of God. It isn't through an aggrandized sense of self; rather, it is through a constant connection to my community, both human and more-than-human alike. In this mutual intercommunion, a sense of awe and wonder is constantly reborn in response to this ecosystem. As I participate within the biodiversity of this landscape, I too become imbedded within the roots and humus. My care and concern is extended towards the life that now reverberates in these woods. In this relationship, God is. And here in this inter-animating relationship with this place, I both bear the Divine image and, I am home.

Part 5. Genesis Remembered

Genesis 1-2:2—A Cosmological Epic of Grace

I rewrote the following version of Genesis 1-2:2 based on the last four years of research, reading, and writing. I reimagined the wisdom and beauty of this story by bringing in concepts and features of sacred evolutionary cosmology that would affirm humanity’s co-creative communion with all of creation. My hope was that through this practice, I might remember who I am meant to be as part of the *imago Dei*, and that I would have a new story I could begin telling my children to equip and empower them to live in ways that are on behalf of the Other and the future of our home.

Fifteen billion years ago, primeval Creative Energy, the numinous Mystery behind creation of the universe, flared forth and its cosmic breath set in motion the immense process to imagine, create and pattern the ordered heavens and the earth through gravity and elements. A symphonic vision of emergent, intercommunal life was born.¹³⁵ Now the earth uniquely took form and became filled with Creative Energy, ecstatic union of the Divine and matter; darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of Cosmic Wisdom was hovering over the waters emerging relational consciousness and interconnection.

And Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully created, finding unique embodied form in, and expansive energy with protons, electrons and atoms— “Let there be illumination,” and there became light. Cosmic Wisdom waited and watched and saw that the light became life-giving, and Cosmic Wisdom separated the light from the darkness.

Cosmic Wisdom called the light “day,” and the darkness Cosmic Wisdom called “night.”

¹³⁵ Physicists have acknowledged that the universe has had a human dimension from the beginning; they have termed this the “anthropic principle.” Thomas Berry writes, “According to this principle the universe must, from the beginning, have had tendencies that would eventually lead to the emergence of the human.” Thomas Berry, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 42.

And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day of many days.

And Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully created, finding unique embodied form in, and expansive energy with, great salty seas—“Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” So Cosmic Wisdom formed the vault, a double embrace of oceans and atmosphere, and separated the water under the vault from the water above it.

This became the euphonious breath of life.

And it became so.

Cosmic Wisdom called the vault “sky.”

And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day of many days.

And Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully created, finding unique embodied form in, and expansive energy with, turbulent volcanos and shaping water vapor—“Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it became so. Cosmic Wisdom called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters Cosmic Wisdom called “seas.”

And Cosmic Wisdom waited and watched, and listening, saw that it was life-giving and would continue to become.

And Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully created, finding unique embodied form in, and expansive energy with the vast patterns of the fundamental cell and unparalleled creativity within photosynthesis—“Let the land produce verdant vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it became so.

The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds; all inter-communing with the atmosphere and land.

And Cosmic Wisdom waited and watched, and listening, saw the land become life-giving.

And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day of many days.

And Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully created, finding unique embodied form in, and expansive energy with, galactic unfurling—“Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to

separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it became so. Cosmic Wisdom formed two great interconnected lights—the greater light to commune with the day and provide nourishment and life, and the lesser light to commune with the night through its gravitational pull. Cosmic Wisdom also formed the stars, and the essence for more to come. Cosmic Wisdom set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to commune with the day as Brother Sun and with the night as Sister Moon, and to separate light from darkness.

And Cosmic Wisdom saw that it became good.

And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day of many days.

And Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully created, finding unique and embodied form in, and expansive energy within, adaptation, memory, complexity, and communion—“Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” So Cosmic Wisdom created the emergence of great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind, and the harmonious network of relationship maintained balance and beauty. And Cosmic Wisdom saw that passionate life was good. Cosmic Wisdom blessed the diversity of creatures and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth for you are integral.”

And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day of many days.

And Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully created, finding unique and embodied form in, and expansive energy within, life’s interiority and revelation—“Let the land produce living, connected and complex creatures according to their uniqueness: the herds, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its uniqueness.”

And it became so.

Cosmic Wisdom created the emergence of the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds.

And Cosmic Wisdom waited and watched and saw that this communion of subjects became good.

And Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully created, finding unique and embodied form with humus—“Let humanity emerge with humility,¹³⁶ mirroring the Creative Energy that is within all life, likened to Cosmic Wisdom in our interrelatedness, so that they may know integral joy and kinship with the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, integral joy and kinship with the herds and all the wild animals, and integral joy and kinship with all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully developed the noosphere¹³⁷—humanity to embody the consciousness of Creative Energy that finds form within the Cosmos and the ever-creating world;

in this interrelated, three-fold image of Creative Energy, Cosmic Wisdom became manifest in the communion of the conscious endowed human being, and the differentiation and subjectivity of the cosmos and natural world.

Cosmic Wisdom blessed humanity’s expansive diversity and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and participate in it’s flourishing. Respect the Creative Energy, and honor it within the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground, maintaining balance and mutuality. Be present on this planet in a mutually enhancing way.”

And Cosmic Wisdom energetically and purposefully created a house for the human, a distinct and regenerative home interpenetrated by Creative Energy— “I give you nourishment and interconnection with every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that

¹³⁶ Matthew Fox explains that humility is not “ranking low in a hierarchy or scale” or “insignificant.” Rather, a creation-centered spiritual tradition, as stated repeatedly by Meister Eckhart, points out that the word “humility” comes from the word *humus* or earth. Within the creation tradition, “to be humble means to be in touch with the earth, in touch with one’s own earthiness, and to celebrate the blessing that is our earthiness and our passions.” Fox, *Original Blessing*, 59,

¹³⁷ Noosphere, a key concept developed by Teilhard de Chardin, is the sphere of human thought which is elevated by consciousness, the mind and interpersonal relationships. Noosphere is taken up and developed by Thomas Berry, Leonardo Boff and Matthew Fox.

has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food and fostering. And the belonging extends to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has Creative Energy, the essence of life in it—I give every green plant for food and fostering.” And it became so.

Cosmic Wisdom, in this three-fold relatedness, was infinitely emerging, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day of many days.

*Thus the heavens and the earth began in all their vast array,
which continues to become to this day.*

By the seventh day, Cosmic Wisdom had finished the integral work Cosmic Wisdom had been doing; so on the seventh day Cosmic Wisdom rested from creating emergence and waited to witness.

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