CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD NATURE:

AN EXPLORATORY HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

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Preface "Nature, the world," Ludwig Feuerbach wrote in the middle of the nineteenth century in his Essence of Christianity, "has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul." Feuerbach's judgment was taken up with renewed intensity a century later by scores of ecologists, nature philosophers, historians of religion, and even by some theologians. Against the background of a growing global ecological crisis, they decried what they thought of as the "orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature," and argued in various ways that Christianity "bears a huge burden of guilt" for the modern Western desecration of the environment.

This wave of criticism of traditional Christian attitudes toward nature has, in turn, called forth a vigorous, if not widespread, response by a number of theologians, historians, and environmentalists. Among other things, the respondents have questioned what they consider to be the critics' facile attempt to link the devastation of nature wrought by modern industrial society with the theology of dominion espoused by the Book of Genesis and the ensuing theological tradition.

E— The outcome of this discussion is presently very much in doubt, especially in view of its predominantly polemical character. Ironically, much of the debase has been carried out in the absence of any eafeacare~~fulness~~ historical study of the Christian tradition viewed from an ecological perspective. There are no extent monographs on the subject. Nor do any of the standard histories of doctrine cast any steady light on the subject, even in an instance where we have ft history of the Christian doctrine of creation, impoobable as that may sound. This is not to fault these standard kinds of studies. It is rather to suggest an historical truism, that until very recently historians of the theological tradition have not been prompted by their own situations to raise ecological questions.

Clearly, then, we are -WW? much in need of historical research in this respect, if the whole discussion about Christian attitudes toward human life in nature is to progress beyond its present polemical stage, and if systematic theology and theological ethics, in particular, are to find any meaningful historical roots in this context.fttatiMHK

But this means that we face an enormous scholarly task: the reexamination of some three millenia of theological history from the fresh perpeefcive of contemporary ecological concerns, flow can this be accomplished? It would seem that the task before us will require the efforts of many scholars, for some time to come.

This essay is intended as a small contribution to that widespread, extensive program of research and reflection that the present ffifet—tBa~~umia~~ theological situation seems to require. What follows, accordingly, is a preliminary attempt to interpret the Christian tradition schematically, from an ecological perspective. As such, the exposition will SSSBEg st best be no more than heuristic.

But if it succeeds in this respect, to any degree, the effort will have been worthwhile.

The constellation of interpretive concepts we will be employing in this historical introduction naturally cannot be £ justified in advance. Their value, if any, can be seen only in their illuminative character. But it will be helpful, for the sake of carity, to identify them at the outset.

The key motif is suggested by both Martin ^uber and Karl Barth. Buber gave currency to the phrase "biblical humanism." Barth wrote a famous essay entitled "the Humanity of God." So the expression theological humanism commends itself, as a hermeneutical key for approaching the history of biblical Hebraism and biblical-claasical Christianity. The Hebraic-^Christian tradition, whatever else it may be, is the story of a historical movement which has consistently highlighted God's relationship with human beings living in communion with each other. For Hebraism and biblical-cijssical Christianity, we may say, the life of the human creature in a historical community has persistently been the constituting locus Demeaning and value. Concretely, the tradition has articulated its theological humanism in terms of a dynamic historical relationship between a righteous, creative God, who graciously calls the community to responsible freedom in the world of creation history, and a covenanta1 people which seeks to be faithful to its Divine calling.

This theological humanism can be instructively juxtaposed with two other major belief-systems proffered in many forms by various cultures that ftave interacted with or impinged upon the Hebraic-Christian tradition along the way: theological monism and theological dualism. The Hebraic-Christian tradition has, on the one hand, regularly resisted the notion that the human community is submerged, fatefully immersed,

in the womb of some cosmic Whole (monism). The same taadfction has, on the other hand, just as consistently rejected the concept that the world of human experience is ultimately bifurcated by a clash between two ontological powers or principles of good and evil, light and darkness(dualism).

Between the outer limits of monism and dualism, however, there has been room for the theological humanism of the tradition to egress itself in an extensive, even bewildering, profusion of forms. If we are cautious, neverMieless, we can tentatively idMtify two major trends within that diversity that will hopefully help us to understand the tradition's various ways of expressing the meaning of human life in nature.

The theological humanism of the tradition, on the one hand, has on occasion been holistic. It has evinced a profound sense for the human creature's universal interconnectedness with God, with the entire cosmos, and with the whole human family, as well as giving testimony to the fabric of mutuality sustaining the particular community that carries the tradition. In this regard, the Hebraic-Christian tradition has shown a certain catholic generosity. It has seen all things, [redacted] natural things, as well as human affairs, as moving in the historical flow of the universal Divine Economy or, as we might also want to say, the universal Divine Ecology. Although in the intuitions of some seers and mystics, this holistic form of fanngrrirv theological humanism has tended fcst at times to verge on monism, it generally has sustained a marked appreciation for the Divine Transcendence, on the one hand, and for an intramundane human transcdndence, on the other hand, as well as articulating the vital immanence of both God and humanity in nature.

The theological humanism of the tradition, on the other hand, has seemed to be much more anthropocentric at times, even rankly

anthropocentric, especially over against the world of nature.
It has tended to become anthropologically exclusivistic. SSH?
It has emphasized a marked disjunction, sometimes a Hxs radical break, between God and humanity, on the one hand, and the biophysical order, on the other. It some of its Manifestations, indeed, this anthropocentric form of theological humanism has verged on a dualism of spirit and natter, in which the cc^ypeal world of sense experience has been seen as a matrix of evil, if not the reality of evil itself.
Yet htre the biblical theme of the goodness of creation has virtually always served as a check and prevented the incursions of *V&* any thoroughgoing theological dualism into the tradition.

The following discussion will focus, then, on the changing course of the Hebraic-Christian tradition, particularly on its various theologies of ~~human life in~~ nature -- what we are calling its ecological dimension — as that tradition of theological humanism has flowed, sometimes smoothely, sometimes turbulently, between the distant but never totally invisible boundaries of monism on the one side and dualism on the other. We will see the tradition sometimes veer closer to monism, wkKkkEKxpnsikxxsiyxaKxfHKxpHiamxEaixKKaxHnx^x sometimes closer todialism, yet always being carried along ~~by~~ the potency of its own inner theo-humanistic tendencies.

HEBRAIC FOUNDATIONS Until very recently the approach to nature characteristic of Ancient Israel was widely seen by scholars and theologians to be akin to that of post-Kantian Protestant theology (see below), namely, a ~~markedly pronounced~~ anthropocentric itSxErMsmhumanism. Ancient Israel's religion, it was thought, was primarily a religion of human history, set over against the polytheistic, pantheistic religions of nature pervading the Ancient Near East. Only secondarily, scholars such as **E.** Ernest Wright argued, did Israel introduce nature into it theological purttew, "as a servant of history." Nature, in other words, was chiefly a stage

for history, as far as Isaael was concerned, particularly a stage for »
Redemptive History(Ueilsgachichte). The apparent absence
of any articulated "creation-faith" in Israel's formative
pre-monarchical period(ca. 1300-1000 B.C.E.), the great
emphasis Israel evidently placed on the constituting his-
torical events of the Exodus and Sinai, and the concomi-
tant polemic against the Canaanite nature deities through-
out much of Israel's history, seemed to make the interpre-
tive framework used by the Redemptive History school
incontestible. Along with this emphasis on^history apart
from nature, biblical interpreters in the same vein tended,
as a matter of course, to see Israel's understanding of
the human creature's relationship with nature as focusing
mainly on transcendence and dominion(both themes being
clearly attested in various writings).

It now seems clear, however, that the interpretive framework taken for granted by the Redemptive History school and its many popularizing proponents, does not fully reflect the complexities in the history of Israel's approach to nature, nor, consequently, does it allow full justice to be done to the richness of Israel's theology of nature. Israel's cultural milieu was dominated by a mythological nature-monism(this expression more aptly describes Ancient Egyptian religion than the faith of Babylon, as we will have occasion to observe). In this context, Israel did develop a definite theological humanism. But this humanism was not fundamentally It was much more holistic, as a general rule. In a cultural world which saw nature as essentially divine, in other words, Israel did desacralize nature, but it did not devalue nature. On the contrary,

Israel consistently and vividly affirmed the integrity of nature, the goodness of nature, and the glories of nature in the eyes of God, a story we must now attend to briefly.

The mythologies of most of Israel's neighbors envisioned a primordial, pre-historical world of chaos in which the gods were born and in which a victory was enacted, to some degree, of the god(s) of life over the powers of chaos. In this perspective, the mundane world of human experience exists in a fragile position, constantly threatened by primordial chaos, surviving only in the shadow of the primordial victory of life. It is only by participating in that pre-temporal drama, by reenacting it in festivals, by retelling the myth, by constructing cities and homes in archetypical patterns, and /fn the often perilous exigencies of politics, especially through victories in war, that the human creature finds life, and is spared the ultimately destructive encounter with the powers of chaos still inherent in the world. So this mythological mentality brought with it what Mircea Eliade calls an "ontological obsession," a nostalgia for primordial Being, a drive to return to the pre-temporal events narrated in the myth, in order to renew and to sustain the reality of life experienced in the here and how. The other side of the same ontological obsession is what Eliade also calls a "responsibility on the cosmic plane." That is to say, it is only by humanity's reenactment of the primeval drama — especially at the time of the great New Year festivals that the world is sustained in being.

In practice the obsession with primordial Being was closely related, according to the Ancient Near Eastern mythological framework, to the rhythms of nature. They were variously perceived as capricous and willful(as in Babylon) or permanently and harmoniously established(as in Egypt, where the regular rising and falling of the Nile set the tone). The wor/d of the gods may not have been conceptually identified with the world of nature, but practically nature was experienced as an immediate, coextensive expression of the life of the gods: "The cosmos as a whole is an organism at once real, living, and sacred, it simultaneously reveals the modalities of being and sacrality."(Eliade)

In such a world, furthermore, with the primordial drama of the gods implicated pervasively in the vast sempiternal rhythms of nature, particularly the course of the saasans, all events of mundane historical experience in themselves tend to be reduced to a certain inconsequence, except insofar as they are reenactments of supramundane Divine events. The Real is the "eternal return" of the finite to its primeval source: "the end is like the beginning." The primordial drama of creation in the realm of the gods is all that is real, after everything human has been said and done.

In contrast, Israel's fundamental apperception of reality was primarily historical, not ontological in the foregoing sense.. Indeed, it might be said that Israel's faith, especially in its formative years, display'^ a historical obsession. What was real for Israel, particularly in its early history, were the events at the Reed

Sea and Sinai, pointing toward the conquest of Canaan, not some primordial drama leading to a world creation. When Israel settled in Canaan as a tribal confederacy (1200-1000), the cultic centers of the land were used mainly, it seems, to celebrate Israel's own history. During this period, apparently, — and for understandable reasons -- no extensive story of creation, qua story of origins, was recited in Israel. But this should not lead us to conclude that natural reality was consistently unimportant or otherwise devalued by Israel at that time.

Nature as the paradigmatic expression of the supra-mundae realm of the gods was surely desacralized, overall, by Israel; but nature was not devalued. On the contrary, its reality, //s goodness, and its openness to God, were very much ~~it was~~ affirmed. Israel's primitive historical obsession was holistic, ***jaatssgSBegBK^***. at least implicitly. It encompassed tne material vital dimension of human experience, no fess than the moral, intellectual, and spiritual dimension. Already at the Exodus , Ilin[illegible]. Yahweh is recognized as one who exercises perfect governance in and over nature(Ex. 15:8; Joshua 24:7). Nature, no less than human history, is entirely subservient to Yahweh's merciful will and power(cf. Joshua 10:12ff.; Judges 5:4). In Israel's eyes, in other words, nature was stripped of its primordial, s ipramundane stcrality, and embu«d, as it were, with a new kind of glory — in virtue of the dynamic presence of a God who was encountered as -t/anscend i og Doth nature and history, who was not understood to be fatefully enmes^ the s-fepFf of ffW-world, a God who was seen ngvgvfheless as working out ~~his~~ the Divine purposes in the c.ncrete sphere of natural and human ~~historical~~ immediacy, in a sequence of n a t u r a 1/hiica 1 story events. /jigginni 'g with the Exodus.

Retrospectively, with regard to our theme, we can say that the desacralization -- although not the devaluation -- of nature was the chief historical task of the period of the confederation in Canaan(never would this have to be done again, in quite the same way, throughout the entire course of the Hebraic-Christian tradition). The force of this challenge continued to be felt in Israel, surely, particularly in the Northern Kingdom where the Eloistic strain of Genesis(apparently without a creation story) and the Deuteronomic histories (which show little interest in nature as such) were rooted. But by the time of ~~David's~~ the establishment of the Davidic monarcy, the way had been prepared, the theological space was opening up, for the development of a fully explicit creation theology, a theology of origins as well as a theology of governance, within Israel's own historical framework, on Israel's own terms. This began to happen, especially at the new royal center of Jerusalem(where, apparently, under David's influence, the priesthood, both Yahwistic and indigenous in all probability, brought together pre-monarchical Israelite elements with more native Canaanite motifs). At this time the cultic recital of the events of Israel's history was enlarged with a pre-history of Israel extending back to ultimate beginnings, probably reflected in the Priestly creation account(Genesis 1), and with a narrative of a Divine covenant with David.

With the task of desacralizing nature sufficiently accomplished, Israel began to celebrate the works of its God in nature in a variety of ways. Yahweh's creative governance was identified, for example, with

the powerfully fecund working?of the now dethroned Canaanite Baal in the mythical storm(Psalm 29 was originally a poem to Baal, indicative of the "Babylonian-type" terror-full apperception of nature). Or Yahweh's providential rule in nature was celebrated in terms that originally expressed the beneficently serene cosmic governance of long rejected Egyptian deities(Psalm 104 shows striking resemblances to the Egyptian "Hymn to the Sun") . Also, in conjunction with poems like Psalm 104 -- which itself is closely related to Genesis 1 -- elements of a wisdom theology, with its pronounced interest in the natural order, probably began to appear in prominent ways in and around the cult center in Jerusalem at thesame time (see the Book of Proverbs). All this interest in nature and in the works of God in nature, it should be stressed, tfas not a totally new, qualitative innovation in Israel's faith. Surely it was not any kind of insidious theological deteriorization(as suggested by some proponents of the Redemptive History view). It stood in continuity with the holistic perspective of earlier centuries. But, with the desacralization of nature sufficiently accomplished, the theology of nature of the monarchical period does represent an enlargement of that holistic motif, an enhancement of its sober early forms. It was^an imaginative exfoliation of remarkable proportions.

This exfoliation can also be interpreted, importantly as far as our theme is concerned, as a flowering of the^femin^,Aspects of the .Hebrew Deity. Prior to the monarchy it was the archetypically

male aspects 6f Yahweh that seemed to be most celebrated -- Yahweh' as a leader in battle, Yahweh as "Lord of Hosts." With the desacralization of nature sufficiently accomplished, however, and the various Canaanite fertility goddesses sufficiently dethroned or neutralized, the themes of fecundity and immanence in the earth could also come to the fore in pronounced ways. This happened most visibly in the wisdom tradition. The creative wisdom of Yahweh became a tangible expression of the archetypically female aspect of this God who was called "he."

The articulation of the fully explicit holistic perspective we have been tracing is perhaps nowhere more clearly evident than in the post-exilic Priestly creation narrative of Genesis 1, which has its roots in the traditions of Jerusalem during the monarchical period(1000-586). Here there is no hint of any primordial struggle in the world of the gods, nor is there any evident need expressed to polemicize directly against that view. God"s present governance in nature/history, powerful and righteous accomplishment of ^S^gracious purposes in the mi^st of the given, mundane world, is seen as extending back to a universal beginning and also -- insofar as the theme of the Divine Rest is eschatological("eschata" = last things) -- forward to a universal consummation. In this sense, more generally, Israel's creation-faith and its eschatology are, as it were, imaginative extensions, back and forward, of its providence-faith. The picture of the cosmos we see in the Priestly account is historical(cf. the temporal structure, seven days), but it is just as vividly holistic. Every level of the creation is good. The whole, as it approach os i t«r Final ful f i Imont in tho Divine R°st -- the

pos t-Exilic prophet II Isaiah develops this omega-theme, along with the theme of origins, much more fully -- is seen to be"very good." God looks at everything -jfe has ns de, not just the human creature, and rejoices in its goodness. Implicitly, it seems that the Priestly writer also wants to depict God as rejoicing in the ultimate vindication of the Divine blessings on all things, on nature no less than humanity(cf. Psalm 104 and II Isaiah, passim); That seems to be a constitutive element of God's ultimate sabbath joy.

It is worth mentioning here, too, that the Hebraic mind knows little if anything about any "fallen cosmos." That is a motif that only emerges later on, -StzsssWk Persian influence. But it never becomes an established element of the Hebraic-Christian tradition(although it emerges again to threaten the tradition in the form of Gnosticism and Manicheanism). In contrast, for Hebraism, consistently, nature is thoroughly good, "after the fall," no leas than before. To be sure, nature is "cursed.," with respect to human sinfulness(see Gen. 3:16ff.). But that curse is indeed predicated on the fact of human sin. Its apparent intent is to define some of the parameters of sinful humanity's relationship to nature. It does not signal a Divine rejection, as it were, of nature in it-self or any kind of diminishment of natures Divinely bestowed integrity.

Within' this panoramic Hebraic vision of nature/history under the constant governance of Yahw'eh, from alpha to omega of the world, the identity of the human ceature is understood very much to be rooted in nature, no less than in^history. There is no body-soul dualism, to begin with. The self is

a psychosomatic unity. The self is an animated body,
A
not an inc abated soul (II. W. Robinson). The traditionally
important concept "the image of God," found in Genesis 1,
probably refers first of all, indeed, to the human body
and only secondarily to the more "spiritual" qualities of
humanity.

The identity of the self, moreover, extends into
the world of nature more generally, beyond the human body,
according to the general Hebraic conception. The 'aephesh
(the "soul") of the individual and the community, the
latter with its "corporate personality"(H. W. Robinson),
permeates the land. There is a distinction surely, but no
sharp disjunction between humanity and nature. Concomitantly
there is no real evidence of any pervasive Hebrew arrogance
toward nature, in the modern sense of domination. Humanity
is given dominion, but that Haans an overall responsibility
entciils
to nature(to till the garden and keep it), not any
arbitrary priviledge to exploit nature. "The relation
between the earth and its owner... is a covenant relation,
a psychic community, and the owner does not solely prevail
in the relation. The earth has its nature, which makes
itself felt, and demands respect?(Pedersen) Human dominion,
moreover, is delimited by the Divine dominion, which estab-
lishes certain -- relative -- rights for nature, as well
as various important, but not absolute human prerogatives.
Further, a certain contemplative relationship with nature,
along with the caretaking and dominion motifs, is also
envisioned. In this context, the earth, as a whole and
it its various parts, is envisioned as a resplendent
whole, full of the glory of God and giving praise.

No(: ho be neglected, furthermore, is the relatively minor theme -- but not for that reason unimportant, especially when taken in conjunction with everything else -- that Yahweh has his own purposes with nature, in addition to his purposes with humanity. Nature is not simply a stage posited for God's history with the human creature, in other words. For the Hebraic mind, nature is good; it has it own integrity, at all levels. It exists to serve the Drvine good-pleasure, as well as to serve human well-being. Nature has aspects, also, which in themselves are alien to human sensibilities and serve no apparent human utility(cf. Psalm 104:19ff.), but which are nevertheless reflections of Divine purposes, however unknown and mysterious. So, paradigmatically, we are told that God created the sea monsters -- in order to play with them(Ps. 104:26). The whole of nature, finally, along with the immediate sphere of human life in nature/history, will one day be brought to its fulfilment in the day of the new heavens and the new earth proclaimed fervently by III Isaiah. There will be no "eternal return" to soma primordial, a-cosmic, chaotic beginning. On the contrary, the whole cosmos will be transformed and fulfilled: all things, the vast expanses of the world of nature, no less than the more family, more immediate world of human experience in nature and ~~history~~ society. This is ~~the final,~~ perhaps the most comprehensive, most visionary expression of Hebraic religion's holistic theological humanism.

Early Christian Emphases Although early Christianity developed at first within the matrix of first century Judaism, we cannot simply view the new Christian movement against the background of the ancient Hebrew traditions we have been examining. A rich and intricately complicated profusion of religious, philosophical, and socio-political experience lies between the writings of a II Isaiah, for example, and the letters of a converted Jewish Rabbi by the name of Paul. A number of religious and cultural tendencies might be noted here, among them the ethos of the Persian world; Greek political, intellectual, and religious traditions(in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great); and, various movements and schools within Judaism, such as the Qumran community and Phariseeism. As far as the theology of nature is concerned, two specific developments need to be underlined if we are to begin to understand the ecological dimension of early Christian life and thought.

The first is the coming of a relatively new and generally pervasive eschatological consciousness, that is, a widespread belief that the end of the mundane world was fast approaching. Although the varieties and the meanings of end-time expectations were many and complexly interrelated, it seems clear that a pronounced sense for the waning of the present world and the nearing of a new heavens and a new earth did dominate the mind of early Christianity.

This represented, in significant measure, the renewal of what has been called a "prophetic eschatology" (Norman Perrin), the attitude toward the future characteristic

of much of Hebraism. Prophetic eschatology, in contrast to apocalyptic eschatology(which we will consider presently), may indeed envision a future of radical upheaval of the present order, but it does it in such as way as to trace lines of continuity between the present world and the world that is to come, at every level. Prophetic eschatology, to state the matter sharply, is oriented toward a coming fulfilment, much more so that} some kind of drastic annihilation of the present order's being and value. Perhaps the most comprehensive expression of a prophetic eschatology in Ancient Israel was the synthesis of Exodus and Zion(Davidic) motifs projected by II Isaiah and, later, with still more accent on the future, III Isaiah. Implicit in the prophetic eschatology taken over in early Christianity, and often explicit, was the traditional Hebrew conviction that the creation as a whole is good and is destined, in every respect, for its own fulfilment. Dualistic motifs, very much "in the air" in New Testament times, did not, in this context, penetrate dramatically into the eschatological consciousness of the early Church . The general expectation was that the cosmos, as well as humanity, was destined for consummation. The cosmos was not going to be sloughed off at the end-time, as something essentially valueless or evil. Along with the human community — this was the assumption -- the cosmos was going to be given its own final vindication, too. The cosmos was thus affirmed, indirectly if not directly, as having its own worth in the eyes of God.

Still, a certain cosmic pessimism hovered at the edge of the early Christian consciousness, and made its

presence felt occasionally in significant ways. Insofar as the early Christian eschatological consciousness was, at times, more apocalyptic than prophetic, there arose a certain tendency to devalue the present cosmic order as a whole -- along with the socio-historical order -- and to look patiently, sometimes with a sense of passive resignation, for the coming of the new order of things. Apocalyptic eschatology, it seems, even encouraged a kind of nihilism a^- times; that much emphasis was placed on the destruction of the present order.

Closely related to the apocalyptic mentality was the conviction that the present world is pervaded and controlled by various evil powers, angelic forces. Jesus himself shared this belief, although his own eschatological expectations, insofar as they can be reconstructed, appear to be much more prophetic than apocalyptic. Now it is sometimes thought that since the early Christian movement experienced the world permeated by demons that it must have taken a negative view toward the biophysical order itself. It seems clear, however, that the world of the demons(sometimes confusingly called "cosmic powers") was not identified with the biphysical order in the early Church, any more than it was identified with the world of human morality and reason or with human institutions as such. To be sure, the demons could permeate and possess any aspect of the world human experience, and they often were perceived as doing just that. But they were not the same as the -WWWMtzLH biophysical order, by any means. Only incidentally, chiefly in splinter

communities spawned by Gnosticism, an esoteric religious movement which believ't^in an anti-cosmic Deity aril an essentially evil material order, did the tendency take hold to identify the evil cosmic powers with the material stuff of the created order.

Some expressions of early Christianity, most notably the Gospel of John, do occuply a place in the theological spectrum which shows affinities with the dualistic Ghostic rejection of "this woijd" and the radically; anthropocentric Gnostic concern for the salvation of the human soul alone. Such affinities with dualistic motifs, however, were almost always balanced, as in the Fourth Gospel, by the weight of other more characteristically Hebraic motifs. The Gospel of John, for example, apparently draws on the wisdom tradition of Hebraism('Tn the beginning was the Word...."), with its comprehensively positive evaluation of the whole creation(_ta_ panta) . The rejection of Gnostic dualism in John was also concretized by an emphasis on the fleshly reality of the incarnation and the hoped for resurrection of the body. Further, the seer of the Book of Revelation, presumably writing in the tradition of the Fourth Gospel, explicitly takes up the hope for a new heavens and a new earth.

Next to the pervasive eschatological consciousness of the early Church, with its generally positive implications for the early Christian attitude toward nature(except where apocalyptic influences came to the fore), the second major religious development that occurred between the time of ancient Israel and the rise of early Christianity we need to touch on here is perhaps too obvious. But that may be precisely why it ought to be discussed.

Hie early Church was naturally fascinated, not to say overcome with enthusiasm for, the teachings and the life-history of Jesus of Nazareth. One can imagine that this must have had a dual kind of influence on the early Christian consciousness of nature.

On the one hand, Jesus himself showed a deep Hebraic sensitivity for the wonders of nature and for the providential care of the Creator for creation. Indeed, against a tendency in the JudafSm of his time to see God more and more removed from the concrete environment of daily life, Jesus seemed to see God much more immediately, much more paternally(here in the sterotypical sense of"maternal1^) involved with the world than many of the rabbis did(this is part of the significance of his familiar reference to God as "Our Father"; it seems to be very much a holistic Hebraic motif, reminiscent of the Shepherd of Israel portrayed by Ezekiel). Further, if, as seems possible, the image of Jesus with the wild beasts presented by Mark(l:12f.) reflects elements from JesusS'own teaching and life history, we can imagine him seeing his own mission, in part at least, as somehow inaugurating the final transformation of the cosmos as an Adamic figure. In any case, we know from Jesus^-"parables of growth" that he did look forward to a transformation of the whole world. These elements in Jesus *'j* teaching and life-history must have had an impact of some moment on early Christian attitudes toward nature.

On the other hand, since the early Church by and large accepted the traditional Hebraic view that the cosmos had not fallen, only the human creature within the cosmos(more on this presently), this meant that

Jesus's primarily perceived role at the Redeemer did not immediately set him in relationship to the biophysical order. As a result, although Hebraic convictions about God and the natural order were, as we have suggested, more or less taken for granted in early Christianity, the de facto existential impact of the Jesus-event must have had the effect of focusing an intense kind of attention on the needs of humanity and the revolutionary possibilities for renewal in human life in light of Jesus's coming. The Gospel of Mark, for example, can depict Jesus not only with the wild beasts in the wilderness, perhaps as the New Adam; it can also show him bringing a new kind of peace of nature, calming the storm. And that motif could be developed with reference to the)-Creator, as the one who establishes cosmic peace (by Clement of Rome at the end of the first century). But one can imagine that the tendency d.rT the early Church, especially as it was threatened with persecution, would have been primarily to think of those Markan texts in terms of their own lives, not immediately with reference to nature.

For these and other reasons(such as apocalyptic and Gnostic influences) direct theological interest in nature on the part of the early Church appears to have been minimal. Still, such evidence of attention Lo nature that we do have, when see against the ~~fEtHWs-st~~ Hebrew Bible -- which, after all, was the Scriptures of the early Church -- suggests that the holistic Hebraic motifs, taken up anew by Jesus, were indeed largely presupposed by his first and second century followers.

The panoramic Hebraic vision of the whole creation moving from alpha to omega under the providential care of the Creator is perhaps most succinctly attested in the New Testament by Paul in a (liturgical?) formula, 'phis may have been borrowed originally from Stoic sources, but -- like the creation Psalms 29 and 104 in their contexts -- it was borrowed, -presumably bcause Paul wanted to say something of his own: "For from him and through him and to him are all things."(R.o. 11:36) This is the same Paul who announces that ever since the creation of the world God's power and divinity, however invisible, were to be seen in the things he had fashioned.(Ro. 1:20)

Very early in the history of Christianity, however, such affirmations of the universal providence of the Creator were given a definite Christological shape(cf. I Cor. 8:6). This happened most dramatically in the much discussed pericfipe from Colossians(a letter by Paul or a disciple of his): "...all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together."(Col. l:16f.) In this context we can also mention the worcfeof Paul in Romans 8 concerning the whole creation groaning in travail., as it waits for human redemption, so that it also might be liberated from the futility God has subjected it to(cf. the Hebrew idea of a Divine curse on the earth due to human sin). On the basis of such New Testament texts, variously unitirgthe rule of Christ with the governance of the Creator, some interpreters have advanced the idea that Christ was understood by the Pauline strain of the early Christian tradition as a cosmic redeemer.

Tliis interpretation has been contested, however, and probably rightly so. There is very little evidence, in the first place, that the New Testament in general or Paul in particular accepted the notion of a cosmic fall (fallen spirits there are, but these are distinct from the biophysical order of the cosmos). How, then, can there be a "cosmic redemption". -- as distinct from a universal cosmic fulfilment implicit already in the original teleology of the Divine governance of the cosmos -- if there has been no "cosmic fall"? Nor, with the possible exception of the two texts from Mark mentioned above, concerning the wild beasts and the waters, is there any convincing evidence that early Christianity understood Jesus to have any direct redemptive effect on the greater world of nature, apart from the sin-infected milieu of human life.

,r' If the idea of a cosmic redemption seems to be missing overall in the New Testament, however, the notion of a cosmic fulfilment -- a concluding glorious chapter of the Creator's governance of the cosmos, from alpha to omega -- is not. Virtually all of the so-called "cosmic Christ" texts and Romans 8 as well, together with the teaching of Jesus, the Book of Revelation, and II Peter, presuppose and at times explictly confess a vision of a final cosmic transformation that was implicit in the Creator's original intentions for the cosmos. Indeed, Paul envisions a time when the work of the redeemer, Christ, will have come to an end, and God will be all in all(I Cor. 15:28). The Hebraic theme of the final Rest of the Creator, rejoicing in all things, could not have been all that far from Paul's conscious mind at this point.

Important confirmation of this kind of interpretation of the ecological dimension of early Christian life and thought is to be found in the theology of the greatest Christian theologian of the second century, Irenaeus of Lyon. His thought takes shape largely in response to the challenges posed to the early Church by Gnosticism(and the closely related theology of Marcion). Against the background of Gnosticism, we see how fundamentally congruent the framework of the early Christian theology of nature is with the perspective of the ~~Old Testament~~ Hebrew Bible. We can also see differences of emphasis emerging, particularly in relationship /o the experience of redemption in Christ.

Irenaeus adheres rigorously to the historical-humanistic framework Bequeathed to the early Church by<*Ti~~Old Tes~~ Hebraismo Lawirerrofe.. For this reason he has been instructively referred to as a "biblical theologian." He rejects the idea of speculating about God prior to the creation(cf. the similar silence of the Prqiestly author about any drama prior to the creation of the world). He likewise rejects any attempt, as by Marcion, to postulate two ds, one for each of the Testaments, the one evil, the other good. He strongly emphasizes the fleshly concreteness of the incarnation, moreover, and the resurrection of the body as well. He rejects the notion of a cosmic fall, furthermore, an idea that was so important for Gnosticism; he locates the matrix of sin and evil in human history' not in any sense, in matter. The whole natural creation, apart from human life, as far as Irenaeus is concerned, remains as it was created to be. Irenaeus states, to be sure, that the whole creation is made "for man's sake," not vice versa. But this staterno-tf*

sounds more anthropocentric to modern cars than it actually was. He wants to affirm the special destiny of the human creature,before God, the destiny for personal communion, and the blessings the Creator gives to the human creature graciously(this prefigures the traditiorf^fdea of "common grace"). But he apparently is not intending to suggest that serving humanity is the creation's only raison d'etre, since he understands all things as being created in harmony with each other, for the sake of a final consummation in the day of the new heavens and the new earth. Irenaeus further indicates his holistic sgnse for the place of human life in the larger scheme of cosmic history by his millenialism, his view that redemption and consummation entail a renewal of the whole visible, tangible world.

Still, Irenaeus's view of the final consummation of all things and his theology in general has a certain anthropocentric quality to them, a subtle tone of emphasis that reflects a barely visible movement away from the Hebraic kind of holistic humanism, toward a more insular anthropocentric kind of humanism. Thus Irenaeus thinks of the end-time mainly in terms of a recapitulation of the second Genesis account of creation, the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden, rather than drawing extensively from the first, the Priestly, creation account, with its comprehensive creation teleology. Irenaeus is fascinated, indeed, with the notion that Christ is the second Adam (and Mary the second Eve). Here we see the religious impact of the Redeemer figure, Christ, beginning to select out, as it were, the more anthropocentric of the two creation accounts, a process already underway in Pauline

theology(cf. Romans 5).

In early Christianity overall, then, we see the continuance of many Hebraic motifs, particularly the desacralization of nature(the radical Hebraic distinction between God and his creation was never questioned)) and the reaffirmation of nature's goodness and the universal openness of the whole creation to the creative providence of od. But, in view of other interests, many of them related to th ^redemption of humanity wrought through the Christ event, we detect a certain shifting of emphasis away from the fundamental holistic perspective of classical Hebraic faith to a more insular focus(precedents for which already existed in the Old Testament itself, especially in the Deuteronomic writings). Early Christianity surely does not devalue nature in any substantive way, except insofar as the whole present world of nature/history("this world") is devalued, at times, by the Influence of apocalypticism and/or Gnosticism. Yet nature does begin to fade somewhat from the early Christian consciousness, notwithstanding the holistic Hebraism of Jesus and the holistic visions of cosmic history found in the writings of teachers like Paul and Irenaeus.

THE LEGACY OF PATRISTIC CHRISTIANITY In the era of "the fathers," roughly the period between Irenaeus (ca. 130- ca. *200*) and Augustine (354-430), the holistic perspective of the biblical era was further qualified, this time not by a certain diminishment of interest in nature in favor of other concerns, as in the early Church, but by a substantive alteration in the course of the tradition iself, in the form of a covert dualism of nature and grace. In patristic Christianity a consciously articulated jHHsster-anthropocentric theology of grace came to the fore more and more, yet still in conjunction with a more or less holistic theology of nature.

There were some inner theological reasons why the intense focus on God and humanity, in the context of the drama of salvation, began to develop. In a sepse, the biblical theology of creation was not seen as an issue -- an assumption fraught with significance, as far as the history of our theme is concerned. The idea of God as Creator and providential ruler was widely accepted at the time, not only by Christians, but also by Stoics, Platonists, and Jews. Or so it must have seemed. What was apparently new on the Christian side was the reality of what came to be thought of as "the divinity of Christ." How could his divinity be affirmed along with the fullness of his humanity? If his divinity was to be affirmed, how could the unity of the Godhead be reestablished? And so on. Christological and trinitarian concerns, therefore, as a matter of course required much of the Church's theological energies as it sought to articulate its faith in the

But the substantive theological change we are concerned with here can be attributed at least as much to external influences as to a -sss&awki internal ^Ba (not denying a close relationship between the two). The external precipitating agent for the change from a fundamentally holistic theological humanism to a more focus, from a panoramic vision of nature/history under the governance of God,*the Creator, Rulgr, and £onsummator of all things to a covert dualism of nature and graces the influence of the Greco-Roman culture in which the Church was immersed.

From its earliest days, as Christianity established itself around the Mediterranean basin, it found itself very much a part of an "age of anxiety"(E. R. Dodds, from W. H. Auden). This era of marked cultural uncertainty, nof to say despair, was the result of a number of factors. In addition to the threat of persecution, which was its special burden, the Church found itself living in a time of increasing economic and political insecurity. The venerable pax Romana was waning. It was a time of dramatic inflation, vicious civil wars, invasions from the outside, and vast epidemics. As the external socio-political order was fragmenting, the internal socio-psychic structures of stability apparently began to give way, too. One of the expressions of this general cultural malaise was a sometimes thoroughgoing alienation from the biophysical order generally, and the human body in particular.

The most extreme expression of those anti-cosmic tendencies was probably Gnosticism and its various offshoots.

The material, order envisioned by Gnosticism was essentially a vast, nauseous prison ruled capriciously by demonic cosmic powers. Much less exaggerated but not altogether dissimilar sentiments were shared by many during this period. It was widely believed, for example, that the earth was the lowest point of the universe, the center where the mere dregs and sediment of the cosmos had come to rest, due to their excessive weight. In such a world, daily work, if it were manual labor, could only be thought of as. mindless drudgery, fit only for slaves. Anything having to do with bodily existence, indeed, tended to be looked at with some scorn. Some singled out the human body and human sexuality as especially loathesome. Thus, although the neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus self-consciously rejected Gnostic dualism and its particular view that the body is evil, he appeared nevertheless to be ashamed of having a body at all. Similar attitudes were evident especially in the "desert fathers," who had left the declining, decadent civilization of the Roman Empire behind to seek a new life of purity and contemplation in the wilderness. St. Anthony was said to have blushed anytime he had to eat or satisfy any bodily function. Other monks practiced exorbitant forms of asceticism, including, on occasion, self-castration. Women were thought of by these monks, and by many other Christians and non-Christians alike, to be peculiarly intense embodiments of the revolting and dangerous features of matter, a motif which writers like Tertullian articulated in theological terms("You are the devil's gateway."). Strikingly not just women, but female animals as well, were excluded from the sacred spiritual preserves of Mt. Athos.

This general alienation from the cosmos overall and the human body in particular was reflected by, and no doubt to some degree the result of, the attitudes toward the material world articulated by more than one school of philosophers. To be sure, classical Platonism and Stoicism articulated what has been called a "cosmic optimism." They view^the cosmos as beautiful, and in some sense as a reflection of ultimate goodness. Yet Greek thought, most characteristically its Platonic strain, presupposed a radical gulf between the intelligible world and the sensible, between the realm of immutability constituted by the Ideas or various deities, and souls. ***an*** and the realm of mutability, the material orders This is to be contrasted with the view of Hebraism and early Christianity which identified a radical gulf between the Creator and all creatures, the rational, no less than the^a-rational. Presupposing the gulf between the rational and the material realms, Greek thought readily -WWWSW treated the former as the source of being and value.

Hence a tendency arose to devalue the material world. At best the milieu of matter was thought of an instrumental for human life, and as perhaps being edifying for the journey of the soul to its immutable home apart from matter. More often> however, matter was approached mainly as an obstacle in the way of knowledge, salvation, or the good life. It was the great Plato who said, significantly and paradigmatically, that the body is a prison, a view that of course differs radically from the Hebraic, understanding of human corporality. While there were counter-tendencies in Greek thought -- in Plato's own works, particularly the Timeas; in

Aristotle's notion of form as being intrinsic in things not located in some heavenly realm; in Stoic pantheism -- n the bifurcation of the intelligible and the sensible, spirit and matter, was deeply ingrained in Greek thought, and with it the tendency to devalue the cosmic order.

nevertheless

A related aspect of Greek thinking in this regard was the tendency to absolutize the ultimate Deity or the ultimate Reality in such a way that it was totally removed from the mundane world of human experience. Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover," for example, was so remote, so immutable, so absolute, that it did not know that the world existed. Again, this philosophical view is to be contrasted with the biblical notion of a living God actively involved in the governance of the world, covering himself with the processes of nature as with a garment. Among the philosophical schools at the time, Stoicism did offer a picture of a God providentially involved in the governance of the world(a good expression of this way of thinking is to be found in the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise De Mundo). But Stoicism in this regard did not become a major factor, as far as the Hebraic-Christian tradition was concerned, due to that school's pantheistic monism, which the theological tradition consistently rejected.

apparently

One important result of the philosophical devaluation of matter and absolutizing of God, as that tendency became more and more pronounced, especially in the Platonic tradition, was the emergence of the need to postulate links between the ultimate Reality, "the One," and the finite order, "the Many." This challenge was taken up by Plotinus and others. hey set forth the idea of emanations from the One: a scale or chain of beingfthe Great Chain of Being")

extending downward from the One, through a spiritual realm of various gradations, to the material, order, and ultimately to non-being. They also envisioned the converse, a return of all the spiritual elements from their various gradations back to full unity with the One, leaving matter to be what it essentially was from the beginning, non-being.

Paradoxically, this emanation schema brought with it dual possibilities, as far as the Greco-Roman sense of cosmic alienation was concerned. It could either serve as a corrective to that alienation or as a reenforcement of it. The downward movement of the One was generally interpreted, as Plato had done, as an overflowing of Divine goodness. So Plotinus could see great beauties in the cosmos and seek to refute the dualism of the Gnostics. On the other hand, ip so far as there was a nisus or drive in the Great Chain of Being leading back up to the One, the logical impulse for anyone who took the schema seriously was to reject natter, to desire to leave the prison of the body behind, to think of matter perhaps, as Plotinus did, as an illusion, or, with somewhat less sophistication, as the matrix of evil.

This duality of perspectives -- the One as good and emanating; the One as alien and otherworldly -- suggests a further dimension of the emanation schema which should) not be overlooked. The two aspects of the One seem to be expressions of the archaic female and male principles of the religious consciousness^ in mythological terms, the Earth Goddess and the Sky God. Archetypically, the first is generative, overflowing, loving all things, intimately implicated in the material(mater) order, whereas the second stands over against the earth. The male principle is transcendent, autonomous, intellectually self-contained,

and .wholly other in virtually all essential aspects'-

The fathers lived and struggled with this Greek emanation schema, probably as court theologians at the time of David and beyond lived and struggled with the concepts and images of Canaanite religion. But the encounter with new modes of life and thought in the patristic era led to a certain marked narrowing of the theology of nature in the works of the fathers, not to a broadening as was the case for the Davidic theologians a mihenium earlier. As the tendency to affirm the matrix of nature, the realm of the female principle, in Ancient Near Eastern, culture was an occasion for the Hebraic mind to project a comprehensive vision of the goodness of nature, so the tendency to devalue nature, inspired by the spiritual male principle, in Greco-Roman culture was an occasion for the patristic mind to internalize a sense of cosmic alienation.

Hie patristic story begins most prominently with Origen(ca. 185- ca. 254), whose thought resembles Hotinus's philosophy in many ways. Origen presents the image of a world of spirits(the logikoi) in perfect communion with God in eternity. As free creatures, some of them turn away from God and fall. God creates the material world then, as a kind of gracious act, to stop their fall toward ultimate non-being. The material world for Origen is thus a result of Divine benificence in a sense, but its more fundamental raison d'etre is the fall. The material world is not a good garden, as it appears in the second Genesis creation narrative; even less is its goodness to be celebrated at every level, as in the first Genesis account. Rather, for Origen, the material world is a kind of puratory; it

would have been better if it had never been created. Accordingly, a sense of the intrinsic futility and the ultimate valuelessness of matter in itself is very much in evidence in Origen's thought. [redacted], for example, he can like the presence of rational creatures in the world to the birth of a baby, and the presence of so-called irrational creatures to the afterbirth. Also, more substantively, the ultimate ending of the Divine Economy, as Origen depicts it, is the return of the rational creatures to perfect communion with God in eternity and the falling away of the material order into nothingness or non-being which was its essential origin in the first place.

Origen's thought was challenged by other theologians,- almost immediately. But, it should be noted, as far as the theology of nature is concerned, it was chiefly Origen's view of the creation of the world that was of concern to his opponents, not so much his schemaCitation of the final consummation.

One of the important corrections of Origen's theology of creation came into the tradition through the commentary on Genesis 1, the Hexaemeron, by Basil the Great(ca. 330-379). Irenaeus had already identified the Third Person of the Trinity, the Spirit, with the Wisdom of God, that is, with the creative and integrative governance of the cosmos by God. Basil takes up this motif in his Genesis commentary, highlighting the feminine, immediately present, generative aspect of the Deicy: "How did the Spirit of God move on the waters? ...it cherished the nature of the waters as one sees a bird cover the eggs with her body and impart to them vital force from her own warmth." Basil also

identifies the Spirit with the World Soul of platonic philosophy, that is, with the immanent, animating principle of the whole material order. We see here, then, a much more convincing, much more accurate, statement of the creative goodness of G_od, as depicted in Gensis, than the strained allegorical interpretation put forward by Origen.

The first chapters of Genesis also fascinated Augustine. He returned to them again and again, beginning with his work agains the Manicheans and ending with the eleventh and twelfth chapers of his monumental City of God. Augustine displays a rich sense for the goodness of creation, of nature in particular. His works are full of lavish praise for the beauties of nature. Against some detractors, moreover, he maintains that not all things were created for the sake of humzuL-utility; God has his reasons in fashioning some things that we do not always know(here Augustine picks up nuances from Psalm 104). Also, Augustine thinks of the involvement of the Creator with the world of nature concretely and intimately. He likens the Creator to a shepherd or a husbandman. He depicts the Spirit of God, too, in terms of the active Wisdom of God, much as Basil and Irenaeus had done(although he seems to stop short of identifying the Spirit with the immanent World Soul as Basil did). The tone of his appreciation for creation can be seen in a paraphrase of Genesis 1:31, where he affirms the goodness of all things, of the universe as a whole,, all the more so/ "These things we behold, and they are severally good, and altogether they are very good." Along the way, as we might we11 expect him to have done, Augustine self-consciously rejects Origen's

view of creation

a cosmic fall.

Wien Augustine turns from the movement of the Creator toward the created and within the created, however, to the return of the created to the Creator, he seems to be curiously silent, relatively speaking, about the natural order. He seems to anticipate a consummation of all things at the very end of time, but he does not dwell on that theme. More particularly, he has a low opinion of the human body, particularly the female body, and he continually recommends virginity as a path to heaven. His view of the final state of things, furthermore, seems to be, as a matter of emphasis at least, mainly if not totally spiritual. The triumphant City of %d, the company of the blessed brothers and sisters, will stand before the throne of God, transmuted in their spiritual bodies. That seems to be Augustine's most passionately projected image of the end-time, rather thqn any picture of cosmic renewal surrounding a Messianic Banquet such as we find in the New Testament. Paradigmatically, the heavenly activity has changed from banqueting ^in the middle of a renewed cosmos, to contemplating God in a state of spiritual perfection. Augustine's famous statement in his Soliloquies points in the same direction: "God and the soul, that is what I desire to know, nothing more." All this is undoubtedly related to Augustine's doctrine of election, which is concerned with the destiny of the human creature alone(irrational animals, etc. are not elected), and envisions the establishment of Chat destiny in eternity prior to the creation of the world (a motif which we will see appearing again in John Calvin and Karl Barth, with similar effects). When Augustine turns to the arena of grace, in other words,

as distinct from the arena of nature-; when he becomes more attentive to the return of the created to the Creator; the motion toward unity with God at the pinacle of the Great Chain of Being, as distinct from the overflowing of God's creative goodness*, then his rich sense for nature's integrity and goodness is noticeable by its absence. In the context of grace, nature seems to be of value for Augustine, at most, as that which can help the soul return to itself and thence to od, who -- as far as the finality of the universe is concerned -- is essentially exalted high above the world of nature. More particularly, and more negatively, in the context of grace Augustine sees the human body, particularly the female body, as an obstacle in the way that has to be overcome. In the context of grace, in a word, one can hear discordant notes in Augustine's theology of nature that are reminiscent of Origen's cacaphonous expressions about the material order.

Mat is emergirg here is a covert dualism of nature and grace, already prefigured in the duality of aspects we noted in the emanation schema of thinkers like Plotinus. It is a covert dualism because the material world is seen as good, qua overflow of the Divine Goodness, and because the material order is seen as having its own integrity in the eyes of God, even to the point of attaining some -- minimally depicted -- final consummation. It is a covert dualism because the essential goodness of nature seems to become of less and less significance in the sphgre of grace. Grace for Augustine tends to be a highly insular, anthropocentric concept. Grace, it seems, has to do primarily, if not exclusively, with spiritual reality

not natural reality. Depending, moreover, on how one interprets Augustine's concern for his theology of grace,— and some would say it represents the inner drive of his thought, to which everything else is subservient,— this covert dualism of nature and grace may be seen as even more pronounced than we have viewed it here.

Perhaps the final word from the patristic period,— as we now see it moving from the east into the Latin middle ages,—was spoken not by Augustine, but by his mentor, Ambrose(ca. 339-397). The two had much in common, including thdr interest in the first chapters of Genesis, their praises for the beauties of nature at large, and, at the same time, their low estimate of the human body, particular^ the female body. At the end of his own Hexaemeronfmuch indebted to Basil's work), Ambrose takes up the question why God rested on the seventh day. Now, the preceding verse states, as Augustine clearly recognized but Ambrose apparently did not, that God saw everything he had made, not just the human creature, and pronounced everything "very good." Commenting on the next verse, which is concerned with God resting, Ambrose -- with no evident warrant in the text itself -- essays that God rests "in man," as a sign of things to come, indeed "in man" as a rational creature destined for grace: "He found repose in the deep recesses of man, in man's mind and purpose, for He had made man with the power of reasoning, an imitayor of Himself, a striver after virtue, and one eager for heavenly grace.... I read that he made man and then found rest in one whose sins he would remit.... It may well be that He had given a symbolic picture then of the future passion of the Lord, thus

revealing that in many one day Christ would find repose."

The legacy of the patristic period with regard to the theology of nature thus seems to be twofold: 1) a renewal of a holistic view of God's originating creativity, here strongly influenced by the first chapter of Genesis, in marked contrast to the dualism of Gnosticism or Manicheanism and the general cosmic alienation prevalent in the Greco-Roman world during the period; 2) an assimilation of certain dualistic elements generally present in the culture, particularly as they were articulated by thinkers like Plotinus and Origen, resulting in an anthropocentric view of God's redeeming and consummating activity. The motif of a new heavens and a new earth understood as a Divine goal implicit in the creation from the very beginning thus apparently falls to the wayside. The Divine Rest, whichfor the Priestly writer apparently had signaled the promise of a fulfilment for all the things that God had created, now becomes, as Ambrose's vivid commentary shows, a symbol for human redemption alone.

HIE MEDIEVAL RESOLUTION From Augustine in the fifth century to Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth, the emergence of th e [redacted] t^ecnlogTca1 humanism we have been tracing continued. Indeed, in this period it became the dominating motif in the Christian consciousness, as far as nature was concerned. The covert dualism of nature and grace that became visible in the patristic period not only becomes fully established in the Middle Ages, but the anthropocentric, spiritualizing view of grace turns back, as it were, to shape the Church's understanding of nature qua created. k see the Christian pilgrim embraced by grace, having left the world of nature behind, with his or her eyes contemplating the heavenly Jerusalem ahead. We see this pilgrim pause, turn around, and begin to survey the world of nature once again, with the sense -- "all this beauty and richness is for my sake." That seems to be the last word of the high Middle Ages. We detect a certain return to nature, as to a foreign realm once left behind, but now reclaimed entirely for the voyager. Indeed, we can even see a curious kind of romanticism emerging, that allows the pilgrim to see the alien world he or she had left behind with a new kind of esthetic passion.

Until the twelfth century, when these trends became fully established, the world of nature seemed in the main to be, indeed, the way of pilgrimage, as far as the Church was concerned. This no doubt was related to the stark economic and political conditions of the early Middle Ages. In this context the sense of cosmic alienation that permeated the late Roman Empire readily became a fixed part of the Christian consciousness, already (ArkerfCc-d.

have identified.

For whatever reasons, in the early Middle Ages the celebrations of the beauty and the bounty of nature that could be found in the writings of Basil, Ambrose, and Augustine, were not generally forthcoming. In their l'l.e.i.e.s yiiTnilii.gini- iitea er=.Yhy. we meet the moralizing bestiaries, herbals, and lapidaries, handbooks for the interpretation of the natural world conceived, sometimes bizarrely, as a world of symbols that points toward the heavenly mysteries of human salvation. Meanwhile, at a more esoteric level, the anti-cosmic theological schema of Origin appeared in a new guise in the writings of John the Scotfca. 810- ca. 877), who also translated the spiritualizing neoplatonic work's of Dionysius the Areopagite(ca. 500). And, as the hexaemeral literature continued, exegetes pondered what was to them the first chapter of Genesis's strange silence about the angels and heaven.

Almost imperceptibly during these centuries of worldly uncertainty and strife, during this epoch of otherwordly, spiritual struggle, a new movement was being born, which was profoundly to affect Western Christendom^ Benedictline monasticism. Benedict himself(ca. 480-ca. 550) had been disallusioned with the mostly solitary and frequently severe asceticism which had flowed into the West from the Christian Fast. In keeping with the practical, even militarized, Roman spirit, he founded a communal monastic ism whose ascetic rule «a a e stninurmWrytt = fop- t41 n e was to be relatively modest, but highly disciplined. The new communal monasticism of Benedict was to be predicated on work, that is, action more than contemplation, both in the form of communal worship and -- what hitherto had been widely scorned -- manual labor.

In otherwords,

This was no longer the inner journey of the contemplative in the desert, seeking to recapture the state of Adam in paradise through worldly denial, this was much more the venturing forth of the militia Christi, the spiritual children of Israel, wanderirg through the wilderness toward the promised land. In due course communities of Benedictines literally did go out into the wilderness areas of Europe and began to tame nature for the purposes of their own survival. This, too, was thought of as a spiritual pilgrimage and that it was. But it was c[e facto, if not by intention, a world-transforming not a world-denying pilgrimage, ^he Benedictine movement, in addition to ardent faith in God's guidance in this life, evidently presupposed a deep confidence in the powers that the human creature could exercise over nature. How much this was do to the afore-mention, militarized Roman spirit, how much it was due now to an appropriation of the anthropocentric patristic view of grace, and how much it was due to a new awareness of the ~~Old Testament~~ Hebrew theme of Israel in the wilderness, not to speak of the sometimes anarchic socio-political conditions of the period, is not clear.

Benedictine monasticism has recently been celebrated by scholars such as Lewis Mumfoid and Rene Dubos as offering a model for ecological responsibility. The Benedictine movement, we are told, neither turned away from nature nor ruthlessly exploited nature; it exercised "creative stewardship of the earth."(Dubos) This seems to be an apt description of the Benedictine approach to nature. But. whether this model of ecological responsibility was developed on the basis of some sense of nature's own

whether it was developed more as a matter of practical necessity for isolated communities that had to be totally self-sufficient, is not clear. Was this a manifestation of the holistic Hebraic sense of dominion, *oTfaruorcl*?* of caring for the earth as well as reaping its fruits? Or was it more an unavoidable commitment to survival inspired by the model of ^oman efficiency? Probably it was some mixture of the two.

The twelfth century was a watershed in the Middle Ages in many ways. The. feudal monopoly of the soil began to break up, and with that the Static character of social organization began to change. Urban artisans, at the same time, began to organize into guilds. New techniques of production(many of them long established in the monasteries)- and new extensions of commerce were being undertaken. Intellectually, the century witnessed a revival of classical learning, particularly a renewal of interest in Platonism, fostered by the famous school at Chartes. The century also saw some of the first sustained stirrings of Western scientific curisity. This was reflected in the art of the era, especially in the Gothic capitals which changed from the most minimal representations of empirical nature to a much more vivid kind of naturalistic realism.

A new sense for human competence and human ability to understand and master the world seemed to be burgeoning everywhere.

Alan of Lille(ca. 1128-1202), a theologian of considerable stature in this period(he was called the doctor universalis), articulated and developed many of these new sensibilities. One or his most influential works, at leastliterary history^<&8=asa=Fgcgg&d(it helped set the stage for Dante and our theme is

concerned. The De planctu Naturae -- "The Lament of Mature" -- is an allegorical poem about the virgin goddess Nature, a figure whose literary and philosophical history seems to stem from the Earth Goddess cults that flourished in the Greco-Roman worlds uiJ, flrtii [illegible] Alan describes Nature's beauty and the fecundity of her world. The purpose of the poem is to contrast her purity and beauty with the desecrations imposed on her and her world by human sinfulness.

Alan takes the idea of the Great Chain of Being for granted, as virtually all thinkers did in the Middle Ages. [illegible] But he depicts that hierarchy of being with great poetic power and sensual concreteness, which shows hew a relatively staid philosophical conceptuality such as this could take on existential life. He describes the heavens first of all,"as the citadel of a human city, {where} resides imperially the everlasting Ruler." From f/im goes out the command that all things should be known and written in the book of his providence. Then, "in the air, as in the middle of the city, the heavenly army of angels does service, and with delegated control diligently extends its guard over man. Man, like one foreign born, dwelling in a suburb of the universe, does not refuse obedience to the angelic host."

Finally, even fur th ery rTFom (removed) the citadel of God, it seems, God creates a beautiful material universe, which is the domain OL Nature. In so doing, God ins tills a marvelous sensuous harmony in the whole: "And thus He united with mutual and fraternal kisses things antagonistic from the opposition of their properties, between which the space had made its room from the contraries, and He changed the

strife of hatred into the peace of friendship. All things, then, agreeing through invisible bonds of union, plurality returned to unity, diversity to identity, dissonance to harmony, discord to concord in peaceful agreement."

This is clearly a nature-affirming and nature-celebrating poem. Among other things lan describes the goddess's virgin body sensuously, and her domain, particularly copulation among the animals, with a tangible, erotic joy. The esthetic legacy of Basil, Ambrose, and Augustine was thereby revived; no, more than revived, it was exuberantly extended. In Alan's thought there is virtually no sign of any idea of a cosmic fall; nor do we encounter the kind of anti-cosmic attitudes that were sometimes evident even in thinkers such as the aforementioned three.

On the other hand, the theological framework in which this celebration of nature appears is one that has already insured that the female Natura will be totally subservient too, and separated from, the exalted male Creator. She does nothing, is nothing, in her domain in the distant exurbs of the heavenly city, apart from his command. Alan states this in so many words; and then he also underlines the point at the end of his poem, by showing how Natura(here also a type for the Church) is rightfully subservient, totally, to the priest figure Genius.

In Alan's work the covert dualism of nature and grace we have been tracing becomes overt -- yet, paradoxically, in a way that affirms the positive Value of that which has here been self-consciously subordinated to God, the angels, and human reason. The dualism we have to do with here, in other words, is not an ontological dualism(such as the

Gnostic view), by any means. It is rather a dualism of value. Nature's goodness, it turns out, is a markedly inferior kind of goodness. Alan expresses this succinctly in a formula in his Theologicae Regulae. Irrational creatures, he says, are good only with regard to the beginning (ah alpha) . Rational creatures, on the other hand, whose beatitude is . the reason why the world was created in the first place, are good both with regard to the beginning and with regard to the end(ex alpha et omega). Nature may be beautiful and sensuous, in other words, but she has her definite place, subordinate to and instrumental for, the world of rational creatures and their destiny to be partakers of grace.

Further, there is evidence in Alan's thought of a certain removal of God's creative activity from the material order, that is, yet another nuance of the masculine being elevated above the femine. Surely Alan believes that God creates all things and that nature is totally dependent on God. Yet in his thought nature begins to take on a certain detached independence, a certain self-contained character in its subordinated place. Earlier, as we saw, Irenaeus and Basil had identified the universally animating World Soul of Platonism with the Spirit of God, thus underlining the generative feminine aspects of God. Alan seems to do this, but only in a state of theological tension, since the Holy Spirit as a coequal person in the Trinity could hot long remain in the rankly subordinated position of the goddess Natura(or the World Soul). As a matter of fact, the idea that the HolySpirit is the World Soul was finally condemned in the twelfth century. This sealed a development that had been underway for some time: the

Deity in effect became, more archetypically masculine than ever, leaving the feminine aspects of creativity more and more to the crefturely world of nature. The dualism we are concerned with here, then, is not only a dualism of nature and grace, it is also, as should be evident by now, a dualism of the feminine and masculine principles.

The same kind of celebration of the feminine, yet seeing it always in a subordinate position, is evident elsewhere in the twelfth century. This was the century, interestingly, that saw the birth of courtly love. In this milieus the woman was idealized and sought after, but the model for the relationship was the lord relating to the vassal; and, for all its eros, the relationship was, ideally, never to be consummated. Why? There are tocvloI many answers to this question, but one of the most convincing seems to be that the knight is too worthy, too superior, to lower himself to the level of fleshly existence. He, like the celibate priest or monk, has a higher, spiritual calling. He may begin, full of passion for his lady, prompted by the airs of Spring (the time of year when many of the stories of courtly love begin), but his fulfilment is not in the coppreal world. At best, the fleshly world of women and nature is a kind of beautiful ladder which he uses to climb toward the Infinite. (This kind of analysis of courtly love would have to be pushed even further if Denis De Rougemont is right in identifying the troubadors with the dualistic, quasi-Manichean Catharist heresy which was very much alive at the

It is also interesting to observe that the twelfth century witnessed a remarkable intensification of Marian devotion. The Madonna who was the center of all this attention, it seems, was a much more "natural" or fleshly Madonna than ever before. In the art of the period a much more accessible, earthly Mary begins to appear: mother and baby begin to turn slightly toward each other, prefiguring the "very human" Madonnas of the Italien renaissance. For what appears to be the first time, moreover, the erotic Song of $ongs was interpreted totally with regard to Mary^ by Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1070-1129): "Your creator has become your spouse.... Hurry^to meet him that you may be kissed with the mouth of God." he rise of this kind of sensuous Marian devotion among Cjfrher things reflects the fact that the incarnate Christ had been more or less effectively removed from the concrete mundane world, to the right hand of the Father, where he sat with him in regal patriarchal splendor as the final Judge. Yet here, as in the case of courtly love, it is clear that the fleshly world of femininity, embedded in the world of nature, is at best a beautiful occasion, a passionately attractive instrument, to allow the soul to continue on its journey to be with God and his Son in heaven. ~~Mary remains eternally the Virgin, the gateway to heaven.~~ On the other hand, insofar as Mary is seen in heaven, the whole earthly sensuous world of nature, is at least implicitly vindicated in that respect, even taken up into heaven, for all eternity.

If courtly love and Marian devotion show the positive use of the subordinated earthy-feminine dimension of Medieval experience, other tendencies reveal how the subordinated earidqly-feminine could

once again, in Tertuliian's words, "the Devil's gateway,"—
rather than the gateway to heaven. This shows that
the anti-cosmLc spirit of the patristic period and the
early Middle Ages had not really been overcome in
the twelfth century, but only held in check, as it were,
by means of the dramatic subordination of nature to
grace, matter to spirit. ***I*** So, for example, in the thirteenth century.
Andreas Capellanus, a priest, wrote a strange but
influential treatise on courtly love. The first two
books of the treatise were a kind of introduction to
and a manual for courtly love. With a completely
different tone, the third book pointed to the love of
God as the only source of good, and to women as weak,
vicious, and finally dangerous to the soul, ^uring the
same period the monk Bernard of Morlaix wrote his widely
read satire "On the Contempt of the World," inveighing
against various impieties and also cursing women for
their insatiable sensuality. This mentality came to
a kind of esthetic fruition in Germany during the
next century in the figure of Frau Welt.which appeared
in the portal sculpture of many Churches(this figure
has strong affinities with the earlier architectural
figure, "The Prince of this Word," the Devil). On the
front she is attractive, and shows an alluring aristo-
cratic smile. Behind she is being eaten by worms and
frogs and snakes. Frau Welt,it seems, is the Doppelganger
of the goddess Nature, the courtly Lady, the earthy
accessible Maddnna. Frau Welt reveals the back side,
as it were, of the romantic naturalism of the high
Middle Ages.

A similar duality, although murh mm-a <—

and much less exaggerated, can be seen in the works of medieval mystics. Students of mysticism have identified two general cross-cultural types of mystical piety: "Hie extrovertive experience looks outward through the senses, while the introvertive looks inward into the mind."(Stace) This roughly corresponds to the two movements in the Great Chain of Being we have alreay footed, from the One to the Many, from the Many to the One. It also corresponds to the nature-grace dualism we have been considering. The first type of mystic finds God overflowing into his creatures; the second seeks God in regal, absolute isolation. Mechthild of Magdeburg(ca. 1210- ca. 1280) seems to represent the first: "Whoso knows my Freedom," she heard a Divine voice saying to her, "cannot bear to love me alone, he must also love me in the creatures." Bonaventura(1221-1274) seems to place himself in the more introvertive class: "Creation is nothing but a kind of statue of God's wisdom. When a soul sees that, it ' understands that it should pass from the 'shadow[1]* to light, from the way, to the end of the way, from 'trace' to truth, from the Book to the true knowledge which is in God." Once again we see the duality of the medieval apperception of nature: it can be a world in which to love God, or it can be a world of shadows.

It would be too much to say, as we survey all these developments, that the seminal theology of the great Dominican doctor, Thomas Aquinas(1225-1274), is only a synthetic theological commentary on general medieval attitudes toward nature. But in a sense this is true, beginning with the view of nature put forward by Alan of Lille. Of ^te^LTtienne Gilson, the eminent medieval

historian and interpreter of Thomas, has said: "it expresses the Christian idea of nature common to practically all medieval theologians." On the other hand, Thomas's view of nature surely deserves out attention, in view of his later importance, if for no other reason.

At least two major differences obtain between Alan in the twelfth century and Thomas in the thirteenth; first, Thomas's Aristotelianism(Alan was a Platonist); second his extensive philosophical-theological consistency and completeness. If nature in the twelfth century was beginning to be set apart from Dod in a somewhat self-contained position, this tendency was accented even more by Thomas, under the influence of Aristotelian metaphysics. For Aristotle, simply expressed, the form is in. the individual; it is not so much a part of a heavenly realm in which individual tmngs participate to have their reality. /a *arcler'* *A* This tends to define nature, by and large, as an autonomous realm. Thomas accepts this nuance, while at the same time attempting to balance it with the theme *of-* the Divine causality the presupposition of all secondary causality. How autonomous nature actually is in Thomas's view is perhaps a matter for debate; that it assumes a rather distinct kind of autonomy, particularly in contrast to the Flatonic-Augustinian view, seems to be clear.

Along with this new Aristotelian approach to nature Thomas essentially reproduces the framework of Alan according to which the material order is good ab alpha whereas the ratiori^order is good ex alpha et omega: "Now the final perfection, which is the end of the whole universe, is the perfect beatitude of the saints at thn

consummation, of the world; and the first perfection is the completeness of the universe at its first founding, and this is ascribed to the seventh day."

In this overall framework, Thomas also re-presents Alan's celebration of nature in itself, although in a characteristically much more sober way. He cites Basil's statement that the Holy Spirit brooded over the primal waters, like a hen over her chickens, Mid, strikingly, he attributes a certain kind of esthetic joy to God as God is creating the world(this picks up a theme which seems to pervade Genesis 1).

Still, Thomas firmly believes, as Man did, that all irrational creatures were made "for the sake of man," to provide him a place of habitation and food, on the one hand, and as an aid to knowing God. In the end-time, accordingly, it will be chiefly the human creatures among the many material creatures, who will be consummated. First of all, according to Thomas, the four material elements will be renew* in order to have a fitting renewal of man's body, which is composed of those elements. But plants and animals will not be renewed. They will disappear when all things are consummated. Thus the Thorn!stic principle that "grace does not destroy nature but perfects it" turns out to be markedly anthropocentric, even dualistic in the end, at least as far as the biosphere is concerned. For, in effect, grace does destroy the plants and animals.

Against this background of a dualism of nature and grace, predicated on an anthropocentric and spiritualizing -- soma would also say androcentric -- view of nature, which we have seen at both sophisticated and popular levels, we approach the much celebrated figure of St. Francis of Assisi(1182-112c] with a certain reserve. Francis undoubtedly was a revolutionary figure. His attitude toward nature, for which he is perhaps most famous, ns surely •~~CTrnrssTbo-»be~~ appealing to moderns who have [redacted] experienced both the ravages of industrialism and the ecstacies of the romantic poets and philosophers £ mostly unable to escape the first and unable to attain the seconcj). ^here is no prima facie reason to believe, however, that Francis, notwithstanding his captivating Hymn to the ^un, in which he addressed the fire as brother and the earth as sister, notwithstanding his legendary sermons to the birds and.,his taming of the wolf, — that the humble saint overcame the dualism of nature and grace we have been considering.

The motif of the holy man taming the animals, to begin with, is a familiar one in the Western theological tradition, with roots in the time of the desert fathers. It presupposes a genuine harmony with nature, to be sure; but that can easily be accounted for by the kind of schema developed by lan of Lille. In short, the motif of harmony with the animals may be quite anthropocentric, related more to the second Genesis creation narrative than to the first. Further, Francis's asceticism, particularly with regard to his own body, and his steadfast, unquestioning acceptance of the celibate life, while surely not out of the ordinary in his time, nevertheless suggest that the medieval --GSUt x of the material order, above all the fleshly feminine, may rejection

have been a part of Francis's life-history, at least unconsciously.

On the other hand, the self-authenticating power of the ymn to the un is undeniable. So is the symbolic power of his attention to a very earthly Christ figure, who was born in the midst of animals (it was Francis who first invited the "manger scene"). For such a sensitivity to nature, particularly as that is expressed in his hymn, one probably has to return to Psalm 104, with its celebration of the goodness and integrity of nature, in order to find a poem of equal vision and power. Perhaps Francis's radical devotion to the earthly incarnate Christ of the Gospels gave him the insight and intuition to allow him to transcend the nature-grace dualism of the medieval mind and return to the fullness of the holistic biblical vision of nature. But, in fact, we know so little about Francis that it is difficult to.reach any convincing conclusions, one way or the other.

THE AMBIGUOUS WITNESS OF THE REFORMATION It has been debated whether the Reformation is best viewed as an essentially medieval or a modern development. While not wanting to deny the legitimacy of that discussion, what seems most striking from the perspective of our theme is another line of historical continuity. The Reformers thought of themselves as returning to a more biblical kind of Christianity than was available to them in the Middle Ages. Some were convinced that they had been able to leap over a millenium and a half of Church history to rediscover and then reinstate the faith of the early Church in the sixteenth century. Be that as it may, it does seem, from a twentieth century vantage point, that there are some noteworthy continuities between biblical religion and the thought and life of the Reformation, continuities which set this manifestation of the Hebraic-Chris tian tradition apart from both the patristic and the medieval segments of the tradition" that is, at least ajrfj regard to the theology of nature. In Reformation thought, especially in Luther, we encounter a certain return to the holistic humanism of biblical theology. On the other hand, most dramatically perhaps in Calvinism, we can see some of the trends we have identified in the Middle Ages being given a new dynamism, prefiguring modern developments.

Luther's theology is certainly humanistic, in the sense that we have used that expression. The center of his theology is the gracious relationship of God to the human creature. For Luther, justification by faith is the key theological experience and the key theological doctrine, and it has to do exclusively and unashamedly with

God and humanity. In this regard, Luther stands very much with Augustine, for whom grace was an overpowering and identity-forming realityYet for Luther, in contrast to Augustine, grace does not mean entering into a process, into a pilgrimage, which is ultimately, through perseverance, to lead the believer to fullness of grace in heaven. Luther breaks with that kind of pilgrimage-view of grace. His doctrine of justification means that the believer now, in this present world, is blessed with fullness of grace. This corresponds to Luther's view of creation. "I believe that God has created me," he writes in his summary of the first article of the creed in his Small Catechism, "together with all creatures." That motif "together with" is characteristic of both his understanding of redemption and his understanding of creation. It is also characteristic of Luther's understanding of God. Luther knows no other God than the God who is extepsively active in the cosmos, as well as in world history and the particular history of the Church. Indeed Luther has a vivid sense for a continuing creation(creatio con£inua), which sets him apart from many of his medieval forebears who, as a matter of course, distinguished sharply between creation and providence. In this sense there is both a "realized eschatology" and a "realized protology" in Lutcher's thought and experience. In Luther's view both the fullness of the life of grace and the fullness of the life of nature are offered to the believer through his or her faith.

One way to begin to understand the distinctness of Luther's theology of nature as it takes shape, in the larger whole of thought about creation and redemption is to consider one of his famous -- to some inf^ous -- epithets.

With characteristic directness Luther once opined that "reason is a whore." When he said this he was not primarily venting some anti-intellectual sentiments(although he may have been doing that, too), he was expressing a thoroughly thought through theological commitment he had made to break with dualism of nature and grace that he had inherited from the Middle Ages. He was well aware that the statement was as revolutionary as it was pithy. He was, indeed, -- to use a figure that has been employed instructively in other contexts -- standing the Middle $ges on its head. For Luther, it was not matter(with its archetypical associations with the feminine) that is the chief threat to authentic life before God, Matter is not the whore. Reason is.

More particularly, Luther challenges the whole venerable conceptuality of the Great Chain of Being. To begin with, he repudiates the search for God "in the heavens," the way of speculation. For Luther, the only God human beings know is the God who encounters them in his activity in, with, and under the material order, in the "mediated immediacy"(John Bailie) of the mundane world. In this connection Luther totally rejects the idea that angels have any role to play in God's creative governance of the world. Augustine, Alan, and Thomas all maintained that God alone created the world; but that point was made with reference to %d's originating creativity. With regard to God^s providential creativity, his governance of the world, they introduced the idea ths^t

God rules through the mediati-„c t, 4 „ -1- TL:. -C

course, was in keeping with the schema of the Great Chain of Being. Luther rejects all that and assigns the agency of governance in the created order to God alone. In this respect, the God depicted by Luther has a certain tangibly apparent generative-feminine aspect, a theme which we saw lose importance in the Middle Ages. Luther takes Basil's notion of the creative brooding of the Spirit with a thoroughgoing seriousness. He envisions God as flowing into the world, shaping it intricately, embracing all things, like a mother bird on her nest calling fotth her chicks by the warmth of her body. On the other hand, for Luther God also has terrible aspects in nature. But this is also a biblical motif, evident for example in Ps^J-m 29. Like the Psalmist, Luther recognizes that God has purposes in and for the world of nature than are insczxstable, even alien to human life. But whether beautiful and wondrous or mysterious and fearful, for Luther the whole creation is "the mask of God." It is pulsating with the imm^iate power and presence and goodness of the transcendent Creator.

The human criiature, like the Creator, in Luther's view, is deeply immersed in the created order. Luther envisions Adam and Eve enjoying a common table with the animals, and -- in a context where countless doctors of the Church had celebrated the grandeur of reason as the image of God -- Luther states that Adam and Eve's greatness was the fact that they walked about naked.

In this connection, whatever one may think overall about Luther's attitudes towar,{marriage, the significance of his rejection of the heaven-bent world of monastic celibacy and his uncertain but passionate entrance into the fleshly

world of matriiaony cannot be overestimated, as far as his theology of nature is concerned. It signals his refusal to recognize a denatured heavenly realm, a world of spirit, which is the human creature's created destiny. He sought his humanity before God in a consummation with the flesh. If, further, one sees the medieval Frau Welt as one extreme but not altogether unexpected expression of the anti-cosmic sentiments embedded in so much of patristic and medieval thought, than Luther's entry into marriage is nothing less than an act of public prophecy, announcing God's love for the sexual, and the material order in general.

This is not to suggest that Luther was some kind of a cosmic optimist. On the contrary, he had a deep sense of the sinfulness of human life, and he saw that sinfulness as radically effecting human life in nature. He continually remarks how weak the human creature is, even how the various bodily faculties have been diminished in power by human sinfulness(in the garden Adam saw better than we do today, for example). Also, as a child of his era, Luther's world was peopled with legions of demons, evil powers which could twist natural processes to their own purposes. Indeed, Luther seemed to feel that human sinfulness and the reign of demons was increasing; perhaps indicating the nearing of the end-time. But this kind of thinking should not be confused with any notion of a cosmic fall; nor should it be equated with Greco-^oman ideas that the world was "running down," that the material order was decaying, prior to a firey collapse and a return to a primordial beginning. Luther's sometimes dreary, despairing

in biblical terms as reflecting both Luther's vivid sense for the Wrath of God and his acceptance of the Divine curse motif from the Book of Genesis. Since human identity for Luther is so much a part of the fabric of nature, it would have been surprising if he had not depicted nature as in some sense an alien reality, given his strong doctrine of human sinfulness. Luther ha4 a holistic understanding of sinful humanity's life in nature, no less than hug^nity's life in nature qua creation, as originally intended by God.

In the context of his understanding of salvation, Luther's theology of nature again shows its holistic character. Here we encounter one of his least understood but perhaps most innovative doctrine, the ubiquity of the risen, ascended Christ. This theme is, like others, intimately related to his rejection of the conceptuality of the Great Chain of Being. No longer is Christ seen as removed, as lifted to the highest pinacle of the hieranhy, seated at the exalted right hand of God in patriarchal splendor. For, the Creator himself is not removed at the pinacle. So Luther says: "the right hand of God is Everywhere." It follows, then* if Christ is at the right hand of God, then Christ is everywhere, too. This idea may be questionable in various ways, but it surely shows how hospitable, in Luther's way of thinking, the whole of nature is to the power and the presence of grace. This also comes to expression in Luther's related understanding of the incarnation, in his high valuation of the humanity of Christ. Luther stands in the

influenced by St. Bernard at this point). He consistently emphasized the concreteness of Jesus's humanity, the accessibility of God to the faithful in Jesus's humanity, in, with, and under the tangible flesh of Jesus. As the ascended one, for Luther, Jesus is correspondingly present in the immedicacy of mundane experience.

Luther accordingly depicts the life of the redeemed as a new life in nature, in addition to everything else: "Erasmus does not concern himself with this; it interests him little how the fetus is made and formed and developed in the womb.... but by God's mercy we can begin to recognize His wonderful works and wonders also in the flowers, when we ponder his might and goodness." In this context Luther also identifies manual labor as a good, for the redeemed life. This theme of work is congruent with everything else he has to say about the new life of the Christian in nature. His image of work has a certain static character to it; it is rooted in his understanding of the human creature's immanence in the earth. The notion of work as mastery of nature for the sake of amassing signs of Divine blessing would not come to the fore in the Reformation tradition until later, in Calvinism. Luther things of work more as husbandry of the earth, from which one harvests the fruits of Divine blessing, rather than as accumulating a storehouse of achievements or a storehouse of wealth (as a matter of course, Luther onnn=°'¹ ■"

Once Luther was asked what he would do if the world were going to end. He said, "I would plant an apple tree." his is the kind of meaning work has for Luther-, a faithful care of nature until the end-time, trusting God for the fruits of the earth. When the final day does come, moreover, Luther envisions a cosmic renewal of incredibly beautiful proportions. Grace here finally takes the whole material order under its wings, in contrast to the anthropocentric, insular consummation depicted by Thomas, for example. For Luther, to use the medieval terminology, the "irrational" as well as the "rational" creatures are good, not only ex alpha but also ex omega.

John Calvin(1509-1564) developed a theology which, retrospectively, seems to have been much more a bridge between the medieval and modern epochs than Luther's was. Calvin's image of God as Creator and his -companion vision of the created order was holistic, in many ways. He, too, rejected the conceptuality of the Great Chain of Being as formative for a theology of creation. Calvin sees the immediate effects of the power and wisdom and goodness of God in all things. His view of the creation is anthropcentric in some respects, holistic in others. Thus, for example, he steers clear of Ambrose's anthropocentric interpretation of the Divine Rest in Genesis 1: Jiff., describing the Divine Good Pleasure and, subsequently, the Divine Rest, as having to do not just with human life, but with the entire cosmos, its symmetry, its completion in all parts, its "highest perfection." Calvin also states on more than one occasion that the whole creation is the theatre of God's glory — and he thinks of this quite tangibly, as a

mirror. He remarks, too, that "it can be said reverently that nature is God" -- so dependent is the cosmos on the will of the Creator in every respect.

On the other hand, for reasons that are not altogether clear(perhaps having something to do with Calvin's humanistic education and a certain influencejfhe Greek dichotomy of spirit and matter), the image of God that Calvin projects is, in nuance at least, on occasion quite dramatically, much more transcendent, much more removed from mundane experience, although always powerfully exercising his will in that context. More specifically, Calvin rejected Luther's idea that the right hand of God is everywhere^« that is to say, .the Godhead seems to have a kind of fixed place. Further, although the point has sometimes been overdone, Calvin's God does have a stern patriarchal countenance at times, as far as Providence is concerned. For talvin, the absolute sovereignty of God is a recurrent theological emphasis, beginning with the inexplicable Divine decision in heaven to elect some and to damn others. Indeed, it seems on occasion that the Male Sky God of the archaic religious consciousness has taken over^ as Calvin's muse. Luther's thought shows similar nuances, from time to time, but these are generally balanced by his image of the Creator Spirit brooding throughout the world and by his understanding of the incarnation as the utter self-emptying(kenosis) of God's power and love, as it were, into the child on Mary's lap. In Calvin's thought, here again' in contrast to Luther' s,—there is also an identifiable body-soul dualism that parallels the emphasis Calvin places on Divine transcendence.

But perhaps the key difference between Luther and Calvin, as far as their theologies of nature are concerned, has to do with the aforementioned doctrine of election, ^or Luther, election is an intra-mundane, existential experience, by and large; Luther professes to know nothing about God's actions in eternity. Melanchthon, closely following Luther in this regard, refused to discuss election in his own systematic exposition of the faith. For Calvin, in contrast, election is a passionately portrayed "absolute decree" in eternity, prior to the creation of the world. To be sure, in his mature thought Calvin treats the doctrine only after his exposition of salvation, and then with confessions of his own inadequacy in presenting the doctrine faithfully. Yet, as for Augustine, the idea ■ of an eternal event having to do with humanity alone, prior to the creation, is nevertheless very much apparent in Calvin's schema. This then has ramifications both for Calvin's view of the practical life of the redeemed and his image of the end time.

The legacy of Calvin with regard to the practical life of the redeemed has been much discussed. Although his thought surely has its own integrity and should not be equated with that of his followers, his doctrine of election does contain within it the seeds of the later "Protestant Ethic" studied by Max Weber and others. "We teach that the calling of the elect," he writes memorably in his Institutes, "is a sign and testimony of their election." This theme was to become of major importance i.01 \ateT CaYviviisva. Heber sees in it the roots of the

one's election by practical proofs of righteousness; later, with a fateful change of emphasis; that one demonstrates one's election by signs of worldly blessings and success. One should surely not hold Calvin responsible for modern capitalism's excesses, particularly its rape of the natural world, but it is legitimate to observe that ~~a cgtmiwa~~Mgf aspects of his thought — his emphasis on the sovereignty and transcendence of God, his strong doctrine of eternal election, which was anthropocentric by definition, and his concomitant emphases on humanity's dominion over nature and the soul's rule over the body -- certainly helped prepare the way for the tise of the capitalist spirit.

Calvin's view of the end-time seems to be congruent with other significant doctrines of his which shape his theology of nature. His eschatological vision seems to be intimately tied to his doctrine of election. He is virtually without anything to say at all about any renewal of the whole cosmos. On the other hand, he discusses the resurrection of the just and the unjust at considerable length, y default^ Calvin's vision of the end-time seems to be even more anthropocentric thaii •'than Thomas's. Thomas at least projected the idea that the material elements will be renewed(and the heavenly bodies, too). Calvin is silent about these questions.

Retrospectively, then, we can say that Reformation thought was preoccupied, as was the whole Middle Ages, with the theology of grace. That was the arena, indeed, that it choge for its break with the received tradition. Yet

of Luther's and Calvin's biblical exegesis, it seems, the scope of Reformation thought was broadened to include attempts at revising the medieval theology of nature, as well. This was accomplished by both Luther and Calvin, although with varying results.

Calvin, it seems, never fully adopted the holistic theological perspective that Luther had evidently identified at an early point in his development. This meant, then, that the insular kind of anthropocentric, patriarchal theology of nature already set in motion in the patristic and medieval periods was given a new lease on life, as it were, in Calvin's theology. On the other hand, Calvin's theology contained a certain social dynamic and a vision of righteousness in society, that was largely missing in Luther's. Luther's, revision of the ftjedieval theology of nature seemed to bear good fruits insofar as he was concerned with the material order as such. But there Luther seemed to stop. He more or less accepted the hierarchical kind of society bequeathed by the Middle Ages. That brought with it its own set of problems as Lutheranism developed, and as it tended more and more to identify the social order of the German state with an order given by nature.

TRENDS IN MODERN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT The Hebraic-Christian tradition helped set the stage for modern culture in the West, and then it found itself forced to deal with the extensive impact of that very same culture^and its various views of nature, particularly as those views were expressed in the findings of modern science. Protestantism and Catholicism responded to this situation differently, so they can conveniently be considered separately.

While the Protestant strain of the tradition did veer into some fitful encounters with the protagonists of modern science along the way, chiefly in the controversy with Darwin and his followers — in which context, in any case, the issue focused mainly on the nature of humanity, not so much on the nature of "nature" -- the modern Protestant story.'With regard to nature is, overall, the history of a sustained accommodation to the findings of modern science, with mixed, sometimes self-defeating, results. We can trace some of the more vivid details of this history by considering the perspectives of the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant(1724-1804), sometimes called "the philosopher of Protestantism" by Catholics, and one of the preeminent Protestant theologians of this century, Karl Barth(1886-197). An important exception to the Kantian-Barthian line is the work of another eminent twentieth century theologian, Paul Tillich(1886-197).

One of the important tasks Kant set for himself was to "make room for faith" in the worldview of modern science. His thought is highly complex, but its broad outlines can he denicted ciuite simolv. To begin with, Kant self-consciously

accepted(with certain qualifications that we will consider) the mechanical view of nature that had been given currency by thinkers such as Galileo, Descartes, and Newton. This was a fateful decision.

According to the mechanical view of nature, the cosmos is just that, a vast machine. It is devoid of any of the so-called "secondary qualities" such as color, taste, and smell. That means, to a large extent, nature in itself is devoid of beauty as well. In itself nature is chiefly composed of hard, drab, irreducible masses of dead, but moving particles of natter, dominated by fixed laws. In nature, according to this way of thinking, there is a strict determinism. There is no freedom.

Prior to Kani's time, proponents of the mechanical view, who had also tried to think theologically, frequently settled for the idea of a Deity who is a kind of cosmic watchmaker, who sets the world in motion, but who then more or less allows it to run its own deterministic course (with the possible exception of "miraculous" incursions by God at various times). The human creature, in turn, was generally depicted in a radically bifurcated way, totally determined qua bodily creature(Descartes said the body, like everything else in nature, is a machine), or able to rise above nature as a rational-moral self.

It will be evident that this view of nature, whatever its beneficial scientific and practical utility in the modern West may have been, had. strong intrinsic affinities with earlier understandings of nature in the history of the West. Among others, it resembles the idea of the material world suggested by the conceptuality of the Great

matter is something fundamentally removed from God. Likewise, both perspectives entertain a view of the human creature as essentially spiritual, yet enmeshed, even imprisoned, in a body. Both views are also open to the possibility of a strong emphasis on human dominion, not-to say domination, over nature, since nature is essentially something inferior to the human as a rational creature and to the Divine. On the other hand, the conceptuality of the Great Chain of Being, as it was appropriated by the theological tradition at least, presented a much more congenial, much more living picture of nature, as created good by God, as an acceptible home for human life, than the mechanical view. For antecedents to the mechanical view, therefore, we must look behind the theological tradition to much more negative, much.more alienated, attitudes toward nature, than any ^that ever made their way into the theological mainstream. We can think perhaps of Gnostic dualism in this connection; if not that, then the kinds of sensibilities that were spawned by later Stoicism in the waning days of the Roman Empire -- a sense of futility, a feeling of being totally under the sway of the impersonal, all-determining wheels of the cosmos. Mitehead has taken us even further back, into the world of classical Greece. "The pilgrim fathers of the scientific imagination as it exists today," he wrote of mechanistic science, "are the great tragedians of ancient Athens, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripedes. Their vision of fate, remoreless and indifferent, urging a tragic incident to its inevitable issue, is the vision possessed by science."

The mechanical view of nature was nevertheless a modern phenomenon. As a scientific conceptuality, it was intimately linked with, not to say promoted by, the mercantile and industrial forces that were transforming the Western socio-economic order and the face of nature in the modern West. "The power that was science and the power that was money were, in final analysis, the same kind of power: the power of abstraction, measurement, and quantification."(Lewis Mumford) ^he entrepreneur who needed natural resources for his factories, in other words, found it easy to measure the value of nature in money, because it was easy for him to conceive of nature in itself as a valueless, dead, indifferent, God-less machine. The converse of course is also true. The economic requirements of capitalism surely paved the way for £he widespread acceptance of the mechanical view of nature. Thus the scientific doctrine and the ideology of the bourgeoisie tended to coalesce. To be more accurate, therefore, we should probably speak of the "mechanical-industrial view of nature" as a cultural phenomenon, rather than just the mechanical view of nature. It will be evident, at least on the surface, how congenial such a view of nature could be to Protestant thought, which, through Calvinism especially, had done so much to set the stage for the spirit of modern capitalism.

Kant accepted this mechanical-industrial view of nature, but he also attempted to relativize it. On the basis of intuitive experience of the human self-consciousness which for him was disclosed chiefly in moral experience, he

•••••••• 4Aon of a ''noumenal" world as the world of

reality behind all "phenomenal" existence, that is, behind the world of nature as envisioned by mechanistic science. But Kant also stressed that there can be no cognitive access to this world of the noumenal, other than through the immediate data of moral experience. And even here, according to Kant, the human understanding is markedly limited. On the basis of the moral consciousness it can postulate God, freedom, and immortality, but it can never have knowledge of them(that is, "theoretical knowledge," the kind of knowledge one has of the natural world) . The human creature can act as i_f freedom were a reality, a_s i_f God somehow providentially ordered the world, and so on, but with no greater certainty than that. Kant expressly states that with respect to the human body "there is no freedom," and that the idea of God has no direct applicability to our understanding of the yorld of nature. In this way, by predicating everything on the inner nature-transcending moral consciousness of the human ego, and by ruling out the possibility of any kyown immanence of God or the human self in nature, Kant felt he had made froom for a viable religious ■faith within the world depicted by mechanistic science.

When one compares Kant's thought with Luther's, the paucity of vision and the dearth of sensitivity of Kant's approach to nature, and the ineffectual character of his attempt to relativize the mechanical view of nature, quickly become apparent. Gone is Luther's almost mystical vision of creation as the mask of God. Gone is his wonder at the fecundity swirling through a grain of wheat. Gone, too, is Luther's rich s^,?se for the meaning of human corporality, for the self's congenial embeddedness in the matrix of the

.^rtrith. Gone?, as well, is Luther s conviction that faith allows one to discover great blessings all through nature and to share them with all one's neighbors. And, finally, Luther's hope for a glorious fulfilment of the entire cosmos has disappeared. Kant is left awestruck with "the starry heavens above," as he said memorably, and "the moral law within." By the former he surely meant the fated turning of the eternal spheres of the universe. By lithe latter he apprently mean a courageous, stoic commitment tto moral existence in an alien world. The holistic dimension t;Of Luther's theological humanism has been carved away. "sJhe "living God" and the embodied world of human life, ws-rhich so captivated Luther's mind as he developed his cown theological humanism, are no more to be seen. The Kantian God, insofar as he is more than merely a postulate of human reason, is a highly spiritualized Deity. The essential human self is also highly spiritualized. When these two highly spiritualized expressions of personal being are then juxtaposed over against a natural order t'hat ijj essentially alien, one can understand why some ilnterprtters of Kant have likened his thought to Gnostic cdualism.

Kant bequeathed a framework for doing theology that was perhaps more radically anthropocentric, more dramatically insular, than virtually any other in the entire course of the Hcbraic-Christian tradition(with the possible exception of Origen and some of the introverted, world-denying mystics). Kant simply accepted the approach to nature that was given generally in his culture -and specifically in the science of his time, and sought to make room for faith

Given

and the Promethian aspirations sometimes accompanying the spirit of industrialism, Kant's way of accommodation was ultimately to be proved a failure by the course of events in the West. What does it mean, finally, to have a moral faith, however courageous, when one lives in a world whose resources have been raided and polluted on a vast scale and whose peoples have seen their common-wealth accumulating more and more in the pockets of an affluent, well-fed minority?

Strikingly, the Kantian approach to nature deeply influenced much of the Protestant theology that followed in its wake. Many theologians adopted the stance of accepting -- sometimes self-consciously affirming — the mechanical-industrial view of nature as a datum, and then developing their theologies in terms of a highly spiritualized conceptuality of God and humanity. This strategy was readily adapted by some, in a similar manner, when they were challenged to deal with the "survival of the fittest" image of nature projected by Darwinism. As long as they were able to establish "room for faith" in the human self-consciousness, most of these post-Kantian Protestant thinkers could, in fact, accommodate their theology to virtually any kind of "truths" about nature that were presented to them. In addition to all the other problems this stance brought with it, 4 the influx of Darwinism particularly into the theological consciousness -- which was already predisposed to acede to the socio-economic expressions of mechanism in the form of industrially m -- prepared the way also for the acceptance of Social Darwinism and its insidious approaches to social problems.

Karl Barth was trained in the Kantian tradition, but he quickly began to reject it wholesale. He soon gave up any effort to "make room for faith." Rather, he began to seek to articulate the faith bequeathed to him in the theological tradition on its own terms, boldly, and without any felt need to accommodate his thought at every turn to the science and the philosophy of modernity. In Barth's thought, accordingly, we meet a sense of affirmation of the created order("God justifies the creation") and a detailed vision of Divine Providence graciously and gracefully overseeing all things. Barth celebrates the life of humanity with a special passion, recalling biblical emphases. He depicts a life rich with mutuality as the reality of human life in this world, a reality established in eternity on the unshakeable foundations of Divine grace. Appropriating the social dynamic of the Calvinist tradition, as wdll, he projects a broad vision of justice in human society. The tone of Barth's theology is joyously effusive, too; for him the grace of God abounds, it knows no limits. This is to be contrasted with the sober, even melancholy, tone of Kant's thought, predicated on his desire to set limits for the human understanding. Yet at one significant point, if at no other, Barth remains closely tied to his Kantian inheritance -- his theology of nature.

Barth states at the outset, in good Kantian fashion, that the doctrine of creation properly can treat"only God and man." There is no theological knowledge of the cosmos in itself, he argues, only our knowledge of a God who is graciously disposed toward us and whose grace is the ultimate rality of all things. What view of nature does Barth present t-hr>n? Mo maintains that he has no

identifiable view of nature.

But on closer examination it becomes more and more apparent that the world of nature he envisions, notwithstanding all he has to say about God justifying the creation and governing it faithfully, has pronounced mechanical characteristics. Barth strongly accents che human creature's dominion over nature and God's transcendence of nature, much more than their immanence in nature. So by default, apparently not by intention, Barth tends to accommodate his theology to the mechanical-industrial view of nature, reminiscent of the Kantian way of accommodation.

Along with this, even of more importance perhaps than his veering in the direction of the mechanical-industrial view of nature theoretically, Barth produces, de facto, a theology of nature which supports the mechanical-industrial view practically. He does this, essentially, by reproducing the Medieval dualism of grace and nature. His conceptual schema begins with God's eternal election of Jesus Christ and the human community in Christ. Then, as Barth says, this covenant of grace needs Q, place to be actualized. Hence, God creates the world and then proceeds to actualize his eternal election of "man" through a history with Israel and she Church which has its center in Jesus Christ.

One can perhaps see .LSArE affinities with Origen here: God creates the world in order to bring the company of rational spirits back to perfect communion with him. As a matter of fact, Barth was influenced by Plato and .the platonic tradition early in his 1K-. but Barth will not have anything to do with the notion of such a cosmic fall(nor with the kind of rational-educative return of the fallen spirits to God that Origen projects).

A much more legitimate comparison can be made with the

determined by God prior to t e creation-is the beatitude of the saints. The created world, in Thomas's view, is purely instrumental to that end. The raison d'etre of nature is human beatitude in heaven. Barth never finished his monumental Church Dogmatics so we shall probably never know how he wanted to depict the end-time in detail. But his theological logic would seem to point in the same direction qs Thomas's, in view of Barth's all-determining doctrine of humanity's eternal election: the ultimate annihilation of the biosphere(and the physical world itself perhaps; here going beyond Thomas), except for human bodies.

Behind Calvin's self-conscious agnosticism about the ultimate destiny of the biophysical order lies his strong supralapsarian doctrine of election, which seems to point his thought in a similar direction, that is, toward the idea of annihilation of all physical reality except human bodies. For Barth, as for Thomas,and apparently for Calvin, too, the world of nature seems to be purely instrumental, ontologically speaking. It is created solely for the sake of human life with God. Barth may want to say, as Thomas and Calvin did, that God is glorfied in all manner of ways in and through the material world once it has been created? but the underlying logic of his thought seems to be clear: the ultimate reason for the existence of the biophysical world is God's relationship to the human creature alone. Barth's theological humanism, it thus turns out, is radically ~~iu.uliK,~~ ii~~nflKdnMtty~~ an~~th~~opocentric, for all his claims to be presenting the teaching of the biblical tradition. Nature, it turns out finally, is no more than the scenery for human history.

Whan one turns to what Barth has to say in passing about nature in itself, one finds further evidence of the influence of the mechanical-industrial view of nature. Not only does Barth tend to define God and humanity as standing over against nature, he depicts nature as a more or less self-contained realm that runs by itself, as it were. T$_o$ be sure, Barth has a complicated statement of Divine providence; but that is worked out entirely from the Divine side, it seems. When one looks at nature, from Barth's perspective, one encounters only the phenomenal reality, not the noumenal reality of Divine providence. Barth is very suspicious, for example, of Luther's picture of God being in, with, and under all things. Correspondingly, with regard Luther's sense of wonder for the world of nature^ for the growth of a fetus, for the beauty of an apple tree, for the majesty of a thunder storm, jjjuch if not all ' of this seems to be,missing in Barth's theology (contrast his enthusiasm for Mozart).

The thought of Paul Tillich differs from Barth' s substantively in many respects. One of these differences' is Tillich's theology of nature. To begin with, Tillich does not seek to "make room for faith^in an already defined scientific worldview. In this respect, both he and Barth have broken with the Kantian tradition. But Tillich goes much further. He does not limit the substance of his theology to the foci of God and humanity. Tillich breaks completely with the Kantian tradition in this regard. T illicit surely writes with a constant awareness of modern science and its understanding of nature, and he takes the scientific picture of nature with utmost seriousness,

for example, the doctrine of evolution. But at the same time he is convinced that the theologian must state his or her own "answers" concerning the world of nature^ in response to the questions explicitly or implicitly arising from the scientific approach to nature. In a word, for Tillich the theologican is responsible for a theology of nature, along with everything else.

From Tillich's earliest days, furthermore, Tillich was much more appreciative of the importance of the romantic tradition in the West than Barth was. As a boy Tillich was already imbued with some of the mystical sensibilities for nature that had been kept alive in his Lutheran tradition. As a young scholar he studied the philosophy of Friedrich Schelling(1775-1854), whose philosophy of nature was very much influenced by romantic apperceptions of nature. Schelling has a place in Tillich's development that is analogous to the place Plato occupied in Barth's development.

In the modern period, it seems, romanticism — variously expressed by writers such as Goethe, Wordsworth, Thoreau, and many others -- provided the only home for that strain in the Western theological tradition which valued the feminine and the vital and the generative in the Deity, as distinct from the masculine, the spiritual, and the transcendent. The biblical notion of the Spirit of God as the immediately creative presence of God, brooding in and over the world, a motif which as we saw was taken up by Irenaeus, Basil, and Luther, was more or less supressed by the tradition as God was removed further and further from the material creiation to an elevated position of regal

The female principle, as it were, was forced underground, emerging only sporadically in the mainstream of the theological tradition in the works of mystics like Julian of Norwich (ca. 1382- ca. 1413) and Jacob Boehme(1575-1624) and in some of the expressions of Protestant pietism, such as F. C. Oettinger( ) and, in a wholly different way, the young Friedrich Schliermacher(1768-1834).

One can trace the cosmic-affirming Platonic notion of the World Soul in a similar way. Identified with the Holy Spirit by Basil, the existence of the World Soul was questioned by Augustine. Finally it was relegated to a stereotypical position of feminine subservience in the twelfth century as the allegorical figure, the goddess Nature; and the identifcation of the Holy Spirit with the World Soul was condemned. Later, however, the idea of a World $oul was revived by the seventeenth century Cambridge Platonists, in conjunction with their notion of a generative "plastic nature." The idea then disappear^ from public view for some time, only to he taken up enthusiastically in the philosophy of Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753), from whom the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) apparently appropriated it. The theme was also taken up on the continent by Schelling, who wrote a book by that title in 1798.

Self-consciously thinking and writing with a sense of his indebtedness to the romantic tradition, Tillich envisions a world of nature that is profoundly animated, a cosmos grounded immediately in the majestic life-giving reality of od, a material world full of mystery, fecundity, beauty, and wholeness. With qualifications, one could even ttSe the Wti "ncnmur to <Ucr\bc Tillich's theology -- nature

Tillich appears to have gone a long way toward reintegrating the exiled feminine principle back into the doctrine of God. Tillich's mystical, holistic vision of nature is one of the results of that synthesis.

At the same time, Tillich makes every effort to remain faithful to the humanism of the classical theological tradition, and not to be led or to drift in the direction of a nature-monism as some of the mystics, and also romantic thinkers like the young Schliermacher and Schelling, showed signs of doing in various ways. The crowning theme of Tillich's theology is "History and the Kingdom of God." Although there is some question whether Tillich finally was able to unite nature with history; the archetypical feminie with the archetypical masculine; his ontology of Being with his confessional theology of a God who acts purposely within human and cosmic history and sets goals for the whole; it seems that Tillich at least made one of the most creative efforts in modern Western theology in that integrative direction. He seems to have laid the groundwork, at least, for a theology that affirms the distinct life of humanity in community, particularly the need for social justice, on the one hand, and the integrity and goodness and created teleology of nature, on the other hand. Tillich showed that the holistic theological humanism of the Bible can still be a valid theological option today, notwithstanding the dominance of a more [redacted] anthropocentric theological humanism throughout much of the tradition.

When we turn from the Protestant strain of modern Christian through to the Catholic, we see a theological history which has been much less geared to accommodating or adapting itself to the oorldvlev ok modern science th.™

much of modern Protestant thought. In the modern period; Catholic theology has been much more concerned, as a general rule, with developing elaborations or corrections of Thomistic theology than it has been interested in "finding room for faith" or articulating theological "answers" in response to the problematic of modern culture. For a long time, indeed, into our own century when the so-called "Modernist" movement was condemned, the Catholic tradition self-consciosly sought to exlude any kind of substantive adapations relevent to the spirit of modernity.

The French paleontologist and Jesuit, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin( ) was engulfed for much of his life by the Church's suspicion of those seeking to make connections between theology and modern science. In the wake of the reforming trends of the Second Vatican Council, however, he began to gain a wide hearing in Catholic circles. His work shows the kind of possibilities, and many of the liabilities ss that seem to be implicit in the modern Catholic consciousness * as it turns to the theology of nature.

Historian Arthur Lovejoy, in his classical study The Great Chain of Being, identifies a trend in the modern period to "temporalize" the Great Chain of Being. This comes more and more into public view, he points out, as the scientific doctrine of evolution gains its own currency. Although Teilhard wrote after Lovejoy had done his study, the historian's exposition of the temporalization motif could have been readily applied to Teilhard's thought. The French Jesuit temporalizes the Great Chain of Being in a masterful, imaginative, and highly suggestive way(whether

he does this in a way that is acceptible to natural scientists who read his work is another question). Teilhard depicts a cosmic process that begins with a situation of primordial, undefined matter and which moves forward and upward through a series of stages of increasing complexity and consciousness: cosmogenesis, biogenesis, and noogenesis. This process, which emerges through an infinitely random but directional process of "cosmic drift," which proceed? from the primordial Many to higher and higher levels of integration, ultimately is consummated with the unification of all things in the One, the cosmic Christ, christogenesis. The universe, according to Teilhard, has an inner side, a "within," which opens it at every level to radiations of Divine Love. This love serves as a kind of spiritual magnet(the ultimate "final cause"), drawing all things to unity with an Omega point, which is the transcendent spiritual reality of the resurrected , ascended Christ.

It will be apparent that one of Teilhard's chief concerns is to integrate main lines of ~~the~~ winian science into Catholic theology, the way Thomas attempted in his day to integrate the philosophy of Aristdtle. Teilhard's success in presenting a theology of evolution, as one might expect, is much debated, particularly insofar as he claims to be doing science as he setz forward his schema of cosmogenesis, biogenesis, and noogenesis. What ever one may finally wish to say in this regard, however, it is clear that the attempt to present a theology of evolution that Teilhard made was an outstanding achievement.

Like Tillich, moreover, although in his own way, Teilhard also projected a theology of nature that stands

clearly apart from the mechanical view of nature. For Teilhard, nature has an inner, a "psychic" side, that is located by Teilhard not in some inaccessible noumenal realm, but in every natural entity, however small, however

IB.IIMIIIIM.I. Further, the cosmos is not like some huge machine running forever in perpetual sameness; the cosmos has a telos, according to Teilhard, it is underway. The cosmos is a process, not a machine.

On the other hand, for all his concern with the world of nature, feilhard does seem to have stayed sufficiently within the Catholic tradition, and within its theology of nature and grace in particular, so as not to have overcome that traditions dualistic tendencies.

One of Teilhard's protagonists, Henri de Lubac, has presented the Teilhardian synthesis under the rubric of the "Eternal Feminine." In a certain sense this is a helpful motif to highlight, for the God Teilhard depicts is not the wholly other transcendent patriarchal Deity of the Calvinist tradition(to state one vivid contrast), the God who works his sway with absolute power Denature, externally, as it were. Rather, Teilhard's God is a God who elicits, who nurtures, who is patient and longsuffering, and whose life is immediately given in relation to the within of all things £n the material order.

But one can question whether Teilhard's integration of the feminine principle into his theology is as thoroughgoing as de L'lbac would have us believe. The archetypical realm of the feminine, after all, is the material order; whereas the archetypical realm of the masculine is the spiritual or rational order. Now, it so happens that, in Tfeilhard's

a process of movement toward higher and higher levels of spiritual and rational intensity. Ultimately, indeed, as Teilhard depicts the process, the final stage will be the white heat of pure spirit. The world of matter will have fallen bake into non-being. Which is surely consistent with the conceptuality of the Great Chain of Being, whether temporalized or not; but would seem to be, in any case, the final triumph of the masculine principle.

Concomitantly, in his ethics, Teilhard depicts a relationship of the human creature to nature which is almost exclusively predicated on -- the masculine motif -- of dominion, not to say domination of nature. Notwithstanding a pervasive and powerful mystical spirituality, he constantly speaks of "man transforming the earth" or "building the earth." His attitude toward matter seems to be that it is posited there to be manipu - lated, restructured, and controled by the human creature, for the sake of producing a world society(which is one of the preconditions for christogenesis). One finds very little sense of wonder for nature as it is givens Aw does find a passionate desire to embrace nature, as it were, but mainly for the purposes of transforming it. Indeed, Teilhard believes that the leading edge of evolution is now the human mind, particularly as it expresses i t se.//^ grasp of nature in science and technology. Nature, in a manner of speaking, does not have its own fulfilment to look forward to, but rather a technological imposed fulfilment: and then it will fall away into nothingness. Teilhard seems to be very much a proponent of the Greek image of the life

(contrast G. Hitlopkins)

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Hebraic image of the life of humanity set primarily with the earth. Likewise, Teilhard seems to give expression to the anthropocentric exegesis of Ambrose, seeing the Divine Rest as ultimately located in the human creature alone, rather than, as the biblical text clearly implies, as ultimately rooted in the entire cosmic order, all of which is good and worthy of fulfilment, not just humanity.

RETROSPECT In Teilaifld's thought, with all his professed interest in nature, and in Barth's thought, with all his professed disinterest in nature, Feuerbach's estimate of the theological tradition in the West seems to be borne out. The same might be said when we survey the anti-cosmic spirit of the patristic period, the nature-grace dualism of the medieval era, and the anthropocentric tendencies of Calvinism. Much of the Hebraic-Christian tradition has expressed an anthropocentric theology of nature. On the other hand, the originating vision of biblical faith, both in Hebraism and in the thought and life of the early Church, was holistic. Its fundamental humanism was integrated with a rich sense for God's creative activity in nature and the human creature's essential and congenial embeddedness in nature. It depicted a natural order full of goodness, fecundity, and mystery, an order with its own teleology before (god being elicited by which U'«.5 governance. This holistic perspective was expressed in many ways as the tradition developed, among others Irenaeus, by Francis Luther and Tillich. The holistic perspective of biblical faith, it seems, has never been lost, and often it has been revived

But the question remains whether the fundamental humanism of the tradition, howevermuch it may have been holistic in its early forms, however much it may have expressed itself in holistic ways over the centuries, will not always tend, or be driven, toward an -a[redacted] anthropocentric theology of nature. Perhaps that it the destiny of the tradition, for better or for worse.