HEALING THE PROTESTANT MIND:

BEYOND THE THEOLOGY OF HUMAN DOMINION(1)

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As the earth groans in travail, it appears that those who stand in the traditions of Luther and Calvin are ill-equipped to respond to the global environmental crisis theological1^.(2) It appears, indeed, that in this critical instance the Protestant mind is suffering from a severe case of hardening of the categories.

The Protestant mind has become fixed, not to say fixated, on what Karl Barth called "the-anthr opology," the doctrine of God and humanity. It has generally presupposed that the rightful theological approach to nature is the-anthropo1ogical: which has meant, in practice, approaching the earth almost exclusively via the theology of a Divinely mandated human dominion over nature.

What is required, therefore, is a certain kind of theological healing, inspired by one of the great principles of the Reformation: sola Scriptura. The Protestant mind needs to be made whole, so that the voice of the Reformation tradition in our day can claim the whole world for God once again, as the Bible does, beginning with the creation narratives of Genesis and ending with the Book of Revelation's vision of a New Jerusalem established in the midst of a New Heavens and a New Earth: rather than focusing almost exclusively on God's history with humanity, while the natural world is interpreted as a kind of staging area for that Divine-Human drama.(3)

That such a theological healing is required will become evident as we review the course of the Protestant theological response to the environmental crisis during the last two decades. The typical Protestant response to this crisis has been to keep prescribing the the —anthropologica1ly shaped theology of human dominion, over and over again, in one way or another. There is a better solution, as we shall see, a holistic solution adumbrated both in the Scriptures and in the classical theological tradition in the West.

I. The Problematic of the Protestant Mind:

From Earth Day 1 97 0 to Earth Day 1990

As we mark Earth Day 1990 in the United States, we also mark a pronounced increase across the country in "environmental awareness." This was signaled already by Time magazine in January, 1989, when it designated our endangered earth as "Planet of the Year." Nor are such concerns restricted to the U.S. Voices speaking in behalf of our endangered planet are being heard around the globe, most notably perhaps in the councils of the United Nations.

The churches are very much a part of this international

discussion. Witness the World Council of Churches' global conference on "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation" this year in Korea.(4) That new accent on the creation — justice and peace have been longstanding emphases of the WCC — is but one highly visible sign that churches around the world have themselves been swept along, if not swept away, by the same rising tide of environmental awareness.(5)

Given the immense scope and profound urgency of our global environmental crisis, this apparent greening of the public mind in general and of the Christian mind in particular can only be welcomed. But it all sounds disquietingly familiar. We have been here before, at least in the U.S., particularly within the circles of American Protestantism. Indeed, calls for increased environmental awareness and for the development of a theology of nature or a theology of ecology or a new land ethic have been issued in this country, with an almost monotonous regularity, for two decades or more, at least since the first national Earth Day in 1970. But whether we have finally begun to witness the greening of the Protestant mind in America can be debated.

For those who were around for the first Earth Day in 1970, and its theological aftermath, there is surely a feeling of deja vu. A work like Brother Earth: Nature, God, and Ecology in a Time of Crisis, for example, published in 1970, was intended to be among the first of a wave of serious theological reponses to the global environmental crisis, as that crisis was perceived by many with clarity already at that time.(6) But works like this were soon forgotten, and that wave of serious studies in ecological theology never happened, as the nation and its Protestant churches quickly became preoccupied with other things.

Notwithstanding that turn of events, during the ensuing twenty years a few theologians, notably John Cobb, Joseph Sittier, and, most recently, Juergen Moltmann, valiantly continued to explore, in depth, theological issues related to the concerns of ecology and the environment.(7) Each, as it were, staked out the territory of one of the Trinitarian persons: the vision of a Creator who persuades all things and thus bestows value on all things (Cobb); the vision of a Redeemer who is the universal fountain of Divine Grace, the Pantokrator or Cosmic Christ (Sittier); the vision of a Sanctifier who feels with and indwells all things, nurturing them, and shepherds all things to their final Sabbath Rest (Moltmann). But these thinkers have found few influential audiences of any size, in this respect, either within the churches or beyond. During the last two decades, Cobb, Sittier, and Moltmann, and others like them, therefore tended to remain more or less solitary explorers, with small followings, if any, as far as their ecological interests were concerned.

Other voices were also raised in the wake of that first wave of environmental awareness circa 1970, many of them speaking from the margins of the the American church: feminist thinkers and exponents of native American, Asian, or African religions.(8) But these voices scarcely received any hearing whatsoever within the American Protestant mainstream, apart from certain romanticizing environmental interludes, often at church camps or

on wilderness treks, where mainly affluent, urbanized Protestants imagined themselves as neo-native peoples for a week or two, before they returned to business as usual in the cities and suburbs .

In light of twenty years of often fitful and largely unfruitful theological starts, are we now to begin the process all over again as we celebrate Earth Day 1990? Do we need still more calls for increased environmental awareness in our churches and for new theologies of nature or a new land ethic? Will such utterances do anything more than assuage the mounting environmental guilt among our members, providing temporary and symptomatic relief for those who issue them and for those who hear them? Do we not have to do here with a deeper malaise of mind that requires a more thoroughgoing kind of therapy?

It is sobering in this respect to ponder the fact that the very Protestant mind that has sanctioned such calls for increased environmental awareness and for new theologies of nature during the last two decades has been largely preoccupied with other, sometimes antithetical interests.

Thus many of the most vocal Third World spokespersons in our churches understandably have championed theologies of liberation. These theologies have been projected as historic!zed, humanistic theologies par excellence .(9) Characteristically they have betrayed little direct concern for the earth, except insofar as they have — rightly — identified how the resources of the earth have been grossly maldistributed. Protagonists of liberation theology have also been suspicious — rightly — of those who espouse environmental concerns, since appeals to the order of nature in the past have often served to prop up the unjust structures of the established socio-economic order. A concern to save the whales, for example, might just be a subterfuge, consciously intended or not, to distract the public from focusing attention on the shocking numbers of children dying in our cities.

Meanwhile, back in the First World, establishment practitioners of the theological arts have addressed themselves to global issues mainly in cultural and political contexts, such as: pluralism; science and technology; world peace; democratic capitalism. Or they have found themselves, willy nilly, swept up by more parochial ecclesiastical concerns, such as: hermeneutics; the doctrine of the ministry; church growth.

This situation almost inevitably has driven those Protestant church leaders who have cared about environmental issues to fall back on long established and little examined theological assumptions: most of them having to do with the theologoumenon of human dominion over the earth. In the process, they have also tended to ransack the Scriptures to gather what have appeared to them to be environmentally relevant texts, without the assistance, usually, of seasoned biblical scholars.(10)

Thus espoused as a kind of emergency solution by Protestant church leaders who have not been able to find any other readily available options in the Reformation tradition, the theology of

human dominion over nature has generally taken two forms during the last twenty years.(11) Those who have identified chiefly with Third World concerns sometimes have spoken of "new visions of eco,lustice."(12) Those who have been more at home in a First World milieu have tended to speak of "a new theology of responsible stewardship."(13) But it all has tended to amount to the same thing, whether it was promulgated under the banners of ecojustice or responsible stewardship: the traditional Protestant theology of human dominion all over again — perhaps with long introductions describing the environmental crisis and impassioned affirmations of the need for a theological response, with a liberal sprinkling of "environmental proof texts" thrown in along the way.

True, the theme "care for the earth" has emerged again and again within Protestantism during the last twenty years, and this would suggest a certain respect for what the World Council of Churches is now calling the integrity of the creation. But that theme has almost always been emphatically attached, like an appendix, to the is sues of distributing the fruits of the earth justly (the ecojustice perspective) or managing the productivity of the earth wisely (the responsible-stewardship perspective) .(14) The theme "the integrity of the creation," in contrast, implies contemplating nature as a world with its own life and its own rights, in short, caring for nature enough to allow it to have is own history with God. But that theme, in the mind of many contemporary Protestants, has generally been accorded little or no standing of its own. The advocates of ecojustice or responsible stewardship may mention it, but when they do they generally seem to be nervous and unsure about the whole idea.

Could it be that the venerable the-anthropological Protestant theme of human dominion over the earth is itself problematic? Could it be that the many environmental critics of Christian thought, beginning with Lynn White, Jr., have had a point all along?(15) Could it be that the reason why Protestant reponses to the environmenal crisis have not converted the mind of the Church -- not to speak of influencing substantial numbers outside the Church — is because these responses have been more part of the problem than part of the solution?

There are other questions, too, some of them so existentially disturbing that many grassroots believers and most church theologians simply refuse to acknowledge them: above all the nagging modern questions about the cosmic immensities. It is one thing to interpret the earth theologically in terms of human dominion. That has a certain prima facie plausibility. But what about the cosmos? What about our own solar system, to begin with? What about the virtually infinite reaches of space and time in this cosmos? What about the more than 60 million galaxies in this universe careening into an apparently infinite unknown? Are we to believe that the meaning of all these immensities is to be somehow derived from the fact that God has a history with humanity on planet earth and that, in this context, humankind has been given dominion over the earth? And what about the dinosaurs and ichthyosaurs and all the other "prehistoric" creatures on this planet? Are we to believe that the meaning of

the whole history of evolution on this planet is to be understood in terms of God's history with the human creature alone? Is that indeed what the creation narrative of Genesis 1, with its cadence "and God saw that it was good" concerning every aspect of the universe, is intended to suggest? What precisely are we to make of God's thundering question to Job: where were you when I laid he foundations of the earth? Is it perchance the case that the deity who is known chiefly as the one who posits the earth for the sake of human life is a "god" too small to be the Creator and Redeemer of all things?

II. Theological Roots of the Protesant Problematic:

The-anthropology and Human Dominion Over Nature

The Protestant theology of dominion surely has its problems. It all began with what might be called a "the-anthropologica1 concentration" in the thought of Luther and Calvin, and came to its single most notable modern fruition in the great "christological concentration" espoused by Karl Barth.

The thought of Luther and Calvin is predicated on a vision of God and humanity in dynamic interpersonal communion, through the gracious Word of God.(16) God relating himself graciously to humanity, and humanity responding to God in faith and love -- that is the shape of the Reformation tradition's fundamental theological intuition. The theologies of Luther and Calvin are the-anthropological in this sense.

Luther characteristically focuses his attention on justification by faith alone. That is obviously a the-anthropological focus. It pertains to God graciously declaring the sinful human creature forgiven, and the forgiven human creature appropriating that declaration in faith. Accordingly, Luther can observe at one point: "The knowledge of God and of man is the divine and properly theological wisdom." For Calvin, one can safely say, the most important doctrine of all is the doctrine of the knowledge of God. And here, as in the case of the doctrine of justification, God and humanity once again become the chief objects of attention. Calvin accordingly introduces his Institutes with words much like Luther's: "Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."

While the Reformers in a variety of ways also show a profound concern with the whole creation, a concern which is highly suggestive and well worth our most careful attention today, it nevertheless remains the case that in accent , if not always in substance, they direct our attention again and again to the dynamics of God's relationship with the human creature . Thus they tend to be preoccupied exegetically with the second creation narrative in Genesis, which highlights the human creation and fall (or so it had been read in the then received tradition), and with New Testament texts such as Galatians and the first chapters of Romans, concerning justification by grace through faith alone,

apart from works of the law. This the-anthropological focus on human sin and human salvation characterizes their biblical interpretation. They are not nearly so concerned to highlight the cosmic immensities portrayed by Genesis 1 and the apocalytic universalities depicted in the Book of Revelation.

By the time of Karl Barth, the Reformers' the-anthropocentric focus had been systematized, especially by theologians who wrote in the wake of Immanuel Kant and Albrecht Ritschl.(17) Such thinkers taught that God cannot be known in nature, and they often implied, if they did not say so in so many words, that God cannot even be encountered in nature. Both Kant and Ritschl maintained, systematically, that the Divinely posited purpose of nature was to provide a place in which God could create, educate or redeem "a kingdom of spirits." Kant and Ritschl also accented, as a matter of course, the theme that the proper relationship of the human creature to nature is dominion — a concept that often was taken by their followers to mean domination.

Theirs was a pristine logic. If the raison d'etre of nature is esstentially instrumental, why not use nature like the instrument it is for the sake of the greater glory of the underlying Divine purpose, which is the creation and exaltation of the human creature?

That nineteenth and twentieth century theologians like Ritschl, who stood in the tradition of Kant's thought, also were serving other interests is surely noteworthy.(18) The mechanical view of nature championed by Newton, Descartes, and others, which these theologians also took for granted, and the refusal on their part to deal with nature as a theological issue of any substance, surely functioned, at that time, to grease the wheels of the titanic scientific and technological conquests of nature being enthusiastically promoted by the ruling classes of Western industrial society.

Karl Barth's theology exploded in the midst of this scenario with a resounding No.(19) He took issue with what he considered to be the all-too-easy nineteenth century identification of bourgeois progress with the coming of the Kingdom of God. But he did so, finally, as one of his most important essays states so clearly, in the name of The Humanity of God. Howevermuch, then, he might have distanced himself from his nineteenth century predecessors in other respects, he essentially held firmly to their systematic subordination of nature to God and humanity. Remarkably, in the context of his extensive exegesis of the Genesis creation texts, Barth also argued that the Bible does not permit us to espouse a theology of nature at all , only a theology of God and humanity.

Nature only comes into view in Barth's thought in two respects: first, as the stage for God's covenant-history with humanity; second, as the field in which the human creature exercises a limited, but undeniable lordship, akin to the Divine Lordship over the creation. Strikingly, the same Barth who could celebrate the great beauties of Mozart's music found little or no opportunity to celebrate the beauty of the Swiss Alps, in the

midst of which he lived. Wonder in Barth's thought almost always had to do with the glories of the Divine-Human drama, not with the glories of the Divine creativity in the cosmos, as we see that kind of glory depicted, for example, in Psalm 104. Thus, by default, if not in so many words, what has rightly been called the "triumph of Grace" in Barth's thought has this, perhaps unintended, result: the abnegation of nature.

Barth accomplishes all this in his mature thought, for better or for worse, in the name of his famous "christological concentration." God elects Jesus Christ and the people of Christ in eternity, Barth maintains, and everything else in the drama of creation and redemption follows with a certain Divine inevitability, including the exercise of human freedom. The created world, in this schema, is the stage or platform or external ground of that chr1sto logical covenant. Barth thus draws on the the-anthropological focus of the Reformers, as that was mediated through Kant and others, and radicalizes it in terms of christology. In his thought the focus is no longer generally on God and humanity, as it was for the Reformers; it is concretely on God and humanity in Jesus Christ. Nature has thus fallen by the wayside, in Barth's thought, not out of the picture altogether, to be sure, but to the periphery, given Barth's particular kind of christological concentration. Nature has become merely a stage for the Divine-Human history eternally established and temporally realized in Jesus Christ, and merely an object or a field over which the elected human creature can exercise the freedom of dominion, born of Grace.

The problems of this kind of Protestant the-anthropology of nature are many. To begin with, it is intrinsically unstable. As it is read, the theology of dominion all too easily can become the ideology of domination. On the one hand, Barth does set limits for human dominion over nature, so that it does not become domination over nature. Barth by no means wants to encourage what he thinks of as mindless exploitation of nature. But notice. These are the limits of prudence, not of essence. The human creature, in this sense, must not mindlessly exploit nature lest nature be destroyed and human life thus be undercut, likewise lest some humans be enabled to exhalt themselves unjustly over others through the accumulation of natural resources as their private domain. Barth was in fact a socialist. He believed firmly in the just distribution of the goods of creation and the preservation of the earth for future generations. But, on the other hand, nature in itself essentially amounts to very little, according to the very same Barthian logic. It has only an instrumental value, at best. What are we to believe when we read Barth, then, that human manipulation of nature must be restrained or that that manipulation is an essential datum of human life, to be taken for granted and perhaps even encouraged to the point of domination for the sake of social justice?

In this connection, it is important to note that Barth knows of only two kinds of ad extra relationships on the part of persons: I-Thou relationships, and I-It relationships. Authentic human relationships, in his view, are all I-Thou relationships. They are characterized by allowing the other his

or her Lebensraum, because the thou intrinsically, as one elected in Jesus Christ, requires that kind of respect. In this sense the Thou is a Selbstzweck , an end in himself or herself, qua elected. In contrast, accord!ng to Barth's schema, relationships with nature can only be I-It relationships. The creatures of nature have no r ai son d'Htre of their own. They are essentially mere objects, awaiting to be used by persons. In this respect, as others, Barth's thought seems to encourage the domination of nature, notwithstanding his explicit calls for prudent restraint.

Consider, then, this exaggerated hypothetical case. A proposal is made to level the Swiss Alps, using an advanced, non-polluting thermonuclear technology. All the minerals from the mountains would be made available for community-controlled enterprises, whose earnings would in turn be invested at no interest in the economies of certain Third World nations. The new, flat Switzerland would also be covered with rich arable soil and many grazing areas, which would provide agricultural livelihoods not only for Swiss citizens, but also for many unemployed Turkish workers in nearby Germany, and an agricultural surplus as well, which could be shared at cost with Third World countries which need to import food. The land would be laid out, moreover, in a way that would encourage the flourishing of smaller communities, thus enhancing the participatory democratic-socialist processes of the country.

From the perspective of Barth's thought, there would be every reason to go ahead with such an undertaking. Level the Alps! The Alps have no right of any kind to exist of their own. Likewise for the giant whales. Likewise for the hummingbird. Likewise for he lilies of the field. They all could be eliminated, in a kind of environmental final solution, as long as human life was not fundamentally injured.

Did it ever cross Barth's mind that God might want the world God created to be blessed with the Alps and with the great whales and with the hummingbird and with the lilies of the field[7]. It is doubtful that Barth ever did entertain such thoughts.

It is also apparent that Barth never really seriously addressed the haunting modern question about the cosmic immensities, other than by scoffing at it, perchance with one of his favorite texts in mind, Psalm 8 — "When I look at the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him...? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet...." (Ps. 8:2-6) Such was the radicality of Barth's theological human!sm.(20)

Further, we can speculate how Barth might have envisioned the topography of the World to Come. He never finished his Church Dogmatics, in particular the section that would have dealt with eschatology, so we will never know for sure what he would have said explicitly. But knowing the logic of his thought, it is possible to suggest what he might have said about the World to Come in a concluding volume of his dogmatics.

What would Barth have written? What could he have written? Would the World to Come in his view be a world, as it is depicted in the Bible, where the lamb will lie down with the lion, where the whole earth will be renewed in abundant fecundity and majestic beauty, as the desert blossoms, where the whole creation will end its travail and experience the glorious liberty of the children of God, where all the nations will gather at the holy mountain of Zion? Or would the World to Come, as Barth would envision it, be a Divine-human world only, as Thomas and other classical theologians had maintained, with no plants and animals, no mountains for that matter, since they are not essential constitutents of the human essence?(21) Since only humans, in Barth's schema, not plants and animals, not stars and galaxies, are elected in Jesus Christ, it stands to reason that Barth's depiction of the World to Come, in its broad outlines, would have been humanistic to the extreme. Do not look for the greening of eternity in the thought of Karl Barth. Once again, although this time mainly by implication, we encounter the abnegation of nature in Barth's thought.

Consider also the implications of what might be called the strong ethical otherness of the Thou in Barth's thought. In Barth's schema, domination of one human being by another is resolutely excluded. Why? Because every human, slave as well as free, female as well as male, Jew as well as Greek, is in a certain sense — to use non-Barthian language -- of infinite value in the eyes of God. Every human is eternally elected in Jesus Christ, according to Barth's schema, and therefore, in this sense, every human is of eternal value. Not so for the Alps, the great whales, the hummingbirds, the lilies of the field, the stars and the galaxies. Such creatures have no eternal value to speak of, since they are not eternally elected. They remain "Its," and as such have what can only be considered to be a weak ethical otherness, according to Barth's schema. This leaves the creatures of nature all the more vulnerable to human abuse and exploitation or mere neglect, born of ignorance, wherever Barth's theology is taken seriously.(22)

This is Barth's legacy, then, as far as the theology of nature and the ethics of the environment are concerned. It is a legacy that leaves the mind of those would would be Barth's followers constantly vulnerable to the inrodes of a spirit of domination. The line between ecojustice and responsible stewardship, on the one hand, and environmental exploitation, even destruction, on the other hand, can sometimes be ethereal. We know that Barth's thought stands as a Rock of Gibraltar against all forms of inter-human exploitation. But he offers us no such strong guarantees for the Rock of Gibraltar itself. From Barth's perpsective that Rock could legitimately be here today and gone tomorrow, if its disappearance were not to inhibit the well-being of the human creature in any essential respect.

The problem with the theology of ecojustice or the theology of responsible stewarship, therefore, as we can see from this examination of the implications of Barth's thought, is not that these theological approaches to nature are necessarily wrong, but that they may well be much too reticent, not that they are obviously incorrect, but that they may well be all too

susceptible to distortion. And while it is true that the abuse of the principle should not discredit its validity (abusus non t o l l i t usus), it is also true that probable abuse of the principle in a time of crisis certainly should discredit the principle's obvious utility, especially if other principles are available that appear to be less vulnerable to abuse.

It turns out that some of the most thoughtful of the post-Barthian exponents of ecojustice and responsible stewardship have recognized the vulnerability of their positions, in this respect. Thus one finds references in their writings for the need to respect nature in itself, not only for its usefulness. Sometimes these thinkers even draw on extra-biblical sources at this point, native American religions, for example, or romantic poets, and opine that these heterodox perspectives have something to teach us! That may well be the case. But it is striking that these Protestant thinkers themselves feel driven to exercise this rather odd theological maneuver: odd in the sense that these Protestant exponents of ecojustice and responsible stewardship typically derive everything else that they hold to be theologically essential from the Bible and the classical theological tradition. Yet here they feel compelled to reach out, so uncharacteristically, to non-traditional theological sources, in order to support their argumentation.

The authors of the insightful volume Keeping and Healing the Creation are typical in this respect. These proponents of a new theology of ecojustice tell us, on the one hand, that their perspective is "thoroughly informed by the biblical story," that they find in the biblical story and in their faith as Reformed Christians "indispensable resources, spiritual power, and clear guidance for a renewed faithfulness to God that redirects the human enterprise toward justice and peace within the human family and toward keeping and healing the creation."

On the other hand, they also take note of the fact that several other streams of "contemporary theological work are forging fresh ways of interpreting God's interaction with the world." And they obviously find themselves wanting to drink from these "other streams." Among these they mention process thought, which "views all living beings as seeking self-realization within a total cosmic process," creation-centered spirituality, which emphasizes "a compassionate God in every being, and every being... in God," feminist theologies which stress relationships of partnership, "entailing mutual respect and the recognition of interconnectedness," and native American spiritualities which "call for partnership and harmony, for cherishing the richness and majesty of creation, and for an active commitment to the preservation of God's gifts of earth, sky, water, and people. " fas)

And they conclude: "Unless we relate to the creation with respect for the integrity of the whole and all its parts — 'with due regard to their given structure and need' — the creation will devolve into chaos." This judgment "goes far beyond a merely rational, utilitarian assessment," they state emphatically: "It is a response to the creation's intrinsic claim, an acknowledgement of intrinsice value. The claim is God's claim, God's glory, and the respone turns to praise."(24)

Clearly, they are aware that their position is less than satisfactory unless nature can in sone sense be viewed as an end-in-itse1f in the eyes of God, something much more than a stage posited for the sake of the Divine-human drama.

Likewise, Douglas John Hall, a champion of the theology of responsible stewardship, finds it necessary to develop a relational anthropology, according to which the human creature is essentially, not just instrumentally, a part of nature. He even goes so far at the very end of his discussion to talk about the need to recognize "the spiritual element in matter." He explains that "the corollary of the statement that human being is being-with-nature is the recognition that nature, from its side, has a capacity for relatedness." We cannot conceive of the material world, he stresses, as though it were totally devoid of spirit — as though it were simply 'it'!" Accordingly, he talks about a sacramental approach to nature that resists the "thingification" of nature. (25)

The point here is not that the authors of the aforementioned volume or theologian Hall do not have theological warrant, according to their own assumptions, to think in terms of the intrinsic value of nature or a sacramental vision of nature, although that is a question that must be raised in another context.(26) Karl Barth's fundamental assumptions, in any case, surely exclude such ideas. The point here is that when these writers seek to reaffirm the modern Protestant theology of dominion -- which Barth so thoroughly exemplifies -- either in terms of ecojustice or responsible stewardship, they find themselves compelled to affirm the value of nature in itself, the ultimate value of nature in the eyes of God, and the concrete indwelling of God in all things, not just the history of God with the human creature. Their attempt to qualify the modern Protestant theology of human dominion over nature, even as they seek to reinterpret that theology, shows the liabilities of that theology from yet another angle of vision, the perspective of the insider.

Which leads to this critical question. If, following along in the the-anthropo1ogica1 tradition of Luther and Calvin, which was brought to a certain radical conclusion by the christo1ogica1 concentration of Karl Barth, we discover so many liabilities in the modern Protestant theology of dominion, must we not ask whether there might be a better alternative? Can this Protestant hardening of the categories possibly be healed? Or is it perchance congenital? Is it perhance the case that if one stands in the tradition of Luther and Calvin one can only espouse some kind of the-anthropological interpretation of nature?

III. A New Paradigm for a Venerable Tradition :

Constructing a Holistic Protestant Theology

There is a better way.

To identify that way, it will probably be best to state the truth bluntly at the outset, even though the conceptuality most

appropriately invoked to do so has been used and abused in recent years to the point of tedium: the conceptuality of the paradigm shift. What is needed is a new paradigm for Reformation theology, not a new Reformation theology, as such.

The parallel with the natural sciences in this instance appears to be exact. Rinste ini an physics did not abrogate Newtonian physics. In the context of the former, the latter still remains "true," as a general rule, insofar as the latter refers to the forces studied by Newton, those operative on a billiard table, for example.

It is possible to reclaim the thought of Karl Barth in a new context, just the way Einstein's science reclaimed Newton's. The laws of the billiard table remain true, in the matrix of this new way of thinking, but in this case one pauses to look out the window, as well, at the garden and the mountains at the horizon.

This seems to be a highly promising project because, upon completion, it will allow us to open the door to paths that lead to a variety of theological options in this context, at least a few of which seem to be eminently worthy of our attention. It appears to be the case, in particular, that the theologies of explorers such as John Cobb, Joseph Sittier, and Juergen Ho Itmann have not gained the widespread, serious hearing in the churches of the Reformation that these theologies merit precisely because the views of these thinkers have been variously informed by the new paradi gm. (27) As Thomas Kuhn instructed us some years ago, the adherents of the old paradigm are simply ill-equipped to understand the insights of those who write from the context of the new paradigm. The defenders of the old, by temperament, can only reject constructions that emerge from the context of the n ew.

It is, in still other words, a question of identity that is before us here. Whatever else Karl Barth may be, and whatever negative responses some of his ideas might have elicited (Lutherans, for example, are sometime profoundly troubled by his understanding of Law and Gospel; feminists are regularly scandalized by his theology of man and woman), he remains this, to this hour: the twentieth century interpreter of the traditions of Luther and Calvin par excellence, in the eyes of most historically informed interpreters of the same traditions. Karl Barth is the Protestant Thomas Aquinas -- for better or for worse. And if he is not precisely that, he something close to that.

Barth's thought embodies a self-conscious allegiance to the two singlemost important principles of the Reformation, with a clarity and a consistency that is perhaps unequaled by all other theologians in our century who have identified themselves with the traditions of Luther and Calvin: sola gratia and sola s crip tura . With a certain theological grandeur, Barth's thought does represent "the triumph of Grace," on the one hand, and with a dramatically comprehensive scope, a devotion to the Scriptures, on the other. This is nowhere more apparent than in his treatment of the doctrine of creation, which is an uncommonly lengthy exegesis of the two Genesis accounts of creation,

predicated on a theological vision of the gracious eternal election of Jesus Christ and the People of Christ.

That is why it is highly appropriate, if not absolutely necessary, to turn to Barth's thought in this instance, where the concern is with the theological paradigm mo re than the theological particulars. For it is indeed a question of identity that we face here, primarily, not doctrine. And Barth, at least as much as any Protestant thinker in this century, if not more so, represents the theological identity of the traditions of Luther and Calvin.

If, then, it is possible to show that we can hold firm to the essentials of Barth's thought, while broadening its scope, if it is possible to show explicitly how this twentieth century Protestant the-anthropology can be incorporated into the matrix of a more inclusive twentieth century Protestant holistic theology, then the requisite paradigm shift will have been identified in a way that may enable protagonists of the old to step forward to claim the new, without sensing a loss of i d enti ty .

Then, also, it might be possible for those visionary representatives of the new paradigm, thinkers such as Cobb, Sittier, and Moltmann, to gain a fresh hearing in this respect, perhaps to be heard, on their own terms in some circles, for the first time.

A New Ecological Farad igm for Protestant Theolog y

To identify what can be called a new ecological paradigm, in the matrix of which this holistic Protestant theology might be developed, it will be instructive to take one historical step backward, so that we may then the more confidently take two constructive steps forward. When we take that first step, however, we discover that the new ecological paradigm we are seeking to identify is not so new at all, howevermuch it has been forgotten. In retrospect, we can see that that paradigm has been one of the two dominant modes of thought — or motifs — that have informed the thought-world of Christian theologians since the earliest days of self-consciously developed Christian theology.(2.8)

Both of these motifs are related to a primordial human experience — the encounter with the overwhelming mountain. From the rites of primal religions to the intuitions of moderns such as Paul Cezanne — who passionately contemplated Mont Saint-Victoire again and again and again — the mountain heights have universally captivated the human imagination and its religious sensibilities.

This primordial experience characteristically has taken historical form in two related, but distinct modes, one projected from the perspective of the mountain heights, contemplating the ethereal regions above, the other projected from the same heights, but, instead, contemplating the global vision of the manifoldness of being on every side.

From these two originating experiences of the overwhelming mountain, moreover, two metaphors often have come to expression in many forms, in various cultures. The one, growing out of the contemplation of the ethereal Above, can be called the metaphor of ascent, the other, growing out of the contemplation of the fulness of being Around, can be called the metaphor of fecundity.

The itinerary of the mind, in the first instance, is upward. It moves away from the manifoldness of being below toward some exalted experience of pure and all-transcending spiritual unity above, the One. The itinerary of the mind in the second instance is outward and circuitous. It moves out toward the surrounding manifoldness of being and embraces the fullness of being, a vision of the Many.

The mind of the ancient Hebrew people was captivated by yet another metaphor, given with the force of the Exodus experience: the metaphor of migration to the good land. In this instance the itinerary of the mind is forward, moving from what is a kind of materially deprived wilderness experience toward an experience of earthly abundance — toward "a land flowing with milk and honey."

On the basis of these three metaphors, given in many ways, in many different cultural contexts in the West, two modes of thought or motifs developed in classical theology. The one is predicated on the metaphor of ascent alone. This is the spiritual motif. The other is predicated on both the metaphor of fecundity and the metaphor of migration to the good land. This is the ecological motif. In the case of the latter, the world is depicted at the beginning, the Alpha, in terms of a primordial fecundity and is envisoned at the ending, the Omega, in terms of arrival at the abundance of the Promised Land. Both the spiritual and the ecological motifs are attested in the Scriptures, and both are in evidence in the classical theological tradition in the West.

This, then, in brief compass is the "new" ecological paradigm: an itinerary of the mind that begins with the experience of fecundity and moves toward a fulfilling experi ence of overflowing earthly blessings .

It seems clear that in Barth's thought the spiritual motif dominates. For Barth, theology begins when we lift up our eyes to the heights of eternal election, where we see a world constituted by mainly spiritual creatures: God and humanity, united in Jesus Christ. Only in service of that primal vision does the manifoldness of the created world come into being. The spiritual motif evidently shapes Barth's thought from beginning to end. The ecological motif comes into view only when a place is required in the midst of which the primal spiritual story of God and humanity can unfold. Barth is not really interested in the fecundity of nature, except insofar as it offers a congenial stage for the playing out of the Divine-Human drama. Nor does Barth characteristically think of salvation in terms of a "land experience," akin to the one often attested in the Hebrew Scriptures. Characteristically, when Barth is interpreting Romans 8 concerning the whole creation groaning in travail, awaiting the liberation now enjoyed by the children of God, he

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suggests that this expression, "the whole creation," in fact refers to the human creature alone, not to the cosmos!

What if we then begin to think theologically in terms of this paradigm shift? What if we appropriate the Barthian schema, no longer on the basis of the spiritual motif (the metaphor of ascent), but rather on the basis of the ecological motif (the metaphors of fecundity and migration to the good land taken together)?

This paradigm shift is permissable, given the principles of Reformation theology, since -- it seems certain — both the primary principles of the Reformation, sola gratia and sola scripture, can be forcefully affirmed within the matrix of either paradigm. The difference is this. With our vision enlightened now by the ecological paradigm, the Grace we can see is the life of God overflowing, predicated on self-giving love, to the whole creation , from Alpha to Omega, not primarily to the human creature. Now, likewise, the promise proclaimed in the Scriptures can be heard not just as the gift of human salvation, but also as the gift of a New Heavens and a New Earth in which righteousness dwells for the sake of all creatures.

In the context of the ecological paradigm, then, sola gratia can remain the fundamental norm of all theological reflection. But this Grace will now be displayed in terms of cosmic universality, not just in terms of anthropocentric particularity. This expansion of the theological horizon, emphatically, can also be accomplished in terms of the Reformation principle sola scriptura. Texts such as the following, along with the formative texts so often cited by Luther and Calvin from Romans and Galatians, themselves can take on a formative significance.

The first depicts the cosmic scope of God's gracious activity ad^ extra, as God's reign moves toward its fulfilment, toward the final Rest of God's Future:

> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)

The second describes the reign of Christ in, with, and under God's universal history with all things, as that history is ultimately to be consummated:

> For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.... When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all. (I Cor. 15 :28)

A third hints at the cosmic work of the Spirit of God, nurturing all things, and suggests, as early Christian thinkers such as Ireneaus and then later theologians such as Luther maintained — the image of the "brooding" of the mother hen over "the nest" of the wo rid:

> When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of

> the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. (Gen. 1:1.f.)

A fourth text depicts the landscape and the soulscape of the consummated Future of God:

> Then I saw a new heavens and a new earth; for the first heavens and earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.... (Rev. 21:lf.)

Such texts point to a normative biblical warrant for the new ecological paradigm, and show the operative significance of the Reformation principle sola scriptura for this exposition.

It remains, then, to depict how this universal "Divine Ecology" unfolds, in broad outline, in contrast to the much more narrow Divine-Human Economy, as the later comes into view in Barth's thought. One difference will immediately become apparent. In keeping with the promissory character of the metaphor of migration to a good land, and in response to the thoroughgoing eschatology that shaped the teaching of Jesus and of Paul, the final fulfilment will as a matter of course become the integrating construct in this ecological theology, rather than the eternal beginning, as is the case in Barth's thought. Still, the "prologue in heaven," the Covenant, has its own definitive significance.(29)

The Covenant

The Whence of the Divine Ecology is the Covenant, or the originating commitment which the infinite Living God makes to initiate, sustain, and complete a history with a finite world, in the midst which this God wills to call forth the human creature. This, in the most compact kind of language available, is the originating Divine Covenant:

> GOD RESOLVES IN ETERNITY GRACIOUSLY TO COMMUNICATE GOD'S INFINITE LIFE TO INTERRELATED AND INTERDEPENDENT COMMUNITIES OF FINITE BEINGS IN FITTING WAYS, AND TO ENTER INTO COMMUNION APPROPRIATELY WITH EVERY COMMUNITY OF FINITE BEING, MEDIATED BY THE ETERNAL LOGOS OF GOD AND ENERGIZED BY THE ETERNAL SPIRIT OF GOD, IN ORDER TO MANIFEST THE DIVINE GLORY THROUGH A UNIVERSAL HISTORY, WHICH GOD WILLS TO BRING TO ITS COMPLETION WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, SO THAT ALL THINGS, IN APPROPRIATE WAYS, MIGHT ENTER INTO THE ETERNAL SABBATH REST OF GOD.

To anyone familiar with the thought of Karl Barth, perhaps the most radical departure from Barth's thinking, suggested by this summary statement of the Covenant, is the unspoken decision here to describe the "prologue in heaven" in general terms, for what it is — a prologue. Hence the classical theological distinction between the eternal Logos of God and the incarnate Logos of God (the logos asarkos and the logos ensarkos), following Emil Brunner and many early Christian thinkers, is preserved here, whereas Barth collapses the two. The name Jesus Christ, notably, is not yet mentioned in the context of the

Covenant, precisely to preserve the historical particularity and the eschatological concreteness of the Incarnation and the promised Parousia. God has a real history with all things, not a predetermined history. What is sure and certain in God's primordial eternity is God's resolve to carry out God's purpose. What is not sure is the way in which that resolve is to be enacted in cosmic history. God must struggle to bring that history to the fulfilment God intends for it from the very beginning, by the mediation of the Logos and the energizing of the Spirit. In Barth's thought, in contrast, "first things" are so completely defined that little is left to be added when we describe the unfolding the of Divine Covenant in time and space and its subsequent eternal fulfilment.(30) The promissory character of the metaphor of migration to a good land requires us to envision the original, initiating intention or commitment of God in open-ended terms, as the beginning of a genuine history with all things.

This is the originating Divine plan or purpose, then, not to establish a world in order to educate or redeem a "kingdom of spirits," as Kant and Ritschl taught, and in many ways as Barth himself believed, but something much more expansive and much more emeompas sing: to establish and shepherd a universal history of nearly infinite variations and, at the right time, to bring that history to its fulfilment in the eternal Sabbath Rest of God.

The God of the Covenant

As we continue to reflect within the context of the ecological paradigm, it becomes apparent that three major emendations can and should be made to Barth's doctrine of God, two of them developed suggestively by Juergen Moltmann, and the other espoused by the medieval theologian, Bonaventure.

The first has to do with the inner-trinitarian principle, attested throughout the course of the classical tradition, that "the Father is the source of the whole Trinity" (pater fons totius trinitatis). Barth takes this principle as a given. But it now appears that this principle is an afterglow, as it were, of ancient Greek metaphysics — and the metaphor of ascent — which was predicated on the conception of a hierarchy of being, with the undifferentiated, purely spiritual One at the apex. Moltmann argues convincingly that a more communitarian and egalitarian image of each of the Divine persons in relation to the others does much more justice to the biblical notion of the Living God who has a history with all ereatures.(31)

Since, moreover, the vision of the Covenant before us shows us that the world God creates is itself communitarian — we have seen how God graciously wills to bring into being and to enter into communion with interrelated and interdependent communities of beings -- and since our doctrine of God will as a matter of course shape our image of the world, it is important in this respect also to be able to envision a Deity who is fundamentally communitarian. It will then all the more forcefully appear to be fitting that such a God should create and redeem a communitarian world.

The second emendation has to do with the richness of the inner-trinitarian life. If space permitted, it would be highly instructive to draw on the trinitarian insights of Bonaventure extensively at this point.(32) Bonaventure understands the life of trinitarian persons to be characterized by an infinite fecundity in themselves, which for him is the inner-trinitarian ground for the extra-trinitarian Divine creativity in terms of fecundity. Since Barth is not really concerned with the theme of fecundity, this thought does not emerge in its own right in his trinitarian thought. But it certainly commends itself for our attention as we seek to outline a doctrine of God that is shaped by the ecological paradigm.

The third emendation of Barth's doctrine of God, this one also suggested by Moltmann, has to do with a new accent on God's self-limitation, on the one hand, and God's mothering of the creation, on the other hand, especially by the nurturing energy of the Spirit. This God creates a space within the Divine being: 'withdrawing, in this sense, to allow the cosmos to have its own place.(33) In this schema the cosmos is not dominated by a distant and therefore necessarily overpowering Divine otherness, as some Protestant images of God, including Barth's at points, sometimes have suggested. This God is One who calls into being by eliciting and who rules by nurturing, as John Cobb has tried to teach us. This God is not a "King" akin to the Persian emperors of old, as Whitehead once reminded us. This God is one who is most characteristically revealed in the humility of the Cross, whose power, in this sense, is weakness. This is a God who can really enter intimately and immediately into an interactive history with all creatures, not one who dominates them like puppets.

The Integrity of Nature

The expression the "integrity of the creation" is one that the World Council of Churches has lately given some cur rency.(34) That is a promising development, from the perspective of the logic of this outline. But this new terminology will remain a flatus vocis if it is not firmly rooted in some appropriate theological conceptuality. The inherited Protestant theological tradition, as that tradition is exemplified by the the-anthropological thought of Karl Barth, seems ill-equipped to do that.

What is required, if the figure be permitted, is a triangular mode of thought, with the line between God and nature drawn just as visibly as the lines between God and humanity, on the one hand, and humanity and nature, on the other. Barth is unambigous about the matter. We cannot know anything about the line between God and nature, he maintains. This means that in his thought nature is inevitably interpreted in terms of its instrumental value. It has no Divinely bestowed standing of its own .

Nor will it be sufficient only to redraw the line between humanity and nature, with heavier strokes toward the pole of nature, as Douglas Hall has sought to do, with his concept of a

relational onto 1ogy.(35) He argues that the relationship with nature belongs to the human essence, and that nature therefore is not merely an object posited by God for the sake of human manipulation. This surely is an improvement on Barth's the-anthropologica1 narrowness. But it is doubtful whether Hall and others who move in the same direction have actually accomplished what they have set out to do, namely, to demonstrate theologically that nature ij^ a genuine other, with its own integrity, not merely an object at human disposal.

Even in this relational anthropological schema, it appears that the integrity of nature will finally have to be understood chiefly in terms of human being. Thus Hall discusses "the three dimensions of human relatedness," being-with-God, being-with-the-human-counterpart, and being-with-nature.(36) While, as a matter of course, he acknowledges that the first, being-with-God, means being with "the source and ground of all being," (37) Hall actually does not depict that third line in the triangular set of relationships, the one between God and nature, with any sustained attention. He is chiefly concerned with the lines between God and humanity, and humanity and nature. In practice it seems clear, given other more pragmatic pressures on the human decision-makers, that that kind of relational ontology will also soon become vulnerable to the spirit of domination, since the relationship of the human being with nature is understood in this context chiefly in terms of the human actor who takes responsibility for nature.(38) The human creature, in this schema, plays a kind of pater f ami lias role vis-a-vis nature, not owning nature outright, to be sure, but being "truly responsible for what happens in the house hold."(39) The human creature, according to this way of thinking, is never resposible t_o nature as a genuine other, but is typically responsible for nature as what must be adjudged to be a dependent other.

In former days, many theologians found it easy to think of women in such terms — that she is "Adam's rib," that she gains her meaning from his responsible and caring relationship with her. Now that the voice of women has been heard in this respect with resounding clarity, it has become apparent that it is dehumanizing to interpret female being in terms of male being, howevermuch the interpreter takes pains to indicate that the woman has her own integrity. Ultimately that leads to "the rape culture." Likewise for nature. If nature is interpreted mainly in terms of human being, then the spirit of domination, the rape of nature, cannot easily be kept at bay.

So it is of critical importance to say that God has a history with nature which is independent of God's history with human!ty , although the two, nature and humanity, are also intimately interrelated and interdependent. This theme is suggested already by the foregoing description of the Covenant: that God resolves in eternity graciously to communitcate God's infinite life to interrelated and interdependent communities of beings, and enter into communion with them in appropriate ways, through a universal history.

God has a history with the galaxies, communicating God's infinite life to them gloriously -- the white heat of the stars

reflects the Divine majesty in a way that humans, who are like grasshoppers, never could. Likewise, God has a history with the dinosaurs and the ichthyosaurs and all the sea monsters and every great beast of the forests and the fields, however threatening they might be to us when we cross their paths. The Siberian Tiger reflects the Divine majesty in a way that humans, who were not there when God laid the foundations of the world, never could :

> Tiger! Tiger! burning bright,
> In the forests of the night,
> What immortal hand or eye
> Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

There is a time, especially in the night, when it is best for the tiny human creature to withdraw like a grasshopper into some protective niche, to allow the great ones of the cosmos to thunder and to frolic with God. When you are huddled by the hearth in the middle of the night and your hear the lightning crack and the lions roar, then you may first begin to understand the integrity of nature.

Then with the coming of the day, with the sun blazing down on the fields, you might see still more, with the eyes of a Vincent Van Gogh: the richness of the soil and the beauty of the lilies, to which even Solomon in all his glory could not compare. Then you will all the more understand the integrity of nature.

The Vocation of the Human Cre ature

Although every community of being within the universal history of God with the creation mirrors the glory of God, only members of the human community are created according to the image of God. The human creature, created in community, like all other creaturely beings, is unique in this respect: the human creature is called to enter into self-conscious communion with God, along with other humans, through confessions of praise and acts of obedience. We have much to learn from Barth at this point, in particular as he accents the uniqueness of the human creature, and the responsibility of the human creature.

But Barth's theology of the human creature also needs to be expanded. Barth's vision is so much qualified by the theme of human uniqueness, and takes human dominion in such a strong sense, that in this respect the image of the human creature in relation to nature that emerges in his thought again and again accents human manipulation of nature, even, by implication at times, exploitation. Given the ecological paradigm, however, and given our understanding of God in communitarian terms as the One who elicits all things, and given likewise our vision of nature as communities of beings with their own integrity, it is fitting to think of the human creature now — created according to the image of God — no longer as homo f aber , but as homo c o ope ran s.(40)

Given the familiar Protestant proclivity, furthermore, encouraged by theologians such as Barth, to allow the idea of

dominion to be interpreted and enacted as domination, we may well be best advised to call a moratorium on the use of that kind of conceptuality altogether. It appears that the Protestant concept of dominion has, at least for the foreseeable future, lost its viability, notwithstanding some heroic attempts to salvage the idea.(41) Likewise for the closely related, much revered, and, for the church, financially most rewarding idea of stewardship: it simply may not be worth the efforts to keep trying to interpret it "in the right way," over and over and over again, since it is so tainted with the nuances of manipulation and exploitation.(42) In any case, the vision of humanity as homo c o ope ran s surely is much more in tune with the biblical vision of Shalom, the lamb lying down with the lion, than the popular image of human dominion is.(43)

But to think holistically in terms of homo cooper ans, and not just anthropocentrically, it will be necessary to revise the common Protestant understanding, taken for granted by Barth, of human ad extra relationships. If the only kind of human ad extra relationship are I-Thou and I-It relationships, then the image of all human relationships to nature must be depicted in terms of dominion, even domination, since — notwithstanding some famous speculations by Martin Buber to the contrary -- human beings do not enter into I-Thou relationships with the other creatures of nature. At least that much, surely, is suggested by the image of Adam alone in the garden. He was not himself, fully, when he was with the animals alone. He could not communicate fully with the animals. He could not give himself fully to the animals. He needed another human being. Human beings speak. Human beings repond, yes, with meanings too deep for words at times, but with meanings nevertheless. Hence it is important for us to have available a conceptuality of I-Thou, I-It, and I-Ens, the later pointing to a relationship of contemplation and cooperation with na ture.(4 4)

The I-Ens relationship is a certain bonding of two beings from different communities of being, the one capable of personal communion, the other not capable of that kind of communion. Unlike the I-Thou relationship, which is always verbal at some level and always reciprocal in some way, the I-Ens relation is always nonverbal and only sometimes reciprocal, as in the case of some relationships between humans and animals — this is part of the significance of the account of Adam naming the animals.

The I stands before the Ens, contemplating another creature with its own integrity before God, a creature called forth by God with its own rights. With wonder and awe the I contemplates the mysterious givenness of the Ens, and its beauty. This is part of the significance of Luther's remark: "If you really examined a kernal of grain thoroughly, you would die of wonder." Sometimes such wonder is transmuted as repulsion, when the I contemplates the dark side of nature, symbolized forcefully by Melville's white whale, Moby Dick. At other times, the wonder of the I before the Ens is transfigured as delight, when with Jesus, for example, one contemplates the lilies of the field. The I of the I-Ens relationship never seeks to manipulate, much less exploit, but always wills to receive this other as a Divine creation with its own integrity and inviolability, as a sign of Grace, even

when the Ens might be found to be repulsive.

Furthermore, the I stands before the Ens, always, with gratitude, never with greed. The Ens can never be -- property. The Ens always belongs, without any qualification, to the Creator and to the Creator alone. The Ens is never "mine." The Ens is always "Thine." Once it is mine, greed begins to take over. Greed breeds mindless manipulation and finally ruthless exploitation. But when the other creature is "Thine," the I of the I-Ens relation always stands before the Ens in gra+itude. Gratitude, in contrast to greed, brings with it contemplation and celebration, sometimes with joyful abandon.

Homo co ope ran s lives with the creatures of nature as Entia, as creatures called forth by God for the sake of God's own history with them, as well as creatures called forth by God for the purposes of blessing human life. Homo cooperans is attentive to the Ens, and the needs of the Ens, as a creature which he or she is called to honor, and also, in appropriate ways, to serve. As God once stepped back, as it were, and created a space so that the whole world could have its Lebensraum, so, imaging the Divine restraint and the Divine ministry throughout the creation, homo cooperans stands back and contemplates the Ens, and sees that it is good. Homo cooperans stands back and waits, with humble and caring attention, opportunities to know and to serve the Ens.

To speak this way, in terms of humanity as homo cooperans, it needs to be stressed, is not to reject what Rene Dub o s has called "creative intervention in the earth." (45) It is by no means to suggest mere and total passivity on the part of humans as the Divinely mandated relationship with nature. On the contrary, homo cooperans can and should, on occasion, intervene creatively in the systems of nature. How else are humans to build up their own communities of Shalom, given the ravages of the elements and legitimate, God-given human needs such as food, shelter, security, sex, culture, and festivity? The point, then, is not at all that humans should not intervene in natural systems, but that that intervention, when it is initiated, should be predicated on the attending and the caring of the I-Ens relationship, and should remain within the context of the I-Ens relation ship.

Nor is the intent here to foreclose discussion about matters such as vegitarianism, animal research, or, more generally, human development of the world of nature. Above all, it is not the intent here to foreclose discussions about the critical issues of distributive justice in human history, vis-a-vis nature. The Scriptures surely propose homocentric values ("you are of more value than they") as well as co smo centric values ("to till the earth and keep it").(46) The point here is that all such discussions mus t be carried on, as far as the logic of this theological reconstruction is concerned, under the rubric of homo c o ope ran s . The only Divnely mandated way for the human creature to develop the resources of nature, in other words, when that is the moral choice of the moment, is within the context of a relationship of cooperation.

The Cosmic Vocation of Jesus Christ and the Cosmic Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Ireneaus thought of the Word and the Spirit as the hands of God.(47) We have seen that the Covenant of God with all things is mediated by the Logos and energized by the Spirit. Retrospectively and prospectively, we now name the Logos and the Spirit Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, while at the same time, in the context of the ecological paradigm, we still confess the cosmic scope of their works.

These themes, the cosmic vocation of Jesus Christ, as we see that depicted in Colossians 1:15f., and the cosmic ministry of the Holy Spirit, as that is adumbrated in the first verses of Genesis, are themes that belong to the heart of this holistic theological reconstruction. Karl Barth would have nothing to do with such themes, nor will many Protestants to this day.

But once again we call to mind the triangular shape of this ecological theology: the line between God and nature, strongly etched, completes the picture, along with the lines between God and humanity, on the one hand, and humanity and nature, on the other. Jesus Christ, as the Lord of life, is the firstborn of creation, in whom all things cohere, and to whom all things tend. Jesus Christ is the cosmic Christ, the Pantokrator , as Joseph Sittier tried to teach us.(48) The Holy Spirit is the Spiritus Creator, the Lifegiver, according the the Nicene Creed, who dwells in all things and so works to sanctify all things, as Juergen Moltmann has tried to teach us.(49)

The vocation of Jesus Christ, in particular, does not only relate to human sin. That it does do that, and does it with excruciating pathos and overwhelming power on the Cross, is of course compellingly true, biblically speaking.(50) But as the Resurrected One, who comes from the Future of God, Jesus Christ is also the Perfecter of the whole creation.(51) His coming signals therefore the beginning of the ending — in the sense of telos -- of all things, when they shall cease from their groaning in travail and also enjoy the glorious liberty that the children of God now enjoy, on the day when the Son hands the Spirit-filled cosmos over to the Father, and God shall be all in all.

The advent of Jesus Christ, as the One who has come to blot out human sin, also means that He has come to restore the sinful human creature to a right relationship with God and therefore to a right relationship with nature, as well as with other human beings. Insofar as believers live in communion with Jesus Christ, then, believers know what was never theirs as sinners alone: the primal realities of life in the creation as the Garden of God, what it can mean to live as homo cooperans. Insofar as as they live in communion with Jesus Christ, likewise, believers also can have a foretaste of the feast to come. They can savor tastes of that great and glorious Cosmic Banquet, when as citizens of the New Jerusalem they will contemplate the glories of the Lord shining and glowing not only within that city, but still more from every creature of nature that will dwell in a luminous New Heavens and a radiant New Earth.(52)

Notes

1» Prepared for the "Theology and Ethics Symposium: New Perspectives on Ecojustice," sponsored by the Committee on Social Witness Policy, Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Commission on Church and Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Theological School, Chicago, March, 1990.

2. For a thorough and up-to-date description of the extent of the environmental crisis, see Ke epi ngand Healing the Creation, a resource paper prepared by the Presbyterian Eco-Justice Tas"k Force (Louisville, NY: Presbyterian Church fUSAl, 1989), pp. 1 -38 .

3. I have attempted to address such issues from a theological perspective for 25 years, both historically and constructively, beginning with my dissertation Creation and Nature: A Study of the Doctrine of Nature with SpecialAttention to KarlBarth's Doctrine of Creation [unpublished] (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1966) and my programmatic essay, Brother Earth: Nature , God, and Ecology in a Time of Crisis (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1970). See also my historical study, The Travail of N at ure : the Ambiguous Eco 1 o g i c a .1 Promi s e o f_ Chris tian theolog y (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). The most recent reviews of this work are: Peter W. Bakken, Journalof Religion, 69:4, 1 989 , pp. 5 7 4 f. and Thomas Sieger Derr, Princeton Seminary Bulletin, 10:3, 1989. My constructive approach has been subjected to scrutiny, in comparison with the perspectives of John Cobb and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, by Claude Y. Stewart, Jr., Nature in G r ace : A Study in the Theology of Nature (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983.) See also Roderick Frazier Nash, The Rights of Nature:A History of Environmental Ethics (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 103-108 and Thomas Sieger Derr, Ecology and Human Need (Philadephia: Westminster, 1975), pp. 36ff. My most recent published essay is "The Future of the Cosmos and the Renewal of the Church's Life with Nature," Cosmos as Creation, ed. Ted Peters (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), chap. IX. This can be read as a companion piece to the reflections in this paper, as can my 1989 unpublished lecture at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, "The Rhetoric of Grace and the Vision of Grace: Joseph Sittier's Theology of Nature As An Invitation To See As Well As To Hear." As a "neo-Reformation" thinker (Stewart), I plead guilty to the description that I am also a "revisionist."(Derr)

4. See The Ecumenical Review, 41:4, 1989. Most of the articles in this issue, introduced by Douglas John Hall, discuss "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation."

5. See also the discussion in R.6np^ag an<i Healing the Creation (above, n. 1).

6. Op^.c it - (above, n 3). In 1986, I reviewed and attempted to analyze the extensive − - but then largely unnoticed — discussion

of the theology of nature in the U.S., from 1961 to 1986, In an essay, "Toward A New Theology of Nature," dialog , 25:1 , 1936 , pp. 43-50. In that essay I plaintively observed that a detailed bibliograhy of works in this field was desperately needed. Thankfully, that kind of task has now been undertaken most helpfully by J. Ronald Engel and Peter W. Bakken, The Promise of Christian Eco-Justice :An Annotated Bibillography (f o rt he omi ng).

7. For John Cobb, see especially Is It Too Late ? A Theology of Ecology (Beverly Hills, CA: Bruce Books, 1972) and the bibliography cited in Stewart, op. cit - (above, n. 3). For Joseph Sittier, see especially Essays on Nature and Grace (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) and the references in the Engel and Bakken bibliography (above, n. 6). Juergen Moltmann's most creative contribution to this discussion is his Gifford Lectures, God in Creation:A New Theo logy of Creation and the Spirit of God, tr. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

8. See, for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecology and Human Liberation: A Conflict between the Theology of History and the Theology of Nature?," To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), chap. 5, and Karen L. Bloomquist, "Creation, Domination, and the Environment," Bulletin of Gettysburg Semi na ry, 6 9:3, 1989, pp. 2 7-32; and, inter alia, Vine Deloria, Jr., God _i_s_ Red (New York: Grosser & Dunlap, 1973) and Harvey Sindima, "Community of Life," The Ecumenical Review, 41:4, 1989, pp. 537-551.

9. See Charles C. West, "Justice Within the Limits of the Created World," Ecumenical Review, 27:1, pp. 57-64. Regarding liberation theology more generally, see Clifford Green, "Gustavo Gutierrez and James Cone: Liberation Theology," Critical Is sue s in Modern Religion, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), chap. 10.

10. These church leaders should not be faulted for this because few biblical scholars during the last twenty years devoted any attention to the theology of nature. There are signs, however, that this disinterest among biblical scholars might be fading. See, for example, the thoughtful and thought-provoking essay by Terrence E. Fretheim, "Nature's Praise of God in the Psalms," Ex Aud i tu, 3:1 , 1988, pp. 16-30, and the literature he cites.

11. An exception was the volume, The Human Crisis in Ecology, ed. Franklin C. Jensen and Cedric W. Tilberg (New York: Board of Social Ministry, Lutheran Church in America, 1972). Produced by a mainline Protestant denomination, this document nevertheless attempted to go beyond a singular reliance on the theology of d omi ni on.

12. "Ecolustice" was first given currency by the Boston Industrial Mission in the late 19 6 0's . This conceptuality is

reflected in the essay by Norman J. Faramelli, "Ecological Responsibility and Economic Justice," Ecology: Crisis and New Vision, ed. Richard E. Sherrell (Richmond: John Knox Press, n. d.) , chap. 2 .

13. See Derr, op . c it . (above, n. 3).

14. Joseph Sittier, who helped to give the expression "care of the earth" currency, did not attach it as an appendix to the themes distributive justice or environmental management. But Sittier remained more or less an isolated figure in this respect.

15. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical roots of our Ecologic Crisis," Science 155, 1967, pp. 1203-7. See my essay also, "The Liberation of Nature: Lynn White's Challenge Anew," Christian Century, 102:18, 1985, p. 530-533.

16. See The Travail of Nature (above, n. 3), pp. 121-132 for the following discussion.

17 . Ibi d., pp. 133-143.

18 . Ibid .

19 . Ibid ., pp. 145-15 5.

20 . In a private conversation with Barth in Basel, in 1965, relating to my interest in the theology of nature, he quoted these verses from Psalm 8 to me, and then admonished me not to get involved with "gnostic speculations about nature."

21. See The Travail of Nature (above, n. 3), pp. 84-96 .

22. Cf. the following statement by Barth, recently called to our attention by Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan, eds. , Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 122f. [from Church Doj*niajt_i cs , III, 4, The Doctrine of Creation, tr. A. T. Mackay et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), pp. 349-51], where Barth is discussing Albert Schweitzer's idea of "reverence for life." We can learn from Schweitzer, Barth says: "Our starting point must be that in this matter..., as a living being in co-existence with non-human life, man has to think and act responsibly. The responsibility is not the same as he. has to his own life and that of his fellow-men. Only analogically can we bring it under the concept of respect for life. It can only follow the primary responsibility at a distance. If we try to bring animal and vegetable life too close to human, or even class them together, we can hardly avoid the danger of regarding and treating human life, even when we really want to help, from the aspect of the animal and vegetable, and therefore in a way which is not really apposite. But why should we not be faced here by a responsibility which, if not primary, is a serious secondary responsibility?" But then Barth qualifies what he has just said, in his own characteristic

the-anthropocentric way, in terms of a strong doctrine of human election and human dominion, which, by the time he concludes his discussion, seems to lead him to the point where he has finally taken back much of what he said, at first, in favor of reverence for life. Plants and animals, he states, are indispensable, but they are the background for what is truly essential, the life of God with human beings. The nuance, moreover, as a matte-v of course shifts from the thought of reverence to the thought of control: "The special responsibility in this case rests primarily on this, that the world of animals and plants forms the indispensable living background to the living-space divinely allotted to man and placed under his control. As they live, so can he. He is not set up as lord over the earth, but as lord on the earth which is already furnished with these creatures. Animals and plants do not belong to him; they and the whole earth belong only to God. But he takes precedence of them. They are provided for his use. They are his 'means of life.' The meaning of the basis of this distinction consists in the fact that he is the animal creature to whom God reveals, entrusts and binds Himself within the rest of creation, with whom He makes common cause in the course of a particular history which is neither that of an animal nor a plant, and in whose life-activity he expects a conscious and deliberate recognition of His honour, mercy and power. Hence the higher necessity of his life, and his right to that lordship and control. He can exercise it only in the responsibility thus conferred on him."

23. Keeping and Healing the Creation (above, n. 1), pp. 44f.

24. Ib i d . , p • 5 6.

25. Douglas John Hall, Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship (Grand Rapids: Herd man s Publishing Company, 1986), p. 201f.

26. See below, p. /A

27. I would say the same about my own mundane theological labors in this field for the last 25 years. See above, n. 3.

28. This discussion summarizes my reflections in The Travail of Mature (above, n. 3), pp. 13-30.

29. I am also instructed here by the works of Juergen Moltmann, beginning with his Theology of Hope : On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology, t r. Ja me s W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). Moltmann's works I regard as a friendly ammendment to the Church Dogmatics.

30. This was already the conclusion of Robert Jenson, in his early work Alpha and Omega:A Study in the Theology of Karl Ba_rth (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1963).

31. See Juergen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom: the Doctrine of God, tr. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row,

1981) .

32. See The Travail of Nature (above, n. 3), pp. 97-105.

33. See Moltmann, The Trinity (above, n. 31), pp. 86-93.

34. Regarding the World Council of Churches discussion, see above, n. 4. I believe that 1 was the first to introduce this kind of terminology into the theological discussion. See my reflections about "the integrity of nature," Brother Earth (above, n. 3), pp. 92, 149, along with a discussion of the rights of nature.

35. Hall, Imaging God (above, n. 25).

36 . Ibid. , p p . 1 2 3 f f.

37 . Ibid . , p . 127.

38 . Ibid . , p. 77.

39 . Ibid . , p . 112.

40. As I develop this thought, I am revising some of the materials I presented in Brother Earth (above, n. 3), which, I now believe, accented the theme of human dominion too sharply.

41. Such as Derr, Ecology and Human Need (above, n. 3).

42. The most forceful interpretations of the stewardship idea have been put forward by Douglas John Hall, Imaging God (above, n . A-5) ; The Steward : A Biblical Symbol Come of Age (New York: Friendship Press, 1932); and The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985). Here, it appears to me, a creative theologian who has a compelling message of his own to deliver, is pouring new wine into old wineskins, with the result that these books are about to burst at the seams, with the turn of every page. What if he had not accepted these three assignments from the Commission on Stewardship of the National Council of Churches[9] What if he had started out, de novo, simply to say what the Spirit was prompting him to say? It is a pity, I think, that he has been such a loyal servant of the institutional church and its theological agenda, in this respect, which sometimes can be driven as much by dollars as by sense.

43. One of the numerous virtues of the study by Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, The Predicament of the Prosperous (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), is that they take Shalom, rather than stewardship, to be the fundamental biblical c ons tru ct .

4 4. See, further, my exploratory essay, "I-Thou, I-It, and I-Ens," Journal of Religion, 48:3, 1968, pp. 260-273.

45. Ren6 Dubos, Reason Awake: Science for Man (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 126f.

46. The issues we are touching on here are delicate and complex. How are we to balance homo cen trie and cosmo centric values? Some of the most thoughtful reflection on these issues has been done by Charles Birch and John Cobb in their study The Liberation of Life: Prom Cell to the Community (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981). This is now Engel and Bakken (above, n. 6) identify and summarize some of the important conclusions of that study: "The general vision of the future good world that ought to guide choices involving our relations to the environment at large is one based on 'maximizing richness of experience' as such, which means maximising the 'quality of human life wih minimum impact on non-human life.'(173) Practically speaking, this principle prescribes a large human population learning to live comfortably and frugally thereby relaxing pressure on the biosphere, reducing poverty, and releasing habitats for other species. In terms of global concerns, a stable and creative world order requires forms of development that are lust (promote personal freedom, equality of opportunity, and participation) and sustainable (accomodate the earth's carrying capacity). The ecological model, with its focus on the intrinsic value of each person and the richness of relations with all forms of life, suggests ways to achieve such a transcending global community of c ommuni ties."

4 7. On Irenaeus, see The Travail of Nature (above, n. 3) , pp. 35-44.

48. See above, n. 7.

4 9. See above, n. 7.

50. The assumption, in this context , is that humanity alone has "sinned. " There is no cosmic fall. See Brother Earth (above, n. 3) , PP- 192-200.

5 1. On the vocation of Jesus Christ as the Per fee ter of the Creation, that is, as One who is more than the Reconciler, see my discussion in Brother Earth (above, n. 3), pp. 162-178. Cf. also the comments of Juergen Mo Itmann, The Tri nity (above, n. 31), p. 116: "According to Paul Christ was not merely 'delivered for our offences' but was also 'raised for our lustification'(Rom. 4.25 AV). Reconciling sinners with Cod through his cross, he brings about the new righteousness, the new life, the new creature throuh his resurrection.... This surplus of grace over and above the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of sinners, represents the power of the new creation which consummates creation-in-the-beginning. It follows from this that the Son of God did not become man simply because of the sin of men and women, but rather for the sake of perfecting the creation."

52. See further my essay, "The Future of the Cosmos and the Renewal of the Church's Life with Nature" (above, n. 3).