ABSTRACT

Covenantal Ecology: The Promise of Covenant
for a Christian Environmental Ethic

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Environmentally responsible lifestyles are becoming a more mainstream, if not trendy, choice in the United States. However, there is still much room to improve in terms of "green" living. This dissertation sets forth a new theological framework for the Christian church that aims to compel more environmentally conscious living. While some may argue that focusing on the church is far too parochial given the extent of environmental degradation happening daily, the church remains uniquely situated to compel positive change.

For decades, the church has promoted creation care by urging congregations and individuals to live as better "stewards" of creation. I argue that stewardship's dependence upon an anthropocentric cosmic imaginary make it a poor choice for a Christian environmental ethic. In its place I argue for a covenantal ecology, i.e., a framework that establishes God, humanity, and nonhuman creation as partners within a covenantally established and maintained relationship. In addition to overcoming some of the

theological distortions of stewardship, a covenantal ecology promotes a deepening of commitment to nonhuman creation.

After describing the flawed biblical hermeneutic of stewardship and the theological distortions it engenders, I draw upon the works of Robert Murray, Michael Northcott and Karl Barth to establish the theological foundations of a covenantal ecology. Having established a theological lens with which to interpret Scripture, I begin an exploration of scriptural texts. The Old Testament establishes the God of Israel as the God of covenantal relationships. These texts describe God's covenantal relationship with all of creation, the relationship between human and nonhuman creation established by the law, the cosmic significance of *ṣedeq* and *mišpāṭ*, and the eschatological renewal of creation brought about by God. I continue this biblical exploration into the New Testament, arguing that Jesus Christ's incarnate ministry initiates the fulfillment of a covenantal ecology, which is completed in the New Jerusalem. In its description of the new heaven and earth, Scripture provides a picture of the fulfilled covenantal ecology in which God, humans, and nonhuman creation live in intimate, nonexploitative relationships.

Covenantal Ecology: The Promise of Covenant for a Christian Environmental Ethic

by

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A Dissertation

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For Aaryn, Nathan and Sadie

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### *1.1. The Current Situation and Church's Role in Creation Care*

Environmentally responsible lifestyles are becoming a more mainstream, if not trendy, choice in the United States. Some of this movement is occurring at institutional levels. Network conglomerates promote a "green week" yearly; car manufacturers, spurred on by government regulation, are building more fuel-efficient cars; civic and religious organizations "adopt" roadways and watersheds to clean and maintain. Some of these changes are also occurring on the individual level. More people use reusable shopping bags, skipping the paper and the plastic; drivers are replacing older vehicles with the aforementioned fuel-efficient cars; homes have full recycling bins and are using energy-efficient bulbs. There are countless other examples of the increasing "greening" of the United States.

Yet, despite this awakening eco-consciousness, a closer look reveals that "living green" does not pervade the American lifestyle. The televisions that allow us to watch a network's "green week" reporting are also "vampire" electronics that continue to consume coal-based power even when they're turned off. Hybrid and electric vehicles, although growing in sales, represent only a small fraction of the U.S. auto market. As of 2008, the U.S. was still importing 102 billion plastic bags per year, the vast majority of

which make their way to growing landfills.[1] While "greening," the U.S. is far from "green."

There are undoubtedly a number of measures that can militate environmental issues like climate change, deforestation, and pollution. However, as Roger Gottlieb points out, the enormity of the modern environmental crisis calls for a fundamental change in the modern understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural world:

> the world is now simply a very different place from what it was. Whatever environmental degradation occurred in the past (and in many cases it was considerable), ecological problems have now reached a point far beyond what could have been conceived of by prior thinkers. When else has a theorist of political power had to confront a government that could poison mothers' milk with pesticides or make sunlight significantly more dangerous by altering the composition of the atmosphere? What other society has had to create norms for economic activity when that activity could affect the daily lives of people thousands of miles away? What morality has had to face a banality of evil in which the most common everyday actions (driving an automobile, putting fertilizer on the lawn) could contribute to devastating effects on future generations or people at the other ends of the earth?[2]

The status quo cannot continue, but the lack of experience in researching, and effectively confronting these novel environmental issues, often lead to equivocation, if not outright skepticism or paralysis both in the American public and the American church.[3]

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[1] Ellen Gamerman, "An Inconvenient Bag," *Wsj.com*, September 26, 2008, sec. Life & Style, accessed June 27, 2011, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122238422541876879.html.

[2] Roger S Gottlieb, "Introduction: The Center Cannot Hold," in *The Ecological Community: Environmental Challenges for Philosophy, Politics, and Morality*, ed. Roger S Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1997), ix, x. For other recent treatments of these issues, see: Celia Deane-Drummond, "Theology, Ecology, and Values," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 895–897; Theodore Hiebert, "The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, Mass.: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), 39–66; Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 39–66.

[3] The response to climate change in American society and American churches are evidence of this uncertainty and skepticism. Polls taken over the last decade reveal that while 97% of climate scientists acknowledge the anthropogenic nature of climate change, less than half of Americans and Christians agree

However, the 2013 report from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that the time for confusion and paralysis has passed. The report describes dramatic environmental changes – e.g., extinction of species, sea level rise, extreme weather, etc. – projected to take effect by the end of the century. If these consequences are to be averted, the report notes that it will require "substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions."[4] The change called for by the IPCC would represent a dramatic shift in current practices in America and the way the majority of Americans currently understand their relationship to the natural world.

As the title indicates, the following dissertation is concerned with caring for the environment. Yet, at the outset, it must be acknowledged that this dissertation is not a theological account driven by scientific explanations of the environmental crisis. While the dire predictions climatologists and environmental scientists are a sound reason for

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with their assessment. Between July 2006 and October 2010, the percentage of Americans who believe that global warming is caused by human activity dropped from 50% to 34%. Pew Research Center for People & the Press, "Wide Partisan Divide Over Global Warming - Pew Research Center," last modified October 27, 2010, accessed June 29, 2011, http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1780/poll-global-warming-scientists-energy-policies-offshore-drilling-tea-party. A March 2010 Gallup Poll showed that 50% of Americans believed that global warming was the consequence of human activity, while 46% believe that it is naturally caused. Gallup, "Americans' Global Warming Concerns Continue to Drop," last modified March 2010, accessed June 29, 2011, http://www.gallup.com/poll/126560/americans-global-warming-concerns-continue-drop.aspx. A survey conducted by Yale and George Mason University placed these numbers at 47% and 35%, respectively. Leiserowitz, A. et al., *Climate Change in the American Mind: Americans' Global Warming Beliefs and Attitudes in May 2011*, Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, May 2011, 3, http://environment.yale.edu/climate/files/ ClimateBeliefsMay2011.pdf. A Pew Research Center survey shows that various Christian groups were either just as skeptical, or even more skeptical, than the American public. L. Street et al., "Religious Groups' Views on Global Warming," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, 2009, http://www.pewforum.org/2009/04/16/religious-groups-views-on-global-warming/ (accessed October 5, 2013). For surveys and studies pertaining to climate science, see John Cook et al., "Quantifying the Consensus on Anthropogenic Global Warming in the Scientific Literature," *Environmental Research Letters* 8, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 024024; William R. L. Anderegg et al., "Expert Credibility in Climate Change," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 107, no. 27 (July 6, 2010): 12107–12109; Peter T. Doran and Maggie Kendall Zimmerman, "Examining the Scientific Consensus on Climate Change," *Eos, Transactions American Geophysical Union* 90, no. 3 (2009): 22–23.

[4] International Panel on Climate Change, "Approved Summary for Policymakers" (Working Group I, 2013), 14, accessed October 6, 2013, http://www.climatechange2013.org/images/uploads/WGIAR5-SPM_Approved27Sep2013.pdf.

projects such as this, I would argue that scripturally-attentive theological articulations of creation are helpful, crisis or no, for when we describe creation, we necessarily describe the relationship between human and nonhuman creation, and their relationship to the Creator. Of course, this is not to say that I reject the value of the insights that modern sciences continue to provide. Indeed, as I show in the dissertation, modern science has provided new insight into Scripture's descriptions of humanity's impact on nonhuman creation. Therefore, while the observations of modern sciences will contribute to this dissertation, it is first and foremost a scriptural and theological project that frames or provides the lens for engaging these observations.

In this dissertation, I focus on a conceptual foundation for the church that leads to a rightly ordered relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. Some may argue that focusing on the church is far too parochial given the extent of environmental degradation happening on a daily basis, but I believe this would be a significant contribution for two reasons. First, as Michael Northcott points out, the churches are "the largest single form of voluntary organization, even in secularized societies such as those of northern Europe," and are an "enormous potential resource for environmental fidelity."[5] Christianity may not carry the same moral authority as it has in previous centuries, but recent surveys have shown that approximately three out of four Americans identify as Christian. Therefore, as Willis Jenkins argues, the church is in a position to bring "environmental issues in contact with the lived faith of their

[5] Northcott, Ecology and Christian Ethics" in Don Brandt, ed., *God's Stewards: The Role of Christians in Creation Care* (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 45–46. Gallup, "In U.S., Rise in Religious 'Nones' Slows in 2012", 2013, accessed October 18, 2013, http://www.gallup.com/poll/159785/rise-religious-nones-slows-2012.aspx#2; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey", 2007, accessed October 18, 2013, http://religions.pewforum.org/reports; Analysis By Gary Langer, "Poll: Most Americans Say They're Christian," *ABC News*, last modified 2006, accessed October 18, 2013, http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=90356&page=1.

communities," thus initiating the type of large-scale change demanded by the modern environmental crisis.[6] Second, As Erin Lothes Biviano has demonstrated in recent research, Christians already engaged in environmental advocacy and projects tend to draw upon scripturally and theological informed understandings of the world as "a powerful source of energy and motivation" for their work.[7] This dissertation is one such articulation, and one, which - counter to the prevailing notion in the Western church today - offers "a different moral universe and way of life" necessary to challenge the morality of the "industrial-technological civilization" in which ecological collapse is perpetuated.[8]

Over the last several decades, the church has largely promoted creation care by urging congregations and congregations live as better "stewards" of creation. While these calls have certainly had some positive effect, I argue that stewardship's affinities with the ideology that has enabled the anthropocentric exploitation of creation of the last four centuries make it a poor choice to rally a robust and sustainable response to the

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[6] Willis J. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), 16. The field of environmental ethics (both secular and religious) is marked by a polyphony of voices, each dealing with the issue in unique, often disparate, and sometimes contradictory, ways. Jenkins writes, "academic endeavors seem only to further fracture discussion, proliferating topics of concern and rehearsing debates over anthropocentrism while the field still lacks a cohesive account of its practical rationality. " Ibid., 32.

[7] Erin Lothes Biviano, "Worldviews on Fire: Understanding the Inspiration for Congregational Religious Environmentalism," *Cross Currents*, December 1, 2012, 506.

[8] Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 111. Willis Jenkins doubts the value of the kind of ethical and moral reformulation advocated by Biviano and Rasmussen, arguing, "religious ethics holds promise for confronting unprecedented problems not because it possesses a special kind of moral resource (values, beliefs, worldviews) but because it works within traditions that is constantly being renegotiated and redeployed in order to meet new contextual demands." Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 5. While Jenkins privileges concretely working within a tradition over moral resources, Biviano found that both were important sources of motivation for Christians pursuing creation care. Lothes Biviano, "Worldviews on Fire," 497.

environmental crisis. In its place I argue for a covenantal ecology, i.e., a framework that establishes God, humanity, and nonhuman creation as partners within a covenantally established and maintained relationship. In addition to overcoming the theological distortions of stewardship, a covenantal ecology promotes a strengthening of commitment to nonhuman creation and thus, may catalyze the type of significant lifestyle changes needed in the United States. To begin, I describe the sources of the Western church's equivocation on environmental issues and behaviors.

### *1.2. Contributions to the Church's Environmental Equivocation*

There are a variety of narratives that attempt to locate the source of the church's environmental equivocation. None of these narratives has been received as canonical, but, insofar as they critically evaluate problematic aspects of the Christian Scriptures and tradition, are helpful for Christian environmental theology and ethics. Some argue that the church's equivocation is the result of neglecting the input of ecologists and scientists in other related fields.[9] Others claim that the church is ill-equipped by its Scriptures to address these issues, and must, at the very least, reject certain biblical images and

[9] Nancy R. Howell, "Relations Between Homo Sapiens and Other Animals: Scientific and Religious Arguments," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 952; Benedict M. Ashley, "Dominion or Stewardship?: Theological Reflections," in *Birth, Suffering, and Death: Catholic Perspectives at the Edges of Life*, ed. Wildes, Kevin Wm, Abel, Francesc, and Harvey, John C. (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 88.

passages that denigrate creation.[10] Still others argue that the theology of the early church, influenced by Neo-Platonism, has confused the church's understanding of creation.[11]

However, the majority of critiques point to philosophical and cultural changes in the 16th century as the main driver of the church's ambivalence, if not negativity, towards creation. While not the only account, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* offers a comprehensive narrative that takes into account the cultural and theological changes occurring in European society during this time period. Beginning in the 15th century, Europe experienced significant developments in astronomy, mathematics, biology, and other sciences in what is commonly referred to as the Scientific Revolution. These changes, Taylor argues, had a dramatic effect on how human beings viewed the world in which they lived. He describes this as a change in "cosmic imaginaries," or "the generally shared background understandings of" the surrounding world.[12] He explains further that before the Scientific Revolution, the world was understood to be an "enchanted," living

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[10] J. R Hyland, *God's Covenant with Animals: A Biblical Basis for the Humane Treatment of All Creatures* (New York: Lantern Books, 2000), 51; David Kinsley, "Christianity as Ecologically Responsible," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996), 116, 118.

[11] Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Global Stewardship: Toward an Ethic of Limitation," in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, ed. Maura A Ryan and Todd Whitmore (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 58. Howell, "Relations Between Homo Sapiens and Other Animals: Scientific and Religious Arguments," 949–952. For criticism of the negative impact of Neo-Platonism upon the Christian understanding of creation, see: Hiebert, "The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions," 142; Thomas Berry, "Christianity's Role in the Earth Project," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2000), 128; Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition" in Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 7; H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 44–49. For criticism of Augustine of Hippo, and the influence of Neo-Platonism on his work, see Michael S. Northcott, "Ecology and Christian Ethics," in Brandt, *God's Stewards*, 34; Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 190.

[12] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 323.

cosmos, i.e., a world in which cosmic and natural forces could, and often did, interact upon human beings.[13] The boundary between the world and humans was much more porous, and human beings could be directly & dramatically influenced by outside objects and forces. The Scientific Revolution gave rise to the modern cosmic imaginary of a "disenchanted" universe, i.e., a world in which the individual was no longer "open and porous and vulnerable to a world of spirits and powers," but, instead "buffered." [14] Buffering "inhibits or blocks out certain of the ways in which transcendence has historically impinged on humans and been present in their lives."[15] As Oliver Davies points out, the effect of this buffering was a bifurcation of human faculties:

> Over the course of several centuries the theophanic universe of the pre-modern period turned into one that is far more familiar to us today: a world conceived primarily in terms of physical quanta, as the interplay of measureable forces… the human imagination and the intellect were set on separate trajectories and that the self, no longer unified in itself by the sense of a *cosmos*, of itself as creature intimately ordered and participant in a world of God's making, was in some profound way cut adrift or exiled from the world.[16]

The modern universe became one in which human beings were estranged not from creation, but from an observable, manipulable "nature."

One can see the distinct bifurcation between humans and nonhuman creation in two the works of two highly influential figures: Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Renée Descartes (1596-1650). Francis Bacon was an English statesman, philosopher and

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 27.

[15] Ibid., 239.

[16] Oliver Davies, *The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 57, 71. For Davies, the function of the imagination is not just some generic creative thinking, but "that the imagination allows us to map out ways in which we can comprehend the *world as a whole*."

scientist whose work laid the foundations of the method for scientific investigation still employed today. Bacon believed that adherence to that method in the empirical investigation of universal laws of nature would allow humans "to detect and bring to light things never yet done" and lead to them to "truth in speculation and freedom in operation" not only in matters of scientific exploration, but in every facet of the human life.[17] Bacon understood this type of knowledge as liberating because it could free humans from the effects of the Fall (Gen. 3:1-24). Bacon writes, "man by the fall fell at the same time from his state of innocency and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses however can even in this life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by arts and sciences."[18] While religion could help humans to regain their innocence, knowledge was necessary if they were to regain their dominion over creation, if only in part.

In "New Atlantis" Bacon illustrates how dominion over nature is most effectively wielded and the results of such a practice. The essay tells the fictional account of European sailors lost at sea who arrive at the shore of the uncharted island of Bensalem. The sailors marvel at the peace, happiness, kindness and knowledge that abound in Bensalem. This state of affairs in Bensalem is attributed largely to "Solomon's House," a building dedicated to "the study of the works and creatures of God."[19] In Solomon's house, researchers utilize empirical observation and experimentation to find the universal

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[17] Francis Bacon, "British Philosophy: 1600-1900," in *Novum Organum*, ed. Mark C. Rooks, 1993, 120, II.iii, accessed October 26, 2013, http://pm.nlx.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/xtf/view?docId=britphil/britphil.01.xml;chunk.id=div.britphil.v1.21;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.britphil.v1.21;brand=default;query=novum%20organum#novum%20organum.

[18] Ibid., 386, II.lii.

[19] Francis Bacon, "New Atlantis," in *Essays and New Atlantis*, ed. Gordon Sherman Haight, Classics Club Library (New York: W.J. Black, 1942), 271.

laws that regulate the world. Bensalem's success as a society is due to the fact that it is ordered in accord with these scientific discoveries. Bacon presents lengthy descriptions of these various experiments. Through the character of a Bensalem native, their relationship to plants, trees, and flowers is described:

> We have also large and various orchards and gardens, wherein we do not so much respect beauty as variety of ground and soil, proper for divers trees and herbs, and some very spacious, where trees and berries are set, whereof we make divers kinds of drinks, besides the vineyards. In them we practice likewise all conclusions [experiments] of grafting and inoculating, as well of wild-trees as fruit-trees, which produceth many effects. And we make by art, in the same orchards and gardens, trees and flowers to come earlier or later than their seasons, and to come up and bear more speedily than by their natural course they do. We make them also by art greater much than their nature; and their fruit greater and sweeter, and of differing taste, smell, color, and figure, from their nature. And many of them we so order as they become of medicinal use.[20]

The gardens of Bensalem are not a venue to appreciate the natural beauty of any of these growing things. Instead, the plants are specimens a laboratory in which horticulturalists experiment with their growth cycles, color, taste, etc., in order to create various drinks and medicines for human use. By using the raw materials these plants and trees provide, they are made "greater much than their nature." Manipulating nature in these systematic ways has made Bensalem the exemplary society and "a picture of our salvation in heaven."[21] In this story, Bacon creates a society completely committed to the scientific method and the manipulation of nature; the society flourishes as it exercises dominion over creation.

Like Bacon, the French philosopher Renée Descartes emphasized the need to find laws that regulated the universe; by observing "certain laws which God has so established in nature," Descartes felt that he had "discovered many truths more useful and more

[20] Ibid., 291.

[21] Ibid., 256.

important than anything [he] had learned before or even hoped to learn."[22] However, his scientific search was but one aspect of a larger program that attempted to find certainty in all types of knowledge. In a letter requesting the support of the faculty of sacred theology in Paris for the *Meditations*, Descartes indicated that the arguments made therein were "most certain and evident demonstrations" and that there was "no way open to the human mind whereby better ones could ever be found…[23] With certainty in scientific and philosophical knowledge, Descartes could assign to humanity absolute control over the natural world:

> Knowing the power and the effects of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens and all the other bodies which surround us, as distinctly as we know the various trades of our craftsmen, we might put them in the same way to all the uses for which they are appropriate, and thereby make ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature.[24]

Controlling nature was no different than mastering a craft. Given the right knowledge and skills, humans could fashion and utilize nature for their own gain. No longer were human beings subject to a world that could physically and spiritually affect them; by sealing off the human from that natural world and assigning them an absolute power over nature, the modern cosmic imaginary conceived of unilateral influence only from the human to nature.

With humans now as "masters" of a manipulable nature, the entire web of relationships between God, humans and nonhuman creation was recast: As Keith Thomas points out, a "transcendent God, outside his creation, symbolized the separation between

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[22] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method,* trans., F. E. Sutcliffe (New York: Penguin, 1985), 61.

[23] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: In which the Existence of God and the Distinction of the Soul from the Body are Demonstrate,* trans., Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1979), 2.

[24] Descartes, *Discourse*, 78.

spirit and nature. Man stood to animal as did heaven to earth, soul to body, culture to nature. There was a total qualitative difference between man and brute."[25] In this new cosmic imaginary, it was necessary that humans be thought of as lords over a "lesser" nonhuman creation, for God was similarly understood as a lord standing over, and unaffected by, material reality. According to this new cosmology, God withdrew from creation after the initial act of creation, but only after having ordained the good of the world towards the good of those who would rule in his stead. As David Kinsley shows, commentaries and other Christian writings in early modern England:

> assumed that God had created the world, and every creature in it, for some human purpose. The entire creation was perceived to have been ordered specially for humankind. The anthropocentrism was linked with the conviction that it was a divine mandate that humankind dominate nature. Other creatures had no rights and were primarily in existence to be disposed of in any way human beings found fitting.[26]

The horsefly, for example, was thought to teach humans patience, and the domesticated animal to provide food and clothing. Domesticated creatures such as pigs and sheep were considered the means by which humanity's needs for food and clothing might be met. From nuisance insects to domesticated animals, nonhuman creatures found their purpose in benefitting humans. In the modern cosmic imaginary God was removed from creation,

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[25] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 35. See also, Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition" in Hiebert, "The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions," 8–11.

[26] David Kinsley, "Christianity as Ecologically Harmful," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996), 114.

humans were called to master it, and creation "became 'nature'- raw materials that existed only to be given value through exploitation."[27]

In the 19th century, this anthropocentric understanding of creation was exacerbated by the Industrial Revolution. The cosmic imaginary of the Scientific Revolution had securely posited nature as a depository of raw materials to be used for human benefit, and the Industrial Revolution of that century produced an "industrial nonrenewing extractive economy."[28] The modern efficient machinery that drove The Industrial Revolution, allowed this depository to be more fully exploited. Nature became the means by which raw materials could be re-sourced, i.e., utilized to make "goods" at unprecedented rates for human use and consumption.

Biblical and theological scholarship in the first half of the 20th century perpetuated this anthropocentric and utilitarian division between humans and the nature they managed. While this perspective was ubiquitous, recent scholarly assessments have noted the division between human and nonhuman creation prominently in the works of Oscar Cullmann, Walter Eichrodt, Teilhard de Chardin, and Karl Barth.[29] This trajectory in its most concise form is also evident in Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad's treatment of creation. Creation, according to Von Rad, was always an ancillary thought

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[27] Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, "Covenant and Creation," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, ed. Charles Birch, William Eakin, and Jay B McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 28–29.

[28] Berry, "Christianity's Role in the Earth Project," 130; Mary Midgley, "Concluding Reflections: Dover Beach Revisited," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 972–973.

[29] Norman C. Habel, *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Pilgrim Press, 2001), 27–28; Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 60–65; Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, 145–173; Geoff Thompson, "'Remaining Loyal to the Earth': Humanity, God's Other Creatures and the Bible in Karl Barth," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark International, 2010).

used to promote other theological concepts; he contends "a genuinely Yahwistic belief" in the doctrine of creation "never attained to the stature of a relevant, independent doctrine."[30] For example, von Rad argues that even in texts that have traditionally been viewed as a locus of reflection on creation (e.g., Pss. 136, 148) creation is "invariably related, and indeed subordinated, to soteriological considerations." Despite being explicitly addressed at length in these biblical texts and others, von Rad argues that creation is simply used here as a means to address the primary concern of the Old Testament: the redemption and salvation of Israel. In the work of von Rad and others, creation was viewed only as the stage on which the salvation of Israel – and humanity in general – played out.

The perception of humans as "masters and possessors" of creation as a bank of resources that they have been called to exploit, has had a lasting and detrimental effect upon Christianity's relationship to nonhuman creation. Elizabeth A. Johnson writes:

> the religious value of the earth has not been a subject of theology, preaching, or religious education. Should today's Christian scholars consult their own experiences, they will most likely remember that the natural world was largely ignored as a subject in their religious formation and education, whether catechetical or scholarly.[31]

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[30] Gerhard von Rad, "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 142. Von Rad argues that this is because, "the doctrine of redemption had first to be fully safeguarded, in order that the doctrine that nature, too, is a means of divine self-revelation might not encroach upon or destroy the doctrine of redemption, but rather broaden and enrich it." Ibid., 143. See, Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Theological Resources for Earth-Healing: Covenant and Sacrament," in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, ed. Maura A Ryan and Todd Whitmore (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 56.

[31] Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 4.

For many contemporary scholars, creation has not been viewed as a locus of theological reflection. Indeed, by separating God and humanity from creation, the modern cosmic imaginary, makes such reflection unnecessary. Thomas Berry writes:

> The prevalent feeling is that the Christian spiritual tradition does not really need to be concerned about the natural world. So long as we keep an intense belief in Jesus, so long as we develop our interior intimacy with the Divine, so long as we follow the Christian life discipline, so long as we carry out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy towards others, so long as we focus our lives on the Gospel; so long as we do all this, any concern about the universe or the planet Earth has no great urgency.[32]

This contemporary Christian spirituality restricts spiritual experiences to certain days and interactions with "human or divine figures whose essential abode is remote from the earth," leaving the majority of time and space as "profane or fallen."[33] The effect of this is spiritual restriction is that "the ideals of reason and salvation are hyper-separated from the earth and from embodiment."[34] This separation not only prioritizes the spiritual over the material, refocusing the individual away from creation to heaven, but leads us to a negative view of human life, for "a person's life is primarily understood as a temporary sojourn during which one is bound, restricted, or otherwise limited."[35] One can see this perspective reflected by Hans Schwarz, who writes:

> The promise of the new creation, foreshadowed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, can serve as a powerful stimulus. It can remind us that whether or not we survive physically, we are assured of ultimate survival and of a new creation. We need not

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[32] Thomas Berry, "Christianity's role in the Earth Project"; Hiebert, "The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions," 132.

[33] Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 224–225.

[34] Ibid., 226–227; Kinsley, "Christianity as Ecologically Harmful," 107–108.

[35] Kinsley, "Christianity as Ecologically Harmful," 107–108.

> hang onto this physical world by any and every means but are able to restrain our desires and sacrifice, even to the point of self-sacrifice."[36]

In order to reassure his audience of their eternality, Schwarz advances a false bifurcation between physical and spiritual survival and claims that they need not go too far in efforts aimed at preserving creation. His interpretation of biblical allusions to a "new creation" denigrate the "old creation," thereby weakening the possibility of establishing a Christian environmental ethic focused on the here and now.

In conclusion, it must be recognized that the modern cosmic imaginary active in the Western church has been heavily influenced by ideas that make the construction and promulgation of a robust environmental ethic difficult. Christians inhabit a world in which they are lords and pilgrims, i.e., given nearly limitless power over the world and at the same time merely passing through it. The absent God of this imaginary has created a world which only finds its purpose as its human masters manipulate and benefit from its resources. With this often conflicting dynamic, it should be no surprise, therefore, that Christian attitudes towards nonhuman creation can, at best, be described as ambivalent.

### *1.3. From Stewardship to Covenant*

Over the last several decades, a growing number of Christians have attempted to counter the environmentally harmful distortions of the modern cosmic imaginary. The irony is that the primary metaphor adopted to combat environmental exploitation, i.e., stewardship, is deeply enmeshed in this creation-denying and denigrating modern cosmic imaginary. Rooted in a flawed hermeneutic of dominion drawn from the first creation account in the book of Genesis, stewardship perpetuates significant aspects of the modern

[36] Hans Schwarz, "Toward a Christian Stewardship of the Earth: Promise and Utopia," in *The Environmental Crisis: The Ethical Dilemma*, ed. Edwin R Squiers (Mancelona, MI: Au Sable Trails Institute of Environmental Studies, 1982), 34.

cosmic imaginary: a distant God, a human manager placed over creation, and a nonhuman creation only valued insofar as it benefits those managers.

Though the metaphor of "stewardship" has occupied, and continues to occupy, a privileged place in American Christian churches, environmental ethicists and theologians now question its suitability as a call to creation care, particularly in the face of increasingly serious state of environmental affairs. As a corrective to the deficiencies of the stewardship environmental ethic and the earth-denigrating effects of the modern cosmic imaginary upon which it is founded, I offer an alternative scriptural and theological account of the relationship between God, humanity and nonhuman creation upon which the church can build a robust response to the contemporary environmental situation. I construct a covenantal ecology that counteracts the theological distortions of stewardship. A covenantal ecology is a covenantally established and maintained relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. It is premised on three theological and scriptural assertions that will be developed in the course of my argument: (1) God is ever-present and active in covenant relationship with creation; (2) human beings are not managers of, but participants within, this relationship, or ecology, called to be faithful to God and neighbor (human and nonhuman); (3) and nonhuman creation, as a partner within this ecology, is an object of concern for both God and humanity aside from its benefit for humanity.

I have chosen to pursue a theological and scriptural methodology because, as Ernst Conradie asserts, reading Scripture through various theological constructs can prove a new perspective with which to understand and address the current ecological

crisis.[37] Similarly, David Horrell argues that such an approach is valuable because it provides a "two-way lens, which shapes and focuses the biblical traditions – bringing certain themes into clear and central focus, blurring, distorting, or marginalizing others – and at the same time both reflects and shapes our understanding of, and response to, the contemporary context."[38] In what follows I construct one such "two-way lens" with a covenantal ecology, providing an alternative theological basis and reading of Scripture to critique stewardship and to describe the covenantal ecology and its promise for the environmental ethics of the church.

### *1.4. A Preliminary Outline*

I begin my argument by situating the stewardship environmental ethic within the larger stream of environmental ethics in practice in the contemporary church (i.e., eco-justice approaches and creation spiritualities) and then trace the theological contours and historical development of each through representative figures. After describing the stewardship ethic through several of its proponents, I expound in detail the biblical hermeneutic utilized in stewardship arguments and its theological implications. To conclude this second chapter, I set forth criticisms of the hermeneutic and its theological implications, which establish and maintain the stewardship environmental ethic and its cosmic imaginary. I argue that stewardship leaves the church with an absent God, a

[37] Ernst M. Conradie, "Interpreting the Bible Amidst Ecological Degradation," *Theology* 112, no. 867 (June 2009): 206. Conradie offers various atonement theories (e.g., Christus Victor, moral influence) and ecologically motivated ethics (e.g., focus on the human as responsible agent, understanding of the earth as sacred, etc.) as examples. While these various approaches are helpful, there is not one that exhaustively rules out the others. Ibid., 202–205.

[38] David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2010), 122.

Steward-Christ and a natural world created to be manipulated and exploited by a human master.

In place of a theology that so distorts the relationship between God, humanity and nonhuman creation, I construct an alternative theological framework through the works of Robert Murray, Michael Northcott, and Karl Barth. While each theologian advances this covenantal ecology in unique ways, I develop the treatment of covenant and creation by all three in this third chapter in order to establish the theological foundations of a covenantal ecology in which in which God, humanity, and nonhuman creation stand in a relationship to one another that is initiated and sustained by God's covenantal initiative.

Having established a theological lens with which to interpret Scripture, I begin an exploration of scriptural texts that deal with covenant and creation in chapter four. I argue that the Old Testament establishes the God of Israel as the God of covenantal relationships. Through these relationships, God makes demands from, and expresses fidelity towards, all of creation, and in doing so, witnesses to an intimate relationship between Creator and creation, and between human and nonhuman creation. These texts span the range of the Old Testament – from God's covenant with Noah in Genesis to the prophets – and describe God's covenantal relationship with all of creation, the relationship between human and nonhuman creation established by the law, and the cosmic significance of *ṣedeq* and *mišpāṭ*. These texts portray God as continually involved with his creation, humans as mis-managers of themselves and consequently creation, and nonhuman creation as participating in God's covenantal and eschatological renewal.

I continue this biblical exploration into chapter five with the New Testament. I argue that Jesus Christ's incarnate ministry initiated the fulfillment of a covenantal

ecology, which is completed in the New Jerusalem described in the book of Revelation. I interpret Eucharistic texts as an indication of Jesus Christ's existence as both the covenant in flesh and the representative of all creation. I then argue that Matthew 5:3-20 establishes Jesus Christ as the one who challenges oppressive orders that would otherwise exploit creation, and in so doing initiates the fulfillment of a covenantal ecology. Finally, I argue that Revelation 21:1-5a, in its description of the new heaven and earth, provides a picture of the fulfilled covenantal ecology in which God, humans, and nonhuman creation live in intimate, nonexploitative relationships. In the place of the modern cosmic imaginary, I recover a scriptural understanding of the world in which God, humans and nonhuman creation are to live as partners bound together in covenant.

I conclude in chapter six, first with a summary of the results of my investigation into the nature of a covenantal ecology, i.e., a divinely initiated and sustained covenantal relationship in which God, humanity, and nonhuman creation stand in a relationship to one another. I then recapitulate the ways in which a covenantal ecology challenges stewardship, and discuss some of the implications of a covenantal ecology for the church and environmentally concerned Christians.

# CHAPTER TWO

## The Deficiency of Current Models for Creation-Care: Beyond Stewardship

### *2.1. Introduction to Current Environmental Models*

Over the last three decades, three distinctive (and sometimes overlapping) Christian responses to environmental issues have emerged. While these trajectories defy any type of rigid categorization, Laurel Kearns has offered a helpful typology to describe these environmental ethics. She identifies and describes three broad categories: eco-justice, creation spiritualities, and stewardship.[1] While some of these ethics predate Lynn White's 1967 article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," this article led to a burgeoning of Christian efforts at articulating coherent environmental ethics. White argued that European Christianity was the main contributor to the modern environmental crisis due to western Christianity's inherent anthropocentricity. For White, any religion that interpreted its Scriptures to mean that "it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper end" needed, to either be replaced or rethought.[2] Within five years, many

[1] Laurel Kearns, "Saving the Creation : Christian Environmentalism in the United States.," *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 55–70. Willis Jenkins reformulates Kearns' initial typology, utilizing these three categories, but evaluating approaches based on their understandings of grace and redemption, as opposed to Kearns whose evaluation is based upon anthropological considerations (i.e., the type and degree of anthropocentrism present in respective approaches). While Jenkins typology is compelling, I have chosen to use Kearns due to the simplicity of her model. See, Willis J. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[2] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 1967): 1205. Years later, Rosemary Radford Reuther furthered White's initial charge, claiming that Christianity's tendency towards dualism, coupled with the modern notion of progress results in "ecologic disaster," i.e., "the rapid eating up of the organic foundations of life under our feet in an effort to satisfy ever-growing appetite for goods." Reuther, Rosemary Radford, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 194.

Christian interlocutors including H. Paul Santmire, Francis Schaeffer and John B. Cobb, responded to White's criticism, argued for reformulation and proposed new ways of viewing and interacting with creation.[1] These early responses established diverse, trajectories that laid the foundation for modern Christian environmental ethics and theology. In this chapter, I describe these three trajectories, treating eco-justice and creation spirituality approaches before turning to stewardship, the most widely articulated of the three. I dialogue with the stewardship ethic in the construction of a covenantal ecology and will, therefore, describe its facets in greater detail than the others. For all three approaches, I provide an account of their theological development through key figures, the distinguishing characteristics of each and criticisms aimed at them.

### *2.1.1 Eco-justice*

Dieter T. Hessel describes eco-justice as "a spiritually grounded moral posture of respect and fairness toward all creation, human and nonhuman" that is "shaped by religious insights and scientific knowledge, interwoven with social, economic and political experience."[2] In *Brother Earth*, an early articulation of what might be considered eco-justice environmental ethics, H. Paul Santmire argues that God's valuation of creation creates a community that demands respect for the rights of both human and non-human creation. Santmire posits a Kingdom ethic premised on a strong connection between ecological and economic justice; both must be pursued if either is to

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[1] John B Cobb, *Is It Too Late?: A Theology of Ecology* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Bruce, 1972); H. Paul Santmire, *Brother Earth; Nature, God, and Ecology in Time of Crisis* (New York: T. Nelson, 1970); Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man; the Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, Ill., Tyndale House Publishers, 1970); Joseph A Sittler, "Ecological Commitment as Theological Responsibility.," *Zygon* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 1970): 172–181.

[2] Dieter T. Hessel, "Eco-Justice Ethics," last modified 2007, accessed November 8, 2013, http://fore.research.yale.edu/disciplines/ethics/eco-justice/.

come to fruition. In light of the coming eschatological kingdom of God, Santmire implores Christians to remember that their "primary allegiance is to the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, not to any particular economic system."[3] This Kingdom ethic guides how humans interact not only with other humans, but with all of creation. When economic and ecological good conflict, the Kingdom ethic demands that the good of creation, and not increased production that leads to economic prosperity, must guide humanity's choices. Those who live according to this Kingdom ethic live as caretakers, who "take care of nature for nature's sake. . . But as caretaker is also challenged to care for nature for the sake of his fellow man."[4] Living as a caretaker, therefore, demands pursuing ecological and economic justice for all of creation.

One sees a similar eco-justice approach in Jürgen Moltmann's *God in Creation*.[5] Moltmann's book locates ecological hope in the Sabbath, which pre-figures God's Kingdom in its establishment of peace throughout the created order. In recent years, this trajectory has been further developed in the liberation writings of Leonardo Boff and the ecofeminist writings of Rosemary Radford Ruether, both of whom have related the plight of the oppressed to ecological exploitation.[6] In all of these eco-justice approaches there are two common traits. First, there is an integration of ecological ethics within a larger ethical framework. Second, within this larger framework, one finds a parallel between nonhuman creation and marginalized group in human history: the poor, women, those in

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[3] Santmire, *Brother Earth; Nature, God, and Ecology in Time of Crisis*, 186.

[4] Ibid., 188.

[5] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993).

[6] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

developing nations, etc. This comparison is made because the victimization of "nonhuman creation joins the cry of the human victims of indifference and oppression."[7] The call to justice for nonhuman creation is, therefore, treated with no less urgency and gravity than that of humans, thus reinforcing and expanding the Christian understanding of "neighbor" and Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). In the eco-justice trajectory, neighbors are not just people who live near you but all creatures, human and nonhuman. The call to love neighbors includes all species of "ecological neighbor" who may live near humanity, or at a distance, "downwind and downstream."[8]

This approach rightly reinforces the connection between the human and non-human creation, as well as the relationship between economic and ecological justice. However, it can often occlude God's role as Creator and his relationship to creation in its emphasis on human justice. In the authors and texts listed above, one finds a noticeable emphasis on the importance of human justice towards other humans and nonhuman creation. However, one also finds relatively little on God's role in establishing and maintaining those relationships, a lacuna that seems to be engendered (as I will show in my treatment of stewardship) by an underlying reliance on the modern cosmic imaginary, for it is human agency and control that is the sole driver of ecological good.

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[7] The Office of the General Assembly Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice", 1990, 15.

[8] Jeanne Kay Guelke, "Looking for Jesus in Christian Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 123.

*2.1.2. Creation Spiritualities*

Kearns describes "creation spiritualities" as trajectories dedicated to "reorienting humans to see their place as one part of a larger, panentheistic creation."[9] Creation spiritualities attempt to reconstruct, or even invent, cosmologies that promote the intrinsic value of nature and portray both God and humans as integrated parts of creation. Creation spiritualities can be traced to John Cobb's *Is it too Late?* in which he argued for an evolutionary understanding of the world.[10] Drawing upon the process theology of Alfred North Whitehead and Aldo Leopold's ecocentrism, Cobb argues that the traditional Christian anthropology, which emphasized the "absoluteness of man" must be replaced by a "vision of a healthy biotic pyramid with man at its apex" that allows the evolutionary process to work "toward the maximization of the pyramid by both building the soil and multiplying the variety and complexity of the forms of life it supports."[11] Cobb argues that this "new Christianity" is a necessary change because it provides a new understanding of nature that takes into consideration not only how human actions affect other humans, but how they affect all living things in the evolutionary process.

Other examples of creation spiritualities are those of Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox. Thomas Berry argues for a "functional cosmology" that will renew a sense of reverence for the mysteries of nature and cure the ecological "autism" which characterizes the modern West.[12] This functional cosmology, he argues, would lead humanity to integrate technologies which sustain and promote the well-being of the

[9] Kearns, "Saving the Creation," 57.

[10] John B. Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*. A Theology of Ecology (CA: Bruce Publishers, 1972).

[11] Ibid., 55, 56.

[12] Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 17.

entirety of nature, not just human beings.[13] Such an integration would, in Berry's cosmological approach, mark humanity's maturation into an "ecological age" in which it could more fully see and comprehend "the interdependence of all the living and nonliving systems of the earth."[14]

Similarly, Matthew Fox argues that humanity needs a "living cosmology" rooted in a cosmic understanding of Christ that universalizes his presence throughout creation. Specifically, Fox argues for an ecocentric Soteriology, i.e., an understanding of the sacredness and salvific potential in creation. Fox develops this cosmic Soteriology by arguing for a move away from an understanding of the human Jesus crucified to the new symbol of Jesus as "Mother Earth crucified." Fox reasons that this is an appropriate metaphor for, like Christ, Mother Earth is crucified by human beings daily – despite her sinlessness and love for humanity - and yet still "rises from her tomb everyday." Fox argues this shift in symbols counters the effect of anthropocentric soteriologies that establish human salvation as the sole *telos* of nonhuman creation. As humans view creation as Mother Earth crucified, and consequently understand its divine significance, Fox argues, they are awakened to the importance of "the survival of Mother Earth. . . " and are saved from their own destruction by her survival.[15]

The creation spirituality model recognizes the importance of reformulating the modern cosmic imaginary. Nonhuman creation is not desacralized, but is viewed instead as a living entity with spiritual significance no less than that of humans. However, the

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[13] Ibid., 65–67.

[14] Ibid., 41–42.

[15] Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 149.

resulting portrayal of the relationship between God and creation is, as Kearns points out in her initial description above, ultimately panentheistic, i.e., the Creator is effectively indistinguishable from the creation. Cobb, for example, argues that in an age of advancing evolutionary knowledge and environmental crisis, it would be better to replace the idea of a personal, transcendent God with an understanding of God as immanent process within nature. He writes, "If this process is what we mean by 'nature' or 'life,' then we can and should view 'nature' or 'life' as sacred. But it will be better to speak of it as Creative Process or as God."[16] Nature, life, creative process, and God are interchangeable terms, and while the latter two are better descriptions of the evolutionary processes at work in the world, all of them convey the sacredness of that process: a necessary portrayal, Cobb argues, if we are to undo the "profound illusions" held by Westerners about the world.[17] Another example comes from Fox's argument to establish Mother Earth crucified as a symbol for Jesus Christ. This is not only a symbol rhetorically, but ontologically, for it conveys the deep truth about the life of Mother Earth. Fox argues that this symbol allows humans to "revere the everyday because it is so full of the divine." As humans revere and come to a greater scientific understanding of Mother Earth, Jesus Christ crucified, they understand their own relationship to this greater divine reality, allowing them to "grow into [their] divinity."[18]

I agree with Cobb, Fox and others who propose creation spiritualities that a new cosmic imaginary, one which understands the importance of all creation and humanity's integration into that whole, is a necessary part of the move towards more ecologically

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[16] Cobb, *Is It Too Late?*, 125.

[17] Ibid., 79.

[18] Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 155.

sound lifestyles. Yet, as Kearns points out, while the panentheism of creation spiritualities is a reaction against the desacralization of nature, it is ultimately rooted in and dependent upon a modern cosmic imaginary that posits the human use of modern science as a means for preservation of the environment. For Cobb, it is ultimately through empirical observation of a world driven by evolutionary processes that the divinity of the mundane is revealed.[19] Berry's "ecological age" is the product of "human technologies" augmenting "earth technologies" and playing a defensive role "against [natural] forces that are ever ready to destroy us."[20] As I show in the ensuing treatment of stewardship, it is exceedingly difficult to overcome this modern cosmic imaginary once its assumptions build the foundations (implicit or explicit) of a model for environmental action.

*2.1.3. Stewardship*

While eco-justice approaches and creation spiritualities respectively have a voice in the environmental ethics discourse, stewardship is the predominant approach articulated in much of Christian scholarship.[21] Its importance to the discourse has led one scholar to refer to it as "one of the Christian virtues."[22] J. Baird Callicott has explained stewardship's promise in this way:

> It has much greater potential than so far tapped to enlist the support and energies of a sizable segment of the public on behalf of environmental concerns. For the very large community of people who accept its premises – who believe in God, divine creation, a preeminent place and role for human beings in the world, and so

[19] Kearns, "Saving the Creation," 62.

[20] Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 65–67.

[21] Kearns, "Saving the Creation," 67.

[22] Mijoga, Hilary, "And God Saw That It Was Good," in *Christianity and the Environment: Care for What You Have Been Given*, ed. Fulata Moyo and Ott, Martin (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 2002), 25.

> on – it represents, in my opinion, the most coherent, powerful, and practicable environmental ethic available.[23]

While there is no single articulation of the term, Calvin DeWitt, one of its strongest proponents concisely defines stewardship as "our use and caring for the household on behalf of the Creator, whose stewards we are."[24] In what follows, I narrate the development of stewardship environmental ethics chronologically through four significant proponents of stewardship: Walter C. Lowdermilk, Richard A. Baer, Francis Schaeffer, and Douglas John Hall. Throughout this genealogy, I illustrate several significant concepts that have become deep-rooted aspects of stewardship environmental ethics.

Walter C. Lowdermilk's "Eleventh Commandment," can be seen as a progenitor of the following decades of stewardship environmental ethics. In a speech in June of 1939 on Jerusalem radio, Lowdermilk claimed that an eleventh commandment was necessary to regulate humanity's relationship to the land. His proposed commandment reads as follows:

> Thou shalt inherit the holy earth as a faithful steward, conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. Thou shalt safeguard thy fields from soil erosion, thy living waters from drying up, thy forests from desolation, and protect thy hills from overgrazing by thy herds, so that thy descendants may have abundance forever. If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land thy fruitful fields shall become sterile stony ground and wasting gullies, and thy descendants

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[23] J. Baird Callicott, "Genesis and John Muir," in *Covenant for a New Creation: Ethics, Religion, and Public Policy*, ed. Carol S Robb and Casebolt, Carl J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 112. The Christianity and Environmental Ethics in North America (CEENA) survey was sent to forty-six Christian environmental organizations. Twenty-one organizations (forty-six percent) of Christian environmental organizations explicitly articulated stewardship as the motivating theological rationale for their group. Compared to the twenty-eight percent who utilized eco-justice approaches and the seven percent who described various creation spiritualities, stewardship approaches represent a statistically significant portion of respondents.

[24] Calvin B. DeWitt, "Religion and the Environment," in *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork*, ed. James W. Skillen and Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 33.

> shall decrease and live in poverty or be destroyed form off the face of the earth."[25]

Compelled by the waste and desolation he encountered in his international travels as Chief of Research of the Soil Conservation Service, Lowdermilk focused on the negative effects of improper land use for current and future generations of human beings. While acknowledging the short-term economic incentive that came with exploitative land practice, he argued for "a moral obligation born of a higher economics, a moral obligation to bountiful Mother Earth which must nourish all present and future human beings as long as it lasts…"[26] His approach to land trusteeship was economic, and yet he argued that the long-term needs of future generations were of more importance than any short-term financial gain. If future generations were to succeed, the land had to be "used and handed down in a productive condition to succeeding generations."[27] As Roderick Nash points outs, Lowdermilk's stewardship ethic, "although grounded in self-interest, drew upon stewardship to support the growing conservation movement."[28] Although he understood that the flourishing of humanity was directly related to the flourishing of the land, it was the preservation of humanity that motivated his speech and led him to call for wise stewardship of the earth.

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[25] Walter C. Lowdermilk, "The Eleventh Commandment," *American Forests* 46 (January 1940): 12.

[26] Ibid., 14.

[27] Ibid., 15.

[28] Roderick Nash, "The Greening of Religion," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996), 202. See also Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 97–98. As Willis Jenkins notes, the modern Christian strategy of stewardship is closely connected with secular strategies of moral agency, which stress human responsibility. One sees this close connection in Lowdermilk, who, while writing in a secular context to stress human responsibility, draws upon a biblical notion of stewardship. Willis J. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 46–51.

Almost three decades after Lowdermilk's speech, Richard A. Baer's "Land Misuse" in *The Christian Century* echoed Lowdermilk's call to responsible trusteeship. Confronted with environmental inaction by the American church, Baer claimed that the church in the United States had not:

> sufficiently grasped the nature of the present crisis, has not understood how powerfully dehumanizing is man's wanton exploitation of his natural environment, [and] has not appreciated the degree to which man-made ugliness and the fouling of areas of natural beauty are corroding man's mind and spirit.[29]

For Baer, human decay was both cause and effect of environmental degradation, thus creating a cycle of destruction throughout creation. Writing during a time of burgeoning space exploration, Baer appreciated the "major role" technology played in humanity's "achieving and maintaining" dominion in creation.[30] Technology was engendered by the "necessities of survival" and "constant struggle" against the wild; therefore, he argued that to reject it would be "foolish."[31] However, Baer also understood that technology alone would not break the cycle of destruction; indeed, technology could exacerbate environmental degradation. One such instance, he noted, was the application of DDT, which promised to "[tidy] up everything irregular in the environment." In reality, not only did DDT fail to wipe out crop-destroying insects, it actually harmed human beings and creatures whose presence was necessary to sustain the health of farmland.[32] This type of misapplication of flawed technology was a "failure to fulfill our obligations as faithful

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[29] Richard A Baer, "Land Misuse : A Theological Concern.," *Christian Century* 83, no. 41 (October 12, 1966): 1240.

[30] Richard A. Baer, "Ecology, Religion and the American Dream," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 165 (September 1971): 54.

[31] Ibid.; See also, Richard A. Baer, "Higher Education, the Church, and Environmental Values," *Natural Resources Journal* 17 (July 1977): 482.

[32] Baer, "Higher Education, the Church, and Environmental Values," 489.

trustees of the gifts of God's creation," which brought about God's judgment of, and the earth's rebellion to, humanity's misplaced desires.[33]

Baer argued that this destructive cycle could be broken with a biblical anthropology derived from humanity's creation in the *imago dei* (Gen. 1:26). "Land Misuse" describes (albeit more generally) a nascent stewardship environmental ethic rooted in the first creation account:

> Creation in the image of God points to man's position as an intermediary between God and nature. As the bearer of God's image, man is God's representative in the world. He is to subdue nature, to exercise dominion over it. He is permitted to use nature to fulfill his own life, but in so doing he does not exhaust his relation to nature. He is also to respect and care for it – even one might say, as a guest respects the house of his host."[34]

In Baer's interpretation, humans stand in a position of privilege as representatives of God to nonhuman creation and are called to subdue and exercise dominion over nature for their own flourishing. However, Baer cautions that humans must never forget that they did not make and do not own the created world.[35] If humans were to thrive, it would only be because they respected God's creation as if it were the very dwelling place of God.

In their early articulations of stewardship, Lowdermilk and Baer set the trajectory for the contemporary articulations of stewardship environmental ethics in two important ways. First, both ground their respective ethics in scriptural language and metaphors.

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[33] Richard A. Baer, "The Church and Man's Relationship to His Natural Environment," *Quaker Life* 12 (January 1970): 421.

[34] Baer, "Land Misuse," 1240.

[35] Baer's argument echoes that of Joseph Sittler. Concerned with pollution and nuclear waste, Sittler's 1962 sermon "The Care of the Earth" urged listeners to move away from understanding the earth solely in terms of its utility. When human beings use the creation, he argued, it must accompanied by a "gracious primeval joy." An economy of joy "moves toward the intelligence of use and the enhancement of joy," while the use economy "moves toward the destruction of both use and joy." The latter is properly referred to "abuse" of the land, by which he means "use without grace." Joseph Sittler, *The Care of the Earth, and Other University Sermons* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 96–98.

Lowdermilk draws heavily upon the language of commandment and Baer, language from the Genesis creation accounts. Second, Lowdermilk and Baer use different metaphors for humans that stress human responsibility for proper management of creation – "stewards" by the former, "trustees" by the latter. As the species ultimately responsible for the management of creation, humans had control over creation, and while they were never to exploit it, they were called to use it for self-benefit.

Another popular articulation of stewardship ethics in the 1970's can be found in Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology*. Addressing inadequate responses to environmental pollution (especially environmental pantheism) Schaeffer argues that Christians can move towards an effective environmental ethic only if the "dominion" given to humanity in Genesis 1:28 is understood in its prelapsarian context. In its postlapsarian context, the exercise of dominion often manifests itself as exploitative tyranny, but in its prelapsarian context, the command to exercise dominion is rooted in the knowledge that as creatures, human beings are charged with dominion over something which they did not create. Therefore, humans can only exercise dominion insofar as they commit themselves to taking care of God's creation and their fellow creatures.

Schaeffer illustrates his environmental ethic with two hierarchical relationships found in the New Testament: those between a husband and wife (Eph. 5:22-33), and a master and servant (Mt. 25:14-30). Interpreting Eph. 5:22-23, Schaeffer argues that "man is taught to exercise dominion without tyranny. The man is to be the head of the home, but the man is also to love his wife as Christ loves the Church." Christians were called to exercise dominion over creation, just as husbands were called to exercise dominion over

their families: out of love, and not tyranny. Both required discretion, for the needs of each party (i.e., of a husband and wife or of humanity and creation) would often conflict. So, Schaeffer reasons, "We may cut down a tree to build a house, or to make a fire to keep the family warm. But we should not cut down the tree just to cut down the tree."[36] There are two features of subsequent stewardship environmental ethics present in Schaeffer's treatment of this New Testament material: (1) dominion means hierarchical, yet non-tyrannical, use and even service (husbands and stewards are to be the "head of the home," but neither is to exploit their position) and (2) dominion entailed weighing the needs of the lesser over and against the greater, while simultaneously never straying from these hierarchical relationships established by God in nature.

The second biblical passage used to describe stewardship is the parable of talents (Mt. 25:14-30). In his interpretation of that passage, Schaeffer writes:

> The talents or money did not belong to the man with whom they were left. He was a servant and a steward, and he held them only in stewardship for the true Owner. When we have dominion over nature, it is not ours, either. It belongs to God and we are to exercise our dominion over these things not as though entitled to exploit them, but as things borrowed or held in trust, which we are to use realizing that they are not ours intrinsically. Man's dominion is under God's Dominion and under God's Domain.[37]

In his analysis of the parable, Schaeffer sets forth three more features of the stewardship environmental ethic. First, Schaeffer uses Scripture to interpret Scripture, in this case, the parable of talents to illustrate the character of "dominion" described in Gen. 1:28. Second, as the one who creates, God is described as the Owner of creation. Third, Schaeffer draws a sharp distinction between the rights of the Owner to delegate duties to

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[36] Ibid., 72-73.

[37] Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, Il: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), 69, 70. The parable of talents is also recorded in Luke 19:11-26, but subtle differences between the two point to a preference for the Matthean passage in Schaeffer's account.

his stewards, and the stewards' responsibility to tend to the Owner's property in a manner befitting the goodness of the Owner.

While the contributions of the previous scholars are significant, there is simply no stronger proponent of stewardship ethics than Douglas John Hall, who claims that there is no symbol in the Bible and perhaps "in all of human literature" with as much ecological promise as the steward.[38] Its promise even exceeded these ecological dimensions; Hall considered it, "a kind of presentation of the gospel in a nutshell."[39] His 1982 book, *The Steward: a Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, has been through several printings and has greatly influenced the eco-theological appropriation of the concept of environmental stewardship.

Like Baer before him, Hall integrates what one might consider "environmental" issues with "justice" issues, including world peace (particularly appropriate given the Cold War tensions at the time of its composition). Modern injustices are all symptoms, he argues, of "the great physical and spiritual problems of our historical moment" which are characterized by a "utilitarian and wastrel attitude."[40] Through warfare, environmental exploitation, murder, suicide, drug abuse, etc., human beings had engaged in a "covenant of death" saturated with the "cloying odor of death."[41] To escape this destructive covenant, Hall argues that humanity needed a new way to imagine its place on earth, and that the biblical concept of the steward could achieve this reimagining.

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[38] Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 213.

[39] Ibid., 49.

[40] Ibid., 9, 143.

[41] Douglas John Hall, *The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 34–35.

Hall develops his steward metaphor in an exploration of several biblical passages. For Hall, like other stewardship proponents, a creation-affirming anthropology must begin with Gen. 1:26-28, and specifically humanity's creation in the image of God; it is ultimately an imaging of God that allows humanity to exercise dominion in a way that reflects God's own love for creation. Yet, given the paucity of other references to God's image (*ṣelem*) in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen. 5:1-3, Gen. 9:5-6), Hall bases his theology of human imaging in several New Testament texts that deal with the concept of "image" (*eikōn*).[42] Hall focuses on the claim of Colossians 1:15 that Jesus Christ "is the image of the invisible God (*eikon tou theou tou aoratou*)," and argues that the image of God was not located (*contra* traditional theological attempts) in the highest of humanity's faculties: e.g., reason, creativity, relationship with God, etc. It is instead found in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, and specifically in his humiliation.[43] Hall, is unequivocal in his affirmations that Jesus is divine and Lord, but his "perfection as the divine *imago*, which is at the same time perfect humanity, is embodied in a lordship that serves."[44] In Jesus Christ - the full expression of divinity and humanity - existence in God's image is revealed as a life of service. Returning to Genesis 1:26-28, Hall argues that the dominion ascribed to those original human image-bearers is none other than the life of service evinced by Jesus Christ. Following the example of Jesus Christ, the "Great Steward,"

[42] Hall, *The Steward*, 43.

[43] Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 78.

[44] Ibid., 79.

humans were called to live as "superior servant[s]" (cf. Luke 12:42-48) who in no way abused or exploited God's creation.[45]

Drawing upon other Pauline passages (e.g., Rom. 8:28-30, Col. 3:9-10) Hall explains how humanity can be conformed to the image of the "Great Steward." This re-imaging is a Christ-initiated and Christ-driven eschatological process in which Christ's followers, or the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:14-17), are brought into right relationship with God, other people, and even "extrahuman creation."[46] When humans are in these proper relationships, they reflect the true image of God expressed by Jesus Christ, the Great Steward. As stewards of God's house, they do not stand "over," or simply "in," nature, but "with" it.[47] For those transformed by Jesus Christ, existing in relationship "with" nature means that dominion, "can only mean stewardship, and stewardship ultimately interpreted as love: sacrificial, self-giving love (*agape*)."[48] In Jesus Christ's suffering and death, one sees a fulfillment of the office of stewardship, for Jesus Christ "desires nothing for himself…He does not think in terms of possession, not even the possession of his own life."[49] Interpreted through a theology of the cross, Hall argues that dominion entails a sacrifice that both preserves and affirms the importance of creation. Hall's christological

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[45] Hall, *The Steward*, 32, 37, 126.

[46] Hall, *Imaging God*, 122–124.

[47] Ibid., 161; Hall, *The Steward*, 191–213. Hall finds that the preposition "with" balances the dialectical tension of humanity's uniqueness expressed by "above" and humanity's commonality expressed by "in."

[48] Hall, *Imaging God*, 185–186. Hall never explains here why we are "obliged" to make this move, although it would appear that it has something to do with his understanding of Christ as not only ethical example, but as unified with believers.

[49] Hall, *The Steward*, 43.

understanding of stewardship, like others, demands an anthropology that emphasized trusteeship of creation on behalf of a good God.

As I have shown through in the writings of Lowdermilk, Baer, Schaeffer, and Hall, there are two aspects of these stewardship environmental ethics that have become basic to all subsequent articulations. First, "stewardship" is developed and communicated through the interpretation of both Old and New Testament texts. Beginning with "dominion" in Gen. 1:26-28, proponents utilize various texts to construct their Christian environmental ethic. Second, in their attempt to combat exploitation of creation, stewardship proponents argue for a cosmology in which human beings act as caretakers charged with managing and utilizing creation responsibly in God's stead. As humans live more like Christ, gain a greater understanding of natural systems and make use of technology more responsibly, they become even more capable of the proper management, or stewardship, of the world. In the following section, I detail several of the critiques aimed at these two aspects of stewardship environmental ethics.

### *2.2. The Inadequacy of Stewardship*

Despite its widespread use and influential proponents, the stewardship environmental ethic is open to a number of criticisms. For the purposes of this dissertation, I wish to focus on two deficiencies found in stewardship environmental ethics.[50] First, I treat stewardship's hermeneutic, which fails to take into account the usage of biblical terms throughout Scripture and the historical context in which the texts are written. I follow the biblical maneuvering of the stewardship argument beginning with Gen. 1:1-2:3, and then move to Gen. 2:4-3:22, the Parable of Talents, and finally

[50] For more criticisms, see E. M Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 211–214.

christological texts in the New Testament. Second, I set forth the theological errors engendered by stewardship. Specifically, I focus on distortions in four areas of Christian theology: the doctrine of God, theological anthropology, the doctrine of creation, and Christology. Although stewardship seeks a distinctly Christian and robust environmental ethic, it leaves us with an absent God, a human manager in God's stead, and a natural world whose value is determined by its use for human stewards whose goal is to become like Jesus, the Great Steward.

### 2.2.1. *Stewardship Hermeneutics*

The most consistent criticism of stewardship ethics is directed at the exegesis its proponents pursue to establish its biblical basis. As Clare Palmer points out, the most glaring instance of this failed hermeneutic is that "nowhere in the Bible is humanity actually described as a steward of the natural world."[51] For stewardship's proponents, the Bible need not explicitly refer to human beings as stewards of creation; using Scripture to interpret Scripture, they argue that the concept of stewardship, i.e., the call to care for God's creation as stewards, "is everywhere present in biblical thought."[52] With this assumption as their basis, stewardship proponents draw upon a variety of biblical texts to describe humanity's call to creation care. The ensuing exposition of texts follows the predominant interpretive strategy of stewardship proponents. I begin with the creation of the humans in God's image and God's command to them to "have dominion" over

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[51] Clare Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," in *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology*, ed. Ian Ball et al. (London: SPCK, 1992), 69; John Arthur Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature; Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (New York: Scribner, 1974), 29.

[52] Willard M. Swartley, "Biblical Sources of Stewardship," in *The Earth Is the Lord's: Essays on Stewardship*, ed. Mary Evelyn Jegen and Bruno V Manno (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 22.

creatures and "subdue" the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28). I then turn to the second creation account (Gen. 2:4-3:22), and particularly the commission given to humans to tend and care (Gen. 2:15) for the garden (texts used to interpret Gen. 1:26, 28). Finally, I describe their use of the Parable of Talents (Mt. 25:14-30) and New Testament passages and concepts used to develop a stewardship Christology.

*Gen. 1:1-2:3*. The first creation account (Gen. 1:1-2:3) is the interpretive foundation for stewardship environmental ethics. This account portrays God as creating all things from a distance through speech acts (Gen. 1:1-25) and thereby engenders a portrayal of God in stewardship as a distant but powerful king. Bruce R. Reichenbach and V. Elving Anderson, for example, argue that the portrayal of God in the first account as a "most powerful monarch" is not only theologically accurate for Christians today, but reflects ancient near eastern understandings of monarchy.[53] In that context, kings would mark their territory by erecting statues that bore their likeness and entrust their vast wealth to trustworthy servants. The first creation account, they argue, reveals that God pursues a similar strategy in administering his creation:

> Like other people with wealth, monarchs entrusted their households and property to their stewards, so that they could attend to other important matters… As oriental kings placed statues of themselves throughout their territory, signifying their claim to that land, God placed those created in his image in the land to represent his interests.[54]

[53] Bruce R Reichenbach and V. Elving Anderson, *On Behalf of God: A Christian Ethic for Biology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans with The Institute For Advanced Christian Studies, 1995), 46–47. As Gerhard von Rad stated decades earlier, humanity's creation in the image of God means that they are "summoned to maintain and enforce God's claim to dominion over the earth." Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis - A Commentary*, Revised. (Westminster John Knox Press, 1972), 60.

[54] Reichenbach and Anderson, *On Behalf of God*, 48.

Drawing upon humanity's creation in God's image (*ṣelem*; Gen. 1:26), Reichenbach and Anderson find an analogy between God's relationship with humanity and an earthly king's relationship to a statue; humans and statues represent the monarch's interests by standing in his place. Similarly, there is also an analogy between God's relationship with humanity and a landowner's relationship with his stewards; humans are called to manage the absent landowner's affairs until he returns. If humans are to image and serve their master faithfully, they must obey his commands and "have dominion" (*rādâh*) over creatures and "subdue" (*kābaš*; Gen. 1:26) the earth, in a manner that reflects the monarch's power. However, as I have shown in the previous examples, stewardship proponents acknowledge that this text from Genesis 1:26-28 is not sufficient in itself to establish a robust environmental ethic. Therefore, they use other Scriptures to interpret this text and more fully describe how humans exercise dominion as stewards.

*Gen. 2:4-3:22*. Stewardship proponents often attempt to interpret the language of "having dominion" and "subduing" in the first creation account in light of terminology found in the second creation account (Gen. 2:4-3:22). Armando A. De la Cruz, for example, argues that the perspective offered by the second account is necessary for a modern interpretation of the first. Cruz argues that while the commands in the first account are valid before and after the fall, the execution of these tasks changes when humans are removed from the prelapsarian "Shangri-La-like environment" of "utmost natural balance" described in the second creation account. Having "dominion over the earth" often manifests itself today as "destruction," but in the paradisiacal environment of the garden in the second account, dominion manifested itself as living in non-exploitative

relationship with creation.[55] By interpreting the commands given in the first account in the setting described in the second account, Cruz argues, exploitation is prohibited and caring stewardship is not only encouraged, but mandated.

Within the second creation account, Genesis 2:15 provides the most significant resources for interpreting the charges in Genesis 1:26, 28.[56] In the second creation account, humanity is created as the Lord's response to the lack of a caretaker in the newly-created garden, and the connection between the two is expressed in the terms human (*ʾādām*) and ground (*ʾădāmāh*). In Gen 2:15, the *ʾādām* is called to till (*ʿābad*) and keep (*šāmar*) the *ʾădāmāh*. The connotation of terms "till" and "keep" differs drastically from the commands to "have dominion" and "subdue" the first creation account; therefore stewardship proponents use the language of tilling and keeping to interpret the commands to have dominion and subdue. Utilizing this strategy, Benedict M. Ashley interprets dominion as the "wise, loving care by which [God] guides to their perfection and fulfillment whatever he has made."[57] Ashley contends that "tilling" and "keeping" in Genesis 2:15 describes "co-dominion" in which Adam and Eve are created to " 'take care of' the Garden, i.e., to protect the ideal environment given them by God…to cultivate it,

[55] Armando A. De la Cruz, "Scriptural Basis of Ecology: A Mandate for Environmental Stewardship," *Taiwan Journal of Theology*, no. 10 (January 1, 1988): 212–213.

[56] Don Brandt, "Stealing Creation's Blessings" in Don Brandt, ed., *God's Stewards: The Role of Christians in Creation Care* (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2002), 67.

[57] Benedict M. Ashley, "Dominion or Stewardship?: Theological Reflections," in *Birth, Suffering, and Death: Catholic Perspectives at the Edges of Life*, ed. Wildes, Kevin Wm, Abel, Francesc, and Harvey, John C. (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 85–86.

that is, work with God to bring it to still further perfection."[58] Matthew Farrelly argues for a similar interpretation of "dominion":

> Most everyone today understands that the "dominion" described in Genesis 1 is really about stewardship of creation. Created in God's image, we were designed to function as God's representatives. In fact, the original Hebrew in Genesis 1 and 2 implies that we are to be both *kingly* and *priestly* representatives. Genesis 2:15 says, 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.' (ESV, emphasis mine). This language is used later in the Old Testament to describe the priests' and Levites' service in the tabernacle (Num. 3:7-8; 18:7). In a profound way, then, to be a human is to be a priest. We have been placed within creation to mediate God's presence, embody God's posture, and enact God's purposes on the earth. And, like priests, we offer creation back to God; we ought not to regard any of our earthly labors as profane or secular, but as sacred service to God on behalf of the world.[59]

Farrelly seamlessly transitions between the two creation accounts (as well as other Old Testament texts) to support his claim that dominion is expressed in the "sacred service" of stewardship. With the priestly metaphor of tending and keeping, having dominion and subduing is cast as cultivation, and not exploitation.[60]

*Parable of Talents (Mt. 25:14-30, Lk. 19:11-26)*. Once it has been established that having dominion and subduing are better understood as tending and caring for creation, stewardship hermeneutics moves forward into the New Testament, and specifically to the Parable of Talents.[61] The parable tells the story of a landowner who leaves his home and

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[58] Ibid., 86.

[59] Matthew Farrelly, "A Covenant with the Earth.," *Christianity Today* 54, no. 10 (Oct. 2010): 28.

[60] See also, Nelson Bock, "An Eco-Theology: Toward a Spirituality of Creation and Eco-Justice," *Cross Currents* 63, no. 4 (December 2013): 441; Edward Adams, "Does Awaiting 'New Heavens and a New Earth' (2 Pet 3.13) Mean Abandoning the Environment?," *Expository Times* 121, no. 4 (January 2010): 174. Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 478.

[61] For a concise example, see Carl F.H. Henry, "Stewardship of the Environment," in *Applying the Scriptures*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1987), 473. It should be noted that this parable is told in both Luke 19:11-26 and Matthew 25:14-30. Stewardship proponents rarely

entrusts each of three servants with bags of gold commensurate with his abilities. When the master leaves, the first two put the money to work. The third servant, who received the least amount of gold, buries it, making no investments. When the master returns, the first two servants present him with one hundred percent profit on his initial investment, to which he is well pleased and rewards each servant in kind. The third however, simply returns the initial investment with no profit. The landowner chides him for not even having the wherewithal to put it in a bank, for at least there it would have earned interest.

When read in the context of the Genesis creation accounts and applied to environmental ethics, stewardship proponents argue that the parable is an allegory for creation care; parallels are made between God and the landowner, humans and stewards, and creation and money. God is thus portrayed as the "real Owner" or "Landlord" who, although absent, has "ownership rights over all creation."[62] Similarly, God's initial charge to humanity in Gen. 1:26, 28 becomes a charge, like that given to the landowner's stewards, to "promote the good of the owner through both conservation and change."[63] Like the landowner's money, creation then is understood as belonging to God and also as an object to be managed by the steward. Riechenbach and Anderson interpret the parable to mean that God's creation, like the landowner's money, must be conserved and changed by stewards. In the parable, the landowner chides the servant who only preserves his given talent, but commends the servant who risks the talent and brings about a positive

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specify between the two, but it would seem, judging from their interpretation of the parable that they are referring to the latter. It should also be noted that an interpretive move is made in the designation of slaves (*doulon*) as stewards (*oikonomos*). Such a conflation is made in Luke 12: 42-46 in describing roles not dissimilar to those described in Luke 19 and Matthew 25.

[62] Robert R. Ellis, "Divine Gift and Human Response : An Old Testament Model for Stewardship" *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 37, no. 2 (March 1, 1995): 4.

[63] Reichenbach and Anderson, *On Behalf of God*, 52, 56, 57.

change for the landowner, i.e., profit.[64] Just as the good stewards in the parable are rewarded for their discernment, stewardship proponents argue that environmental stewards must keep in tension the need to not "desecrate or dissipate" the creation and the need to "develop God's creation and to bring forth its fruit and increase," lest they face rebuke when he returns.[65]

*New Testament Christology*. The final exegetical move focuses on Jesus Christ as the exemplar of stewardship. Calvin Dewitt argues that while the commands to "have dominion" (*rādâh*) and "subdue" (*kābaš*) could be interpreted as allowing exploitative behaviors, the life of Jesus Christ "brings us to see this dominion as service rather than as a license for ungodly behavior."[66] Similarly, Loren Wilkinson reads the first and second creation accounts as setting up an anthropological dialectic; humanity is *apart from* nature and simultaneously *a part of* nature. To hold these two realities together, Wilkinson looks to the incarnation of Jesus Christ in which:

> God demonstrates His transcendence – His dominion over man – by becoming, in Christ, redemptively immanent in human affairs: indeed, by becoming incarnate in the very flesh of the world He made. And this kind of dominion, rather than the dominion by force which uses everything for our own benefit, is to be the model

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[64]The authors extend this analogy to the very essence of the Godhead, arguing "the Landlord gains a great deal from his creation. The creation contributes to God's ongoing life. His good is achieved, in party, by and through the goods realized in the universe." Ibid., 61–62.

[65] Richard D. Land, "Overview: Beliefs and Behaviors," in *The Earth Is the Lord's: Christians and the Environment*, ed. Richard D. Land and Louis Moore (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 23–24.

[66] Calvin B. DeWitt, "The Three Big Questions," in *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork*, ed. James W. Skillen and Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 41. His example as shepherd also interprets the king-dominion passages in Dt. 17:18-20 and Eze. 34:2-4. As noted earlier, Douglas John Hall also describes Jesus as the "Great Steward" whose stewardship provides the model for humanity. Hall, *The Steward*, 32, 37, 126.

> for our own human use of power and transcendence – or, for our use of science and technology."[67]

Jesus' followers are likewise called to eschew "dominion by force" as they exercise their transcendence over nature; Dominion as stewardship is thus interpreted as "serving God and creation. It is reflecting God's love for the world, God's law for creation, and God's justice for the land and creatures."[68] Following the example of Jesus Christ prohibits dominion from becoming domination, but demands its expression through love and service.

In summary, the stewardship environmental ethic draws upon the corpus of the Christian Scriptures in order to describe the task of stewarding creation as one of non-exploitative relationship to God's creation.[69] Stewardship focuses on explaining how God's first charge to humanity to "have dominion" over creatures and "subdue" the earth can engender this type of care. Proponents of stewardship argue dominion is not domination and the command to subdue, different than a command to subjugate. Looking at the command to "till and keep" in the second creation account, the Parable of Talents, and the life and witness of Jesus Christ, stewardship proponents expound upon this initial text from Genesis to form the biblical foundation to their theological and ethical claims.

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[67] Loren Wilkinson, "Redeemers of the Earth," in *The Environmental Crisis: The Ethical Dilemma*, ed. Edwin R Squiers (Mancelona, MI: Au Sable Trails Institute of Environmental Studies, 1982), 46; Ashley, "Dominion or Stewardship?: Theological Reflections," 86,87. Ashley understands Jesus Christ, through his teaching and miracles, as interpreting and furthering the basic message of Genesis, i.e., that "God desires nothing of us but that we should share his blessed life." As we share in God's life, we understand our co-dominion as stewardship, and therefore our technologies must be designed and implemented in a manner that contributes to "the completion of his creation according to his wise plan for our own happiness."

[68] DeWitt, "The Three Big Questions," 42.

[69] Other texts include *Num. 32, Dt. 17:14-20, I Chr. 22, Psalm 24:1,* Matthew 20:8; John 2:8; Eph 1:10; 1 Cor 4:1; Gal 4:2; Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Pet 4:10; James 3:9; Hebrews 1:3; Titus 1:7.

*2.2.2. The Failings of the Stewardship Hermeneutic*

Despite a wide-ranging biblical hermeneutic, several significant flaws can be found in stewardship's interpretive approach. Following the order of the foregoing section (Gen 1:1-2:4, Gen. 2:4-3:22, the Parable of Talents, and finally christological texts) I critique the stewardship hermeneutic, exposing the faulty assumptions and methodology of its biblical foundations. Then, I explicate the four theological implications of the stewardship strategy, which so badly distorts the relationship between God, humanity, and even the nonhuman creation it aims at stewarding, that it actually enervates any call to care for creation.

*Gen. 1:1-2:3.* Much of stewardship environmental ethics is predicated upon humanity's creation in God's image and God's command that they "have dominion" (*rādâh*) over creatures "subdue" (*kābaš*) the earth. While acknowledging these terms have a harsh connotation, stewardship proponents argue that these terms actually signal a non-exploitative service towards creation. However, throughout the Old Testament, neither *rādâh* nor *kābaš* refer to exercising rule through service. *Rādâh* is used to describe the authority of the head of the house over slaves (Lev. 25:43, 46, 53), the king's rule (I Kings 4:24, Ps. 110:2) and authority of priests (Jer. 5:31). It is also used to describe the unjust rule of Israel's leaders in Eze. 34:1-4 and the oppressive rule of the Babylonian empire in Isa. 14:6. The term *kābaš* describes various acts of subordination and subjugation. These include descriptions of military conquest (Num. 32:22, 29), the conquering Promised Land (Jos. 18:1), enslavement (Jer. 34:11, 16), and even rape (Est.7:8, Neh. 5:5). The rule described by *rādâh* and *kābaš* throughout the Old Testament

is not rule-through-service, as stewardship proponents contend, and is often unjust, exploitative, and destructive.

As Celia Deane-Drummond observes, the task of stewardship hermeneutics is ultimately apologetic, for it denies "that dominion as set forth in the Book of Genesis means domination, arguing that it should instead be thought of in terms of stewardship."[70] However, these apologetic attempts cannot account for aspects of the language of dominion and subjugation found in Genesis 1:26-31.[71] As Loren Wilkinson points out, "there is no way of softening the import of these words. They convey total power, a tyrant's power."[72] To achieve this "softening" of language stewardship proponents often turn to the second Genesis creation account.

*Gen. 2:4-3:22*. Given the difficulties inherent in *rādâh* and *kābaš,* stewardship proponents attempt to redeem these terms by interpreting them in light of the terms *ʿābad* (till) and *šāmar* (keep) in the second creation account.[73] The term *ʿābad* is used to express various types of priestly service throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Ex. 4:23, Isa. 19:21, Mal. 3:14, etc.) and *šāmar* to describe: tending one's flock (Gen. 30:31) and the tent of meeting (Num. 3:8), or even observing the covenant (Ez. 17:14). Stewardship

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[70] Celia Deane-Drummond, "Theology, Ecology, and Values," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 897.

[71] See Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, 205.

[72] Wilkinson, "Redeemers of the Earth," 43.

[73]It is generally agreed that these two texts are the products of different authors. Genesis 1:1-2:3, with its structured account of creation, is considered a priestly composition dating to the Persian period. The second creation account found in Genesis 2:4 – 3:4 is attributed to an earlier Yahwist author, which reflects the perspective of the subsistence farmer in the hill country of Bible. See, Claus Westermann, *Genesis: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 37–38; Theodore Hiebert, "The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA: 2000), 136, 139.

proponents are correct to note the ecological promise of these terms. However, they are nowhere intentionally or explicitly used in the Old Testament in conjunction with, or as commentary upon, the terms *rādâh* and *kābaš*. In fact, given the literary contexts in which *rādâh* and *kābaš* are used, it might be argued that *ʿābad* and *šāmar* should be thought of as expressing an attitude towards creation antithetical to that expressed in the first creation account. While *ʿābad* and *šāmar* describe the human vocation in the second creation account in terms of service towards nonhuman creation, *rādâh* and *kābaš* in the first account give the sense that nonhuman creation should be "viewed as an adversary to be pressed into service…"[74]

Theodore Hiebert claims that this domineering vocabulary reflects the understanding of a priestly class who were, "part of its ruling elite, legitimating its political leadership and performing the role of mediators between God and the people in Israelite worship."[75] However, "domination" and "subjugation" are not powers over creation sought out only by the elite. As Kathleen Braden points out, "we people of the comfortable and domesticated world need remember" that these texts were written by "dominion seeking ancestors" outside of the priestly class.[76] It would not be difficult to imagine that "dominion" over crop yields or the ability to "subdue" the creatures that threatened their very lives would be attractive potentialities to subsistence farmers in the

[74] David Toolan, *At Home in the Cosmos* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 19.

[75] Theodore Hiebert, "The Human Vocation" in Hiebert, "The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions," 136–137.

[76] Kathleen Braden, "On Saving the Wilderness : Why Christian Stewardship Is Not Sufficient," *Christian Scholar's Review* 28, no. 2 (December 1, 1998): 258.

Mediterranean highlands.[77] The first creation account may be the product of priestly writers, but for much of Israelite society, to "have dominion" and "subdue" nonhuman creation could bring about positive results: a steady supply of food and safety from predators. Therefore, instead of attempting to redeem *rādâh* and *kābaš*, it would be more profitable to understand them in their historical and literary contexts and to the let the tension stand between God's commands to humans in Gen. 1:26, 28 and the human function described in the garden in Gen. 2:15. Yet, for stewardship proponents, this is an important interscriptural interpretation on the way to New Testament texts.

*Parable of Talents (Mt. 25:14-30, Lk. 19:11-26)*. The steward who maximizes his landlord's capital is held as an exemplar in creation, but stewardship's use of this character in the Parable of Talents actually works against its call to non-exploitative service of creation. The office of the steward, as it is actually presented in Scripture, is enmeshed in exploitative relationships. Throughout Scripture, the various terms translated as steward refer to a slave who is the head of his master and owner's house (e.g., Gen. 43:19, I Ki.15:18; Dan. 1:11, Lk. 12: 42-46). In these texts, the steward is a slave, but also the head of house charged with enforcing the unfair practices of his master. Another parable (Lk. 16:1-8) captures this practice when a steward, fearful he will be replaced, quickly collects on the debts that are owed to his master, highlighting "the role of stewards in funneling profits to large landowners."[78] As described in the Scriptures, the steward is one who both suffers and perpetuates an oppressive dynamic.

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[77] Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 141, 155.

[78] Carol S. Robb, *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit: Biblical Ethics and Climate Change* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 99–100.

Clare Palmer argues that the modern articulation of stewardship, which has taken hold in the Western world, participates in the same dynamic, for it expresses "the dominant positions which the rich economies have over the struggling nations of the Third World" and "can be used without mounting a challenge to the *status quo*."[79] For stewardship proponents, then, acknowledging and challenging the exploitative nature of biblical stewardship would be to challenge the modern cosmic imaginary that make the entire ethic possible. The irony is that by upholding the steward in the parable of talents, stewardship actually promotes the exploitative behaviors it seeks undo.

### 2.2.3. *Theological Distortions Created by the Hermeneutic*

The hermeneutic employed by stewardship proponents engenders four significant theological distortions in its conceptualization of God, humanity, creation, and Jesus Christ. The God who creates becomes an "absentee landlord," no longer involved in the management of his "house."[80] God turns over management of creation to human stewards, who are portrayed as having not only the right to manage creation, but the ability to do so, as well. This is not only because of their capabilities, but because creation is understood in stewardship as a finite asset to be managed. Stewardship proponents argue that it is the life of the Great Steward, Jesus Christ, in which they find

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[79] Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," 76; Santmire, *Brother Earth; Nature, God, and Ecology in Time of Crisis*, 185; DeWitt, "Religion and the Environment," 30. Even proponents of stewardship ethics note the correlation between economic and environmental injustices. H. Paul Santmire, who argues for the necessity of human dominion, nevertheless notes how corruptive economic motivations and ideologies can be on the human's role as "overlord." He writes, "The Gross National Product must be demythologized! …An ever increasing rate of productivity can no longer be the criterion of national health; if anything, it must henceforth be the criterion of national disease." Santmire, *Brother Earth; Nature, God, and Ecology in Time of Crisis*, 185. Calvin DeWitt states it this way: "The market, rather than serving as a means for stewardship, has been elevated to the arbiter of our personal and global ethics, with the result that human beings are divested of their role as stewards of creation and are seen as mere consumers of creation." DeWitt, "Religion and the Environment," 30.

[80] Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," 74.

the example of stewardship perfected. In what follows, I argue that these are in fact theological distortions that are harmful to the foundation of any environmental ethic.

*The Absent God of Stewardship.* Human stewardship is made necessary because of God's absence from his creation. God creates all things and then turns over the management of that creation to his image on earth: humanity. In his absence, the commands to have dominion, subdue, tend, and care are established in order to guide humanity's stewardship. As Willis Jenkins points out, in placing humans in this role, stewardship proponents create an "ontologically distinct boundary between God and creation."[81] After the initial act of creation, which includes establishing humans as his representatives on earth, stewardship proponents place God outside of the created realm. God can therefore only act in creation indirectly, insofar as his representatives, doing his will, interact with nonhuman creation.

Although developed centuries later, stewardship's portrayal of God "sustains a strongly deistic account of the earth as mechanism and God as external to the cosmos."[82] This is not to say that stewardship theology should be considered a branch of deism; their appeals to the special revelation of the Christian Scriptures refute any such attempt. However, as Carol S. Robb points out, it nevertheless remains that "it is not good theology to use language that assumes an absentee God."[83] While claiming to be rooted in Scripture, stewardship proponents do not account for texts which speak of God's

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[81] Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 83.

[82] Michael S. Northcott, "BP, the Blowout and the Bible Belt: Why Conservative Christianity Does Not Conserve Creation," *Expository Times* 122, no. 3 (December 1, 2010): 123.

[83] Robb, *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit*, 100.

activity in creation: e.g., the exodus, Israel's entrance into Canaan, God's incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, and the continued presence of God's spirit.

*A Managerial Anthropology.* In the place of an ever-present God, stewardship sets forth the human manager to manipulate nonhuman creation. Critics argue that this understanding is anthropocentric and fails to take into account human limitation. One can see the expression of this managerial mindset in J.C. Chrazanka's five-point summary of stewardship:

1) The human being has a higher value than nature.
2) The human being has the right to rule over nature
3) Nature is a resource for humankind
4) Humankind has responsibility for nature.
5) Nature should be managed carefully by humankind.[84]

Chranzaka is unabashed in his separation of humanity *from*, and elevation *over*, the rest of creation, and he is not alone in his assertions. Despite their existence as creatures, i.e., like nonhuman creation, dependent upon God for their existence, stewardship portrays humans as having a "hierarchically superior place in creation"[85] and as *"intended* to control" creation.[86] Reichenbach and Anderson, for example, argue that stewardship is "not leisure, not recreation, but an employment" fulfilled by "playing God" with creation.[87] Richard A. Baer even goes as far as to argue that "man cannot be man and

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[84] Chakanza, J.C., "A Concern for Creation: Ecological Crisis in Malawi," in *Christianity and the Environment: Care for What You Have Been Given*, ed. Fulata Moyo and Ott, Martin (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 2002), 58.

[85] Benjamin B. Phillips, "A Creature among Creatures or Lord of Creation? The Vocation of Dominion in Christian Theology," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 134.

[86] General Synod Board for Social Responsibility, *Our Responsibility for the Living Environment: A Report of the General Synod Board for Social Responsibility.* (London: Church House Pub., 1986), 45.

[87] Reichenbach and Anderson, *On Behalf of God*, 55; Wilkinson, "Redeemers of the Earth," 41. The authors are quick to add that we are not to take unnecessary risks with the Landlord's gifts, nor are we

cease ruling over nature."[88] These various descriptions of humanity's managerial ontology and function lead Willis Jenkins to describe stewardship anthropology, as "religious license for anthropocentric domination."[89] If the very being of the human creature is at stake in controlling and manipulating creation, then they are not only allowed, but in fact compelled, to "play God" with their environment. Human beings are no longer creatures alongside of other creatures, but lords created to stand in as proxies for the Creator.

In addition to this unwarranted, unchecked elevation of humanity, it must be asked if humanity's knowledge of the environment and ecological systems is up to such a task. Clare Palmer, for example, writes:

> To be a successful steward… it is necessary to understand that which is being controlled. But the natural world is not like an estate, nor like money in this respect. It is composed of complex ecosystems and atmospheric conditions that we do not understand and cannot predict.[90]

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to mistreat them harshly if we are to be faithful stewards. Similarly, Loren Wilkinson writes of the imago dei, "Many have called this teaching a supreme example of human arrogance. But, like it or not, there is no teaching in Scripture more clear than this, and it stands at the very beginning of the Biblical record of God's dealings with man: Of all things in creation, man is uniquely like God; thus he stands apart from the world, is fundamentally different from it." Wilkinson, "Redeemers of the Earth," 41.

[88] Baer, "Ecology, Religion and the American Dream," 53. For more appraisals of humanity's managerial role, see Swartley, "Biblical Sources of Stewardship," 24; Ellis, "Divine Gift and Human Response," 5.

[89] Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 80. See also, Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, 234; Braden, "On Saving the Wilderness," 268. Several stewardship proponents claim this charge is invalid. See, Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Global Stewardship: Toward an Ethic of Limitation" in Ryan and Whitmore, *The Challenge of Global Stewardship*, 44; Ellis, "Divine Gift and Human Response," 5, 13; J. Baird Callicott notes that the "managerial anthropocentrism of the stewardship reading" may pose problems for "radical environmentalists." J. Baird Callicott, "Genesis and John Muir," in *Covenant for a New Creation: Ethics, Religion, and Public Policy*, ed. Carol S Robb and Casebolt, Carl J. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 130.Braden questions whether a management mentality is consistent for Christians who claim that their God is sovereign. She argues, "We must change our role from managers to witnesses. Can we accept that even in harsh winters when bison die or in warm summers when forests burn we are bystanders to God's glory?"

[90] Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," 80.

While stewardship proponents, following the parable of talents, may compare environmental management to the management of money, environmental systems, composed of intricately related species of flora and fauna, are far more complex than financial systems, and therefore much more difficult to manage. As David Orr points out, even when humanity attempts to promote the good of creation, it has often "inadvertently triggered a mass extinction of other species, spread pollution throughout the world, and triggered climactic change."[91] These inadvertent consequences of human environmental manipulation call for humility in our interactions with creation. As John W. Klotz states, there is a "need to be less cocky and less arrogant" about humanity's intellectual capacities and the corresponding ability to "play God" and manage creation.[92] While Scripture indicates that humanity is created in the God's image, it nowhere ascribes to humanity the type of god-like knowledge necessary to manage a complex order created by God.

*Creation as Repository of Resources.* Following the imagery of the Parable of Talents, creation is understood as a "repository of resources" managed and used for the well being of its human mangers.[93] Richard D. Land, for example claims that the Bible's portrayal of human beings as stewards means that humans "come first," and as such have

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[91] David W. Orr, *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13–14. See also, Lisa H. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 223–224.

[92] John W. Klotz, "A Response to Stewardship of the Environment," in *Applying the Scriptures*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1987), 495. As Jacob Waschenfelder points out, this arrogance stems from an anthropology that so over-emphasizes humanity's uniqueness that it occludes any understanding of "humans as one species among many, interdependent with and interrelated to all other life forms." Jacob Waschenfelder, "Christianity and the Climate Crisis: Theological Assets and Deficits," *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology* 22, no. 3 (May 2014): 272.

[93] Bock, "An Eco-Theology," 435.

the right to domesticate, kill and eat other creatures as well as "use animals in research to better human health."[94] Therefore, as Reichenbach and Anderson argue, changes made to the environment "appropriately ought to begin with what negatively affects human existence…in order to make our planet a better place for us to live."[95] This means that:

> the environment should be tamed and transformed to be more habitable and hospitable: rivers should be dammed to prevent life-threatening floods and to generate electricity; mountains should be moved to facilitate transportation; lakes should be created to provide adequate water resources; forests should be harvested to furnish lumber for human habitations and daily use."[96]

While the authors are insistent that environmental manipulations not unnecessarily degrade the environment, their account lacks any mention of manipulation for the good of non-human creation.[97] The development of human civilization, and not the flourishing of *all* creation, is the motivating factor in damming rivers, moving mountains, and harvesting forests. In their attempt to "interpret groups or species as valuable for the sake of their usefulness to dominant groups or individuals" stewardship reinforces a hierarchy

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[94] Land, "Overview: Beliefs and Behaviors," 23. Land is insistent that these rights over animals do not negate reverence and respect towards animals. Land also does not believe that using animals to improve cosmetics is justified.

[95] Reichenbach and Anderson, *On Behalf of God*, 57.

[96] Ibid. See also Fellows of the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship, ed., *Earthkeeping, Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 233. The Calvin Fellows state that, "God's steward over nature is to be a manager of the earth's household: rock, water, air, tree, bird, and beast, in the infinite complexity of their interrelationships…they must manage for the welfare of the creation and glory of God."

[97] Similarly, Armando A. de la Cruz sets forth three main roles for nature in our lives. First, nature is a quiet refuge from social commitments where "the religious person uses natural stimuli to excite his praise of God." Second, nature provides food and shelter. Third, nature is a source of economic wealth, and serves as to focus us on economic injustice. At no point, does de la Cruz discuss the value of creation outside of humanity's use and benefit. De la Cruz, "Scriptural Basis of Ecology," 220.

in which the well-being of creation is at best a secondary consideration – and often not a consideration at all – to the well-being of one species: *homo sapiens*.[98]

This utilitarian approach to nonhuman creation is possible because stewardship proponents vigorously oppose the idea of creation having value *per se* for two reasons. First, there is an understanding that estrangement from nature is the result, like all other forms of estrangement entailed by human sin, of a "fundamental estrangement from our creator."[99] So, restoring the relationship between human and nonhuman creation will not create a lasting change in that relationship unless it is accompanied by reconciliation between humans and God. As the latter attempt at reconciliation is deemed more pressing, the former is elided. Second, there is a perception in stewardship ethics that assigning any type of intrinsic worth to creation is accompanied by "a tendency especially among environmentalists to look at nature as emulation and perhaps even our worship."[100] Pantheism is a serious threat to orthodoxy, and any worldview that might succumb to it and distract from Christ must accordingly be rejected; it is Christ, and not nature, that is to be imitated and worshipped;.

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[98] Nancy R. Howell, "Relations Between Homo Sapiens and Other Animals: Scientific and Religious Arguments," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 960; Howell points out that "Instrumental value may limit relationship to subject-object interaction," thus lending itself to a managerial anthropology. For a similar critique see Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 90–91; Callicott argues that this eschewal is hypocritical because in their biblically-derived insistence that God creates the world "good," stewardship proponents, are arguing that "God conferred intrinsic value on the world and all its creatures." Callicott, "Genesis and John Muir," 110–111.

[99] William A. Dyrness, "Environmental Ethics and the Covenant of Hosea 2," in *Studies in Old Testament Theology*, ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Robert K. Johnston, and Robert P. Meye (Dallas: Word Pub., 1992), 274.

[100] Thomas L. Compton, "Natural Resources Stewardship: The Earth Is the Lord's," in *The Environmental Crisis: The Ethical Dilemma*, ed. Edwin R Squiers (Mancelona, MI: Au Sable Trails Institute of Environmental Studies, 1982), 112.

As Willis Jenkins points out, this rejection of intrinsic worth is problematic in environmental ethics because it creates a "morally distinct boundary between humanity and other creatures."[101] Humans have no moral obligation to creation *per se*, but are obliged to live morally in relationship with the Creator who has entrusted creation to their care.[102] Humans take care of the creation because of their obedience to the Creator, and they must never confuse the ontological or moral standing of the two. Stewardship thus becomes:

> doubly insulated form any moral claim of nature: obedient stewards conform to God's will, not nature's orders, and Christians discover nature only by participating in God's act…The normative force for stewardship, therefore, comes not by nature's dignity but from the extrinsic command by which human acts are claimed. The stewardship strategy thus makes environmental issues significant in light of God's attitude toward human agents, situating environmental practices wholly within the exchange between God and humanity." [103]

Stewardship creates an environmental ethic that is not fundamentally concerned with the health and well-being of the environment. It is "a moral practice barren of earth."[104] As in the parable of talents, the manipulation and management of creation simply becomes the means by which stewards earn favor with their returning master. It is ironic that stewardship is an environmental ethic that eschews the value and goodness of non-human

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[101] Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 83.

[102] Loren Wilkinson, "A Response to Stewardship of the Environment," in *Applying the Scriptures*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1987), 498.

[103] Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 81, 84; Kearns, "Saving the Creation," 62–64. Jenkins understands this move by stewardship proponents as a reaction to the eco-justice ethic. Kearns, however, claims that this distrust is aimed at the creation spirituality trajectory, specifically at those who are either unconcerned with maintaining traditional doctrine (e.g., Thomas Berry) or those who advocate more pantheistic interpretations of God's relationship to the world (e.g., Fox). Kearns, "Saving the Creation," 62-64.

[104] Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 84. Following the Parable of Talents, Clare Palmer points out that "The focus is upon the relationship of the master to the steward. The 'possession' or 'household' of the master is not important in itself, but only inasmuch as the steward must obey and be faithful to the master with respect to it." Palmer, "Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics," 69.

creation in favor of human well-being, particularly given the biblical witness of its "good" creation by the same Creator that fashioned humanity.

*Jesus Christ as Great Steward?* The final theological distortion engendered by the stewardship hermeneutic is a portrayal of Jesus Christ as the "Great Steward." Christological discussions are rare in any environmental ethic or environmental theology.[105] The most distinctive doctrine of Christianity is rarely brought into ecological discussions, and therefore, helpful critiques of stewardship's Christology are absent the literature. Whether this is because of the "traditional Western emphasis on Christ's coming to save [humans] from sin"[106] or a more recent "concern with the social aspect of Jesus' ministry,"[107] this omission has enervated Christian environmental ethics. While I set forth my own christological contribution to the discussion in chapter five, I wish to make two observations about the deficiency of a "Great Steward" Christology. First, as I have shown, stewards are only necessary because the Creator is removed from creation. Placing Jesus as the "Great Steward" then raises questions not only about his relationship to the Father, but of his own divine nature. If the divine is removed from the created sphere, then is Jesus simply a human steward? Second, the office of the steward in Jesus' time was one who both suffered and perpetuated oppressive economic practices. While Jesus surely suffered from the same practices that created the position of steward, it

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[105] For discussions of this lacuna, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, "An Earthy Christology," *America* 200, no. 12 (April 13, 2009): 27; Martha Kirkpatrick, "'For God So Loved the World': An Incarnational Ecology," *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 2 (Spr 2009): 192–193; Sallie McFague, "An Ecological Christology: Does Christianity Have it?," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 29.

[106] Johnson, "An Earthy Christology," 27–28.

[107] Seán Freyne, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story* (London ; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 24–25.

would be erroneous to ascribe to Jesus any role in perpetuating these practices. In fact, as I will show in chapter four, Jesus' teachings and ministry are antithetical to the exploitative political and economic practices of that day; his life and ministry initiate an overturning of that exploitative order.

### *2.3. Conclusion*

As indicated above, the three theological models most often articulated in the United States are eco-justice, creation spiritualities, and stewardship. While eco-justice and creation spiritualities have made an impact on the American discourse, stewardship remains the predominant metaphor for Christianity. For this reason, the bulk of this chapter has been concerned with pressing the logic and the claims of stewardship.

Stewardship casts human responsibility towards nonhuman creation in terms of the divine mandate given to the first human beings: to "have dominion" over creatures and "subdue" the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28). The result, they argue, is an environmental ethic that rejects exploitative relationships and encourages a type of earth-care that reflects the self-giving ministry of Jesus Christ, the Great Steward. However, there are considerable hermeneutical and theological deficiencies with this trajectory. The stewardship hermeneutic is one that grounds itself in God's commands in the first Genesis creation account to humans to "have dominion" and "subdue" creation. Attempting an interscriptural interpretation through the second creation account, the Parable of Talents, and christological texts stewardship proponents fail to portray these texts as advocating for the selfless care of creation. Further, this hermeneutic engenders four significant theological distortions: (1) the Creator in the stewardship paradigm, like that of Deism, is removed from the world after the initial act of creation: (2) human beings are then

portrayed stewards called upon to "play God" and manage the natural world; (3) creation, although deemed "good" by its Creator, is assigned value only insofar as it benefits its human managers and (4) Jesus Christ becomes the "Great Steward," thus creating issues surrounding his divinity and role in perpetuating oppressive first century practices.

Beginning in the next chapter, I construct an alternative theological framework rooted in a covenantal relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. Drawing upon the works of Robert Murray, Michael Northcott and Karl Barth, I argue that a covenantal ecology corrects stewardship's theological distortions by positing 1) human beings not as stewards, but as active participants within this covenantal ecology, 2) God as the one who establishes and maintains this ecology, 3) nonhuman creation, as a participant in this covenant, an object of care for both God and humans and 4) Jesus Christ as the one who fulfills a covenantal ecology by transforming a corrupted world order.

# CHAPTER THREE

## The Theological Foundations of a Covenantal Ecology

### *3.1. Introduction*

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that proponents of stewardship environmental ethics, while intending to promote earth-care in a way consonant with the Scriptures, ultimately undermine their goal by fundamentally misunderstanding the relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. The stewardship motif erroneously transforms the God of the Bible into an absentee landlord, human beings into *de facto* managers of creation, Jesus Christ into the greatest example of stewardship to be emulated by humanity, and nonhuman creation into the backdrop against which the relationship between the God and humanity is played out. These characterizations neglect much of the Christian Scriptures and this distortion detracts from a sustainable theological and ethical response that directly meets the challenges of environmental degradation. As a corrective to stewardship environmental ethics, this chapter outlines a covenantal ecology in which God, humanity, and nonhuman creation stand in a relationship to one another initiated and sustained by God's covenantal initiative. [1] In opposition to the stewardship environmental ethic, a covenantal ecology situates God in intimate relationship with creation, humans and nonhuman creation as partners (with each

[1] This dissertation is not the first attempt to explore the connection between creation and covenant. In large, I hope to uniquely contribute to this general trajectory with an innovative reading of Robert Murray, Michael Northcott, and Karl Barth that uniquely informs the reading of Scripture. For other attempts, see: Walbert Bühlmann, *God's Chosen Peoples* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 11–36; Bernhard W. Anderson, "Creation and the Noachic Covenant," in *Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Creation Tradition* (Bear & Co., 1984); William J Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993); Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010).

other and God) in a covenantal ecology, and Jesus Christ as the incarnate covenant, who initiates its fulfillment.

I establish the theological foundation for a covenantal ecology in this chapter with an exploration of works of Robert Murray, Michael Northcott and Karl Barth. I begin with Robert Murray's *The Cosmic Covenant*, in which he argues – through an exploration of the Old Testament and ancient near eastern rituals – that God's covenant was established not only with Israel, but with the entirety of creation. Next, I turn to Michael Northcott, who explicitly draws upon Murray's description of the cosmic covenant and applies it to the contemporary environmental discussion. Arguing from Thomistic natural law and the prophetic corpus in the Old Testament, Northcott vividly describes the effect of human behavior on nonhuman creation. Finally, I develop Karl Barth's articulation of the inseparability of creation and covenant, and that relationship's christological basis.

Barth's contributions occupy the majority of the chapter for two reasons. First, unlike Northcott and Murray, Barth's work is written before the modern environmental movement, and therefore in need of some translation into that discussion. Second, of the three, Barth unquestionably spends more scholarly energy fashioning his Christology, a unique contribution necessary both to refute the Christology of stewardship and to provide a perspective that will form the christological foundation of the chapter that deals with New Testament texts. Taken into concert with Murray and Northcott, these three scholars provide the theological foundation of a covenantal ecology.

### *3.2. Robert Murray and the Cosmic Dimensions of Covenant*

Robert Murray's *The Cosmic Covenant*, as John Barton states, "deserves to be much more widely known than it is."[1] A rich historical, biblical and theological exposition of the unexplored dimensions of "covenant" in the Old Testament, it is one of the three theological pillars of the theological foundation of a covenantal ecology. In his examination of non-Israelite religious documents, Murray demonstrates that the belief in a "cosmic covenant" was common in the ancient near east (ANE). In the Old Testament and the ANE, the cosmic covenant was understood as "a divinely willed order harmoniously linking heaven and earth."[2] The cosmic covenant linked heaven and earth in such a way that disharmony or harmony on earth was reflected in the heavens. Texts that describe the cosmic covenant are infrequent in the Old Testament and modern scholarship, but Murray contends that this dearth of material does not indicate the concept is insignificant. It instead reveals the prejudices of two particular theological agendas. First, Murray contends that the Deuteronomist, whose tendency is "towards a more person-centred and voluntaristic ethical system," purged cosmic language from discussions of covenant in the Old Testament, excluding, or at the very least minimizing, some early strains of thought.[3] Second, Murray notes that the tendency in scholarship to interpret the Mosaic and Davidic covenants in light of ANE political treaties and, consequently, to "organize a synthesis round the Mosaic covenant viewed through the

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[1] John Barton, "Reading the Prophets from an Environmental Perspective," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (T & T Clark International, 2010), 52.

[2] Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (Tigris, 2007), xx.

[3] Ibid., 48.

Deuteronomic perspective," has diminished the significance of covenant for nonhuman creation.[4]

Murray finds evidence of this cosmic covenant in several Old Testament and extra-biblical texts, and I develop three aspects of Murray's interpretation of these texts (two theological and one methodological) to form the foundation of a covenantal ecology. First, Murray argues that God's covenantal concern includes not only humanity, but the entire creation. Second, Murray offers a more cosmic understanding of the Hebrew concepts *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*, usually translated as "justice" and "righteousness." Translating them instead as "right order" and "rightness," Murray explains their ethical and cosmic significance, thus transforming *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* from something that only benefits human societies to realities that benefit all of creation. Methodologically, Murray eschews the 20th century conceptualization of covenant as a political treaty that dominated much of the twentieth century, and instead draws upon a wider breadth of covenantal texts that do not fit that model.

### *3.2.1. The Inclusion of Nonhuman Creation in a Cosmic Narrative*

To describe the cosmic covenant, or the divinely willed order linking heaven and earth, Murray sets forth a cosmic narrative in three acts: the establishment, violation, and restoration of the cosmic covenant. In the first act, the cosmic covenant is established at creation as God binds cosmic elements to maintain order. Murray describes this creative binding in his translation of Job 38:8-11:

> Or who shut in the sea with doors
> when it burst out from the womb? -

[4] Ibid., xviii.

when I made the clouds its garment,
And thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed bounds (*huqqi*) for it,
and set bars and doors,
and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stopped'?

The text portrays God's creative act as decisively establishing boundaries for all creation – echoing the creative process in Gen. 1:6-10 – and especially the sea, which is often used as a metaphor for chaos in the Scriptures. These boundaries are described as *hūqqî*, a term that belongs to the "semantic field and technical vocabulary of covenant [*berit*]."[5] In Murray's interpretation, God's creation and institution of boundaries in creation is a covenantal process.

Murray's second act describes how the cosmic covenant is violated by "an alliance of proud rebels, in heaven and on earth."[6] Murray focuses on Genesis 6-9, the Flood narrative, in which God "grieves" at the state of wickedness of humanity and sends a flood to destroy all life except that preserved in the ark. Murray contends that Gen. 6:1-4, which describes angels procreating with human women, is intended to point its audience to a much larger mythology given expression in I Enoch. This myth explains how lesser divine beings rebelled against God and contributed to humanity's wickedness by, for example, teaching them sorcery and weapon-making. This rebellion by divine and human agents consequently broke the cosmic covenant, i.e., the divinely willed order linking heaven and earth as the human use of the angels' "divine" knowledge led to an estrangement between heaven and earth, between the Creator and the creation. This

[5] Ibid., 2 fn.10.

[6] Ibid., 21. For example, Isa. 24:4-6, Jer. 33:25.

estrangement led to God's decision to destroy the entirety of creation excluding what could be saved on the ark.

In the third act, the cosmic covenant is restored, an event, Murray contends, which takes place after the Flood. The Flood narrative will be explored at greater length in the next chapter. In this context, it will suffice to note that Murray interprets the covenant made with Noah, his descendents, and "every living creature," and the promise of "cosmic stability" in Gen. 8:21 as an indication of the creation-wide scope of the cosmic covenant.[7] The inclusion of, and provision for, the created order in the restored covenant displays a re-establishment of the harmony between: heaven and earth, God and creatures, and various parts of the creation.

For Murray, God's establishment and maintenance of covenantal relationships gives order to creation; it is this covenantal bond between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation that provides the starting point for a covenantal ecology. In narrative form, Murray's three-act drama expresses God's concern for all of creation, not just humanity. In the initial creative act, God sets boundaries on creation necessary for all life on earth and governs creation through his covenantal design. In the second act, humanity's wickedness breaks the cosmic covenant between heaven and earth, and cataclysmic results are suffered by creation. In the third act, the cosmic covenant is reestablished by God, thus repairing the relationship between the Creator and creation, and amongst creatures. This cosmic drama narrates God's covenantal relationship with human and nonhuman alike, binding the three together in covenantal relationship.

[7] Ibid., 33.

*3.2.2. Creation, Rightness and Right Order*

Murray's translations of the terms *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*, terms most often translated as "justice" and "righteousness," are used in the ensuing chapters that treat the scriptural aspects of a covenantal ecology. Murray argues that the "semantic range" of these terms includes not only personal characteristics, but of "cosmic order," and therefore translates *mišpāṭ* as "right order" and *ṣedeq* as "rightness" in a more cosmic sense.[8] Isaiah 32, in which the *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* are used to describe the behavior of good kings, illustrates the cosmic nature of the terms. The chapter goes on to describe the restorative effects on that king's society: open eyes and ears, good judgment and the end of complacency (vv.2-15). Verses 16-17 describe the benefits of the king's pursuit of *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* as having a positive effect on nonhuman creation:

> Then right order [*mišpāṭ*] will dwell in the wilderness,
> and rightness [*ṣedeq*] abide in the fruitful field.
> The effect of rightness [*ṣedeq*] will be peace,
> and the result of rightness [*ṣedeq*], quietness and trust forever.

While "justice" and "righteousness" may accurately describe the qualities the king is to pursue, they do not capture the transformation of creation described in vv.16-17. Murray argues this presentation of *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* therefore refers not only to a "right order" in the king and consequently human society, but also to a "right order in the functioning of nature."[9] As the dissertation progresses, I follow Murray's translation of these terms in a number of other scriptural texts. Like Murray, I argue that *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* describe a "right order" and "rightness" in creation sought by those faithful to God's covenant.

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[8] Ibid., 42. Murray points out that Hebrew lacked a single term for cosmic order, unlike Egyptian, which utilized the term Ma'at.

[9] Ibid.

*3.2.3. A Comprehensive Understanding of Covenant*

Methodologically, Murray provides a comprehensive treatment of covenant as he describes the cosmic covenant through Old Testament texts. In his focus on these cosmic dimensions of covenant, Murray explores God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and prophetic texts.[10] Murray's work corrects the narrow, Sinaitic, lens with which Old Testament scholarship has approached biblical covenant in the 20th century. Example of this approach include Walter Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament* and Gerhard von Rad's *Old Testament Theology,* both written in the 1930's. Both Eichrodt and von Rad read Israel's casuistic law against the background of contemporary history of traditions research in an attempt to show how Israel's law was influenced by its ancient near east neighbors. To illustrate the significance of this discovery, Eichrodt gives priority to the Mosaic covenant, a covenant replete with casuistic law, allowing his political reading of the Mosaic covenant to control his brief readings of the Noachic and Abrahamic covenants.[11] Von Rad, on the other hand, simply omits the Noachic covenant – a covenant that does not conform as well as the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and David covenants to political treaty readings – from his discussion.[12] Claire Amos, concisely summarizes the legacy of Eichrodt, Rad, and others:

> There has been a great deal written about 'covenant' in Old Testament scholarship over the past 40 years. Most of it however has focused on the Mosaic or Sinai

[10]Murray even briefly ventures into an exploration of how Jesus' own ministry reveals the cosmic covenant. Ibid., 126–129.

[11] Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament.*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 36–71; for a similar critique of Eichrodt, see Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 32.

[12] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology.* (New York, Harper, 1962). Similarly, Swartley's treatment of covenant, although not meant to be exhaustive, is telling. In his treatment on the relationship between covenant and stewardship, he does not reference the Noah story. Willard M. Swartley, "Biblical Sources of Stewardship," in *The Earth Is the Lord's: Essays on Stewardship*, ed. Mary Evelyn Jegen and Bruno V. Manno (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 27–32.

> covenant, and has drawn analogies with the international treaty system in the ancient Middle East, whether focusing on second millennium Hittite treaties, or first millennium Mesopotamian ones. But while such analogies may make sense of the Sinai covenant, presenting it as in effect a 'treaty' between YHWH and the people of Israel, they are far less satisfactory as an explanation of the covenants made between God and Noah or Abraham in Genesis.[13]

These Siniatic readings of covenant, aside from marginalizing significant texts on God's covenant in the Old Testament, run counter to the construction of a covenantal ecology. As this chapter progresses, I hope to demonstrate that understanding the covenantal relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation demands a comprehensive reading of covenant in both Old and New Testaments. Therefore, God's covenantal interactions with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, along with Jesus Christ's fulfillment of God's covenant must be allowed to inform the discussion in their own ways, which are often not amenable to understanding covenant as a political treaty.

### *3.2.4. Murray's Cosmic Covenant and a Covenantal Ecology*

While Murray's work only tangentially touches on its environmental implications, *The Cosmic Covenant* provides three significant aspects of the covenantal ecology I propose in this dissertation.[14] First, Murray sets forth an understanding of creation as a participant in God's cosmic covenant. Second, his cosmic conceptualization of *mišpāṭ*

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[13] Clare Amos, *The Book of Genesis* (Werrington, Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2004), 67; Similarly Dequeker laments the obfuscation of the Noachic covenant, writing, "World history from Adam to Babel is seen as a prelude without any special meaning in the structure of saving history." Luc Dequeker, "Noah and Israel : the Everlasting Divine Covenant with Mankind," in *Questions Disputées d'Ancien Testament* (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1974), 115.

[14] Environmental implications did not go unnoticed by Murray, who devotes a small portion of the epilogue to the promise of the cosmic covenant for environmental ethics. Murray also challenge the sufficiency of "stewardship," opting for scriptural royal metaphors, which he felt produced a "nobler vision of the human situation vis-à-vis other creatures; a vision in which wisdom, justice, compassion, and the sense of responsibility are taken seriously as being inseparable from the dignity of the image of God, while any thought of exploitation is totally alien to it." Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 171. While my own attempt does not center on a royal metaphor, it seeks a similar outcome.

and *ṣedeq* reinforces an ethical and ontological link between human and nonhuman creation; both are bound together in right order in which humans are called to live ethically in relation to nonhuman creation. Third, Murray provides a methodology that I will appropriate in the ensuing chapters. Counter to the 20th century trends of understanding Old Testament covenants in terms of ancient Near Eastern treaties and focusing on the Sinaitic covenant as an example of on such treaty-covenant, Murray allows individual covenant texts (e.g., the Noachic covenant, prophetic covenant texts) to inform to inform and describe his cosmic covenant. Similarly, I do not attempt to allow one covenant to control the reading of other covenant texts, and allow each to describe different aspects of a covenantal ecology.

In a recent article, John Barton questions the environmental application of Murray's work, in particular his read of the prophets, to the modern environmental situation. Barton argues that the prophets are "on the whole more concerned with social than environmental ethics, and have their eyes fixed on the human rather than the natural world."[15] However, as I show in the works of Michael Northcott (and later in the prophets themselves), Barton's bifurcation between social and environmental ethics is artificially imposed upon the prophets. Refusing this dichotomy, Murray and Northcott enrich both of these ethical areas.

[15] Barton, "Reading the Prophets from an Environmental Perspective," 55. Aside from being an anachronistic assessment, Barton divides the human and natural "worlds," a move, which as we saw in Murray and will see again in Northcott, is unnecessary. He cites the early prophets' emphasis on God's impending judgment and not on a reform of human behavior and the disconnect between ancient and modern conceptions of the structure of creation, i.e., the shift away from understanding the earth and heavens to influence one another, Ibid., 52–55.

### *3.3. Michael Northcott: Covenant and Environmental Ethics*

In *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, Michael Northcott lauds Murray's work in highlighting the relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creatures. He explicitly draws upon Murray's work and develops the environmental aspects of a cosmic covenant. Northcott argues that in the Scriptures, "the preservation of order – supernatural, natural, human moral and social order – is the primary function of the covenant and its associated rituals." The preservation of human and nonhuman aspects of the world is, as Northcott points out, a constitutive part of God's covenant as it is described in the Christian Scriptures. Therefore, Northcott develops a theological interpretation of Scripture that provides "a rich picture of the cosmic meaning and ecological sensitivities of the Hebrew concept of covenant."[16]

I draw upon three aspects of Northcott's work to further build a covenantal ecology. First, Northcott challenges the false premises of the modern cosmic imaginary with a teleological argument rooted in Thomistic natural law. Second, Northcott argues that God's covenant connects human societies and nonhuman creation in such a way that human sinfulness can degrade both social and natural orders. Third, Northcott argues that in light of this connection between human and nonhuman creation, a covenantal cosmology can counteract the earth-denigrating effects of the modern cosmic imaginary and provide the appropriate perspective for humans on their relationship to God and nonhuman creation.

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[16] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 172.

*3.3.1. From Technocratic "Progress" to Christian Order*

Northcott deconstructs the managerial anthropology of modern technological societies through a covenantal model inspired in part by Murray's cosmic covenant. Northcott develops his covenantal ethic through criticism of modern technological society. He argues that technological societies promise cultural, physical, and spiritual "progress" towards a better society. However, instead of providing these various types of progress, technocratic societies distort the definition of a better society by turning the "spiritual quest for salvation…into material advancement," and human beings into creatures whose purposes are only to produce and consume goods.[17] As I showed in the introduction, the idea that the "end" of nature is to become "increasingly subject to human technical reordering" is a fundamental aspect of the modern cosmic imaginary, and one which, Northcott points out, has become a substitute for spiritual fulfillment.[18] This anthropology is ultimately misanthropic. While it promises fulfillment, it actually leads to "grave moral and social problems" such as an abundance of violent crime, depression, suicide, the collapse of families and communities and denigrating attitudes towards the created order.[19]

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[17] Ibid., 258.

[18] Ibid.

[19] These are the symptoms, he notes, of the "most technologised society, North America," which exhibits" the clearest illustration of the failure of the modern myth of technique." Ibid., 259–260. Elsewhere Northcott writes of the earth-denigrating attitudes manifest: "The almost complete absence in North America of the practice of sharing common land – and of public rights of way across private land – may help to explain why a country that has consistently produced globally influential accounts of the environmental crisis – from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* to Joni Mitchell's *"Big Yellow Taxi"*– is so unable to find anything like consensus on the need to conserve a stable climate. The rituals of land use in America – including of wild land protected by the nation-state for aesthetic and ecological reasons – train Americans that land has no story, that present ownership is all, and that commons are not just tragic but unimaginable: only individual or corporate owners can protect resources from their abuse by other people."

In place of the technocratic myth propagated by the modern cosmic imaginary, Northcott argues for a teleological Christian anthropology. He writes, "In Christian tradition, a human life is only rightly ordered when directed towards the creative and redeeming love of God. Only in relation to this love are the other goods of human life – long life, companionship, material comfort and security – likely to be ordered for human flourishing and fulfillment."[20] When human beings are oriented towards and seek God's love (as opposed to a belief in progress through the consumption of goods) they flourish, for a life oriented to God reorients them to other humans and nonhuman creation. Northcott finds the clearest example of this teleological anthropology in Thomas Aquinas' writings on natural law. While Robert Murray acknowledges a resonance between the Israelite concept of order and disorder in society and natural law,[21] Northcott takes the relationship a step further, utilizing Thomistic natural law as a means to elucidate the Israelite concept. He argues that the first principle of Thomistic natural law, i.e., that good is to be pursued and evil avoided:

> affirms that the natural order is a moral order, even though subject to elements of moral ambiguity arising at least partly from the Fall, that this order is determinative for human society and morality, [and] that human goods are interdependent with the goods of the non-human world…[22]

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Michael S. Northcott, "Anthropogenic Climate Change, Political Liberalism and the Communion of Saints," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 24, no. 1 (2011): 39–40.

[20] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 262. Northcott understands this Christian belief to predate the technological ideology he critiques. He writes, "The technological society finds fewer and fewer limits to the technical transformation of the creation but as it does so it neglects the view of the ancients that there was wisdom in the original ordering of things, that though we are invited to enhance and enjoy the abundance of that order we are unwise if we forget that this original abundance comes to us as gift; it is not of our original making but that of the primordial maker." Michael S. Northcott, "Concept Art, Clones, and Co-Creators: The Theology of Making," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 234.

[21] Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 48.

[22] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 232. This is not to say that Northcott is replacing St. Francis as the saint of creation. Northcott criticizes Thomas' own teaching, specifically his contention that created goods are ordered to serve human needs.

Reading Scripture through a Thomistic lens, Northcott affirms that although nonhuman creation suffers from the effects of human sin, it still maintains the teleological, moral character with which it was created. Therefore, creation is not a neutral bank of resources indifferent to the good, but is ordered towards the good insofar as it is a part of God's teleological order.

*3.3.2 The Link between Human Society and Nonhuman Creation*

For Northcott, the intrinsic goodness and teleology of creation binds human and nonhuman creation together in such a way that human behavior can have dramatic effects on nonhuman creation. This moral, teleological character of creation means, "the order of the universe itself manifests the justice of God."[23] God's justice, which always establishes and promotes the common good throughout creation, links both human and nonhuman creation. Therefore, Northcott argues, "when human societies are ordered to the common good this will also tend to preserve the good of the non-human and material creation also."[24] The common good includes all of created life, meaning that the pursuit of justice leads to the flourishing of both human and nonhuman creation. Conversely, it also means that when humans fail to pursue the good, all of creation fails to flourish.

While Murray introduces the creation-wide effects of the disordered human life in his cosmic narrative, Northcott makes explicit the environmental implications of this relationship. Northcott focuses heavily on the prophets, and especially prophetic texts that describe how human infidelity to God's covenant negatively affects creation. Northcott draws heavily upon the prophet Jeremiah's reflections on Israel's exile in order

[23] Ibid., 269.

[24] Ibid.

to illustrate the importance of the connection between human behavior and nonhuman creation. One such example is Northcott's interpretation of Jer. 9:10-14:

> Take up weeping and wailing for the mountains and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness, because they are laid waste so that no one passes through, and the lowing of cattle is not heard; both the birds of the air and the animals have fled and are gone. I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of jackals; and I will make the towns of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant.
>
> Who is wise enough to understand this? To whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken, so that they may declare it? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through? And the LORD says: Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accordance with it, but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their ancestors taught them.

For Northcott, the exile of human inhabitants and the suffering of land and other creatures are the consequences of human infidelity to God and his covenant. In the place of worship and obedience, Israel:

> idolised [sic] wealth and power and enslaved one another and the land in the process…And so Jeremiah reads both exile and ecological collapse as consequences of idolatry and sin. Exile is their punishment for failing to care for the land, and their refusal of the terms that Yahweh had set in gifting the Promised Land to Israel."[25]

Northcott argues that "idolatry" and "sin" are not abstract theological concepts in these texts, but are embodied in the over-practice of land clearing and continuous annual farming, which would have left otherwise suitable farmland as "wilderness" and "waste."[26] These practices, which run counter to sabbatical and levitical statutes

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[25] Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 10. In addition to the prophets, Northcott interprets "the larger narrative of Scripture" to speak of "a covenant between creator and created which sets limits on how and what the most exalted and influential of creatures—humans—may do in creation. And when these limits are ignored, it indicates that the stability and fertility of creation is lost." Therefore, Northcott argues for a hermeneutic that engenders "a culture-shaping, character-forming genre which forms part of the larger set of processes and rituals that together construct moral communities of the kind Christians inhabit." Michael S. Northcott, "Loving Scripture and Nature," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 3, no. 2 (June 2009): 251.

[26] Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 10.

(explored in the next chapter) established in God's covenant with Israel, also strip the fertility from the soil, leading to famine and the deterioration of Israelite society.

In his interpretation of Jer. 9:10-14, Northcott describes the negative consequences of the interconnection between human civilization and nonhuman creation. Israel's disorder, both in worship and agricultural practice, ultimately results in degradation of that land and their removal from it. While stewardship is wont to reduce environmentally responsible living to a matter between God and humanity, Northcott demonstrates that God calls humanity to live responsibly both in relationship to God and other parts of creation; both comprise obedient living. As he argues, "Human life and society are intricately bound up with the life and community of ecosystems and the biosphere."[27] The development of a Christian environmental ethic must surely incorporate the human response to God, but it must also include the human response to nonhuman creation. As I further develop a covenantal ecology, I explore this connection between human infidelity to the covenant and its effect on the created order in different biblical texts in the following chapters.

### *3.3.3. A Cosmic Covenant: The Need for a Cosmological Shift*

Northcott argues that anthropogenic climate change (ACC) is one example of how human sinfulness affects nonhuman creation. He agues that ACC is the product of human dependence on fossil fuels and the resultant emission of greenhouse gases and the product of the "fruits of the modern devotion to the gods of secular reason, technological power and monetary accumulation."[28] Therefore, like the ecological situation described

[27] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 173.

[28] Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 14.

in Jer. 9:10-14, ACC results from disordered human beings misusing that technology towards oppressive ends. While it is true that ACC can be mitigated by technologies and practices that reduce the use of fossil fuels, the issues entailed by ACC are not solved by technology alone. Technologies cannot reorder the human understanding and valuation of creation, and to that end, Northcott argues for a covenantal cosmology that enables humans to "remake their lives."[29]

Northcott argues that the modern system of agribusiness, one of the largest contributors to ACC, is an example of natural and moral disorder inherent in the modern cosmology. Farmers raise crops and rear livestock, a process that depends upon gas-powered farm machinery and fertilizers and chemicals that are produced by the burning of fossil fuels. Crops are harvested with this same machinery, and animals are typically shipped to stockyards and slaughter houses which, Northcott claims, exhibit "levels of cruelty to animals unimagined by predecessor cultures," including those who practiced animal sacrifice.[30] Only after crops and animals are processed and sanitized, are they

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[29] Ibid., 175, 281. Northcott criticizes political liberals who argue that the solution to curbing the use of fossil fuels is the implementation of carbon trading and taxes. He claims that this advocacy reveals a misunderstanding on the part of political liberalism that ACC is simply "a problem of the social allocation of the costs arising from the use of an increasingly scarce resource…"Northcott, "Anthropogenic Climate Change," 35. Northcott argues that these mechanisms and financial penalties, often innervated by corporate influence and governmental resistance, are too narrowly-focused on the present to be effective. A solution to ACC, he argues, must take into account "the roots of the present in the past" and "the connections between the present and the future, and in particular the need of future generations for the kind of stable climate that enabled the projects of our forbears to endure across generations and make possible what we call civilization." Ibid., 44. Northcott locates this long-range view in the Christian understanding of the communion of the saints.

[30] Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 241. While Northcott does not absolve the individual of the perpetuation of these acts, he understands such treatment of land and animals to be indicative of corporate involvement (and governmental disinterest) in the cultivation of food. He writes, "To blame the moral character of citizens for the ecological crisis leaves out of the picture the most influential agents of this crisis, which are not citizens but rather economic corporations that have the rights of citizens, and far greater powers than citizens, but lack citizens' capabilities for moral discernment… But there is a political, and hence a legal, reluctance to put environmental goods, and their use values to present and future generations, above corporate interests. This reluctance does not just reflect the political influence, and legal status and powers, of corporations. It is also informed by the preference of modern economists and a

shipped long distance to reach supermarkets. This modern system, which devalues the life of creatures as it consumes excessive amounts of fossil fuels "sucks the life out of local and sustainable forms of exchange and destroys both human and species communities."[31]

If humanity is to address effectively climate change and other environmental issues, Northcott argues that it must come to understand that justice is integrated into the cosmic covenant that establishes and sustains the world, i.e., that social and natural problems are intimately related with one another. This covenantal cosmology provides an environmental ethic not only in the narrow sense of the term, but a comprehensive ethic that leaves no aspect of creation, including the intricacies of human life, untouched. Northcott describes the effect of such an understanding when practiced:

> When the created order is treated with respect, and when human claims on this order are just and equitable, then both human society and the land flourish. Nature will be fruitful with its gifts, which God in his providence confers freely, when humans respect the covenant between God, people and land, and practise [sic] the good life as God ordains in the law and the covenant. Abundance of gift, of provision is the covenant intention of the Lord provided the people follow in his ways. Such provision requires human co-operation and creativity; it requires the work of tending and caring for nature, and above all the moral and spiritual work of worship and gratitude towards the creator and the quest for righteousness.[32]

Northcott's cosmology is one regulated by a cosmic covenant in which spiritual, moral, and physical dimensions of reality all are inseparable and influence one another. In addition to faithfulness to the Creator, compassion for one's neighbor (both human and

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growing number of politicians for market allocation of the social and environmental costs of natural resource use, since markets are said to be more "efficient" than more deliberative forms of cost allocation by rational choice theorists." Michael S. Northcott, "Artificial Persons against Nature: Environmental Governmentality, Economic Corporations, and Ecological Ethics," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1249, no. 1 (February 10, 2012): 106, 111.

[31] Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 15.

[32] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 270.

nonhuman) and the pursuit of justice for all of creation, are constituent aspects of the rightly ordered life. A life that humbly tends to all others is one that through restraint and humility enjoys God's blessing. The reality of God's covenantal fidelity means that abundance is not the result of repeated self-interested acquisition, but the result of a fidelity by humans to God's creation-wide covenant.

### *3.3.4. Conclusion: Northcott and a Covenantal Environmental Ethic*

To conclude, there are three ways in which Northcott's advancement of Murray's work bear on a covenantal ecology constructed in this dissertation. First, Northcott challenges the modern cosmic imaginary with a theological and scriptural argument that establishes nonhuman creation as moral and teleological in character. Second, Northcott argues that God's covenant connects human and nonhuman creation in such a way that human sinfulness negatively impacts all of creation. Third, Northcott argues a covenantal cosmology can provide the appropriate perspective for humans on their relationship to God and nonhuman creation that can counteract the earth-denigrating effects of the modern cosmic imaginary. I undertake this constructive attempt not only to meet the challenges of stewardship, but like Northcott, to also provide a covenantal cosmic imaginary that promotes creation care. I further develop the theological framework for a covenantal ecology with an examination of Karl Barth's presentation of the bond between covenant and creation and its implications for the relationships between God, humanity, and non-human creation.

### *3.4. Karl Barth: Covenant, Creation, and Christology*

Barth's writings predate both Murray and Northcott, but I take them up at this point because they provide the theological foundations for developing a covenantal ecology through Christology. Setting forth Barth as a positive contributor to any environmental ethic runs counter to much scholarly opinion, including that of Murray and Northcott. Barth's theology has been assessed by a variety of environmental theologians and ethicists as both anthropocentric[33] and exhibiting an instrumentalist view of creation.[34] Geoff Thompson goes as far as to claim, "Karl Barth's theology is unlikely ever to be a major resource for contemporary discussion of environmental ethics."[35] As Willis Jenkins states, the aforementioned attitude has led environmentalists to view "any Barthian environmental ethic" as one which "must recoil from the natural world as apostasy" and thus approach Barth "more often as foil than as champion."[36]

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[33] Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 164; Andrew K. Gabriel, "Beyond Anthropocentrism in Barth's Doctrine of Creation: Searching for a Theology of Nature," *Religious Studies and Theology* 28, no. 2 (2009): 183.

[34] Northcott, for example, claims that the Reformed tradition has historically viewed creation as having "no inherent goodness" other than its contributions towards human salvation, and has therefore been at best "indifferent," and at worst "hostile" towards it" Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 219. Northcott understands Calvin, having been influenced by nominalism, as setting forth two purposes for creation: it has a "capacity to witness to the saving power of God for elect souls," and serves as the raw material which humanity is to transform so that it might reflect the glory of God. Paul Santmire describes Barth's portrayal of creation as a "purely instrumental" mechanism that allows for salvation history to unfold Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, 145–146, 152.

[35] Geoff Thompson, "'Remaining Loyal to the Earth': Humanity, God's Other Creatures and the Bible in Karl Barth," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark International, 2010), 193–194.

[36] Willis J. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 154. Included in his list of critics are: Paul Santmire, Holmes Rolston, Walter Brueggemann, Larry Rasmussen, and Sallie McFague. Jenkins also situates Barth as a conversation partner with, and corrective to, stewardship ethics. In part, the aim of this section is to augment Jenkins' argument that "After Barth, Christian environmentalists may claim that conversion to the way of Jesus entails care for the earth…" Ibid., 187.

There are texts in Barth's corpus that justify the foregoing negative assessment of Barth as adversary to environmental ethics and theology. Even the casual reader of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* can find texts that portray humanity as the "summit of creation" and creation as an "instrument of [God's] acts" (III/1, 98, 102).[37] However, there is a line of thought and argumentation in Barth's exposition of the relationship between covenant and creation in *Church Dogmatics III/1* that can be fruitfully applied to a covenantal ecology. I draw upon three aspects of Barth's theology to further develop a covenantal ecology. First, I explore Barth's critique of the Post-Enlightenment view of creation. Barth argues against a reductionist understanding of 'nature' – a view that resonates with the managerial anthropology of stewardship - that takes into account only what can be empirically proven. In its place, like Murray and Northcott, Barth offers a

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[37] See also III/1, 18, 43, 99, 102, 143, 152, 247. Due to the frequency of citations from this volume, citations from III/1 will be parenthetical. These claims often derive from Barth's exegesis. For example, In his exegesis of Genesis 1:26, Barth argues that the divine consultation "Let us make" separates humanity from the rest of creation which was brought into being through the introductory, "Let there be." Barth argues that this change in wording means, unlike the rest of creation, humanity shares in an "I-Thou" relationship with God, i.e., "not merely to have fellowship with Him like plants and animals and all the other creatures of heaven and earth, but to hold fellowship with Him in unassuming but conscious, spontaneous and active assent to His divine decision" (III/1, 266). Also, in his exegesis of Gen. 2:7, Barth argues that the breath of life breathed into newly-formed body of the *ʾādām* means that they will not, in distinction to other animals, become "arid, barren, dead, dust of dust, earth of earth; a soul without form or dwelling, assigned with the body to the depths of the earth, condemned without the Spirit of God to an impotent hopelessness" (III/1, 236; cf. 291). Yet, Barth argues the most indicative aspect of Scripture as to humanity's uniqueness is expressed not on the Genesis accounts of their creation, but in God's becoming human in Jesus of Nazareth, claiming "The reason why God created this world of heaven and earth, and why the future world will be a new heaven and a new earth, is that God's eternal Son and Logos did not will to be an angel or animal but a man. . . " (III/1, 18). Jesus Christ's decision to come as a human being is determinative for that species. In the incarnation, Jesus Christ becomes the "centre of all creation, of the whole reality" for whom "everything is created," and humans, by virtue of Christ's humanity, are included in this special position (III/1, 19, 376). The human being is seen as the "summit of creation" that has all creatures "under himself – in correspondence with God's relationship to all creatures (III/1, 98, 206). One can see Barth's ambivalence about his treatment of the doctrine of creation, *Church Dogmatics III/1*, in the preface to his discussion:

> In taking up the doctrine of creation I have entered a sphere in which I feel much less confident and sure. If I were not obliged to do so in the course of my general exposition of Church dogmatics, I should probably not have given myself so soon to a detailed treatment of this particular material (III/1, ix).

Having just completed his exposition in he doctrine of God in the second volume of the Church Dogmatics, Barth admittedly moves to the doctrine out of creation out of a sense of obligation. Yet, accompanying his "anxiety and sighing" were "desire and love" for the task at hand (III/1, ix).

view of creation as a product of God's covenant to be with and for "creatures," a term Barth uses to describe everything that is not God (e.g., animals, trees, rocks, etc.).[38] Second, Barth stresses the inseparability of creation and God's covenant, thus challenging the God-human focus of stewardship by making creation a locus of ethical deliberation. Third, and arguably most important for the theological construction of the covenantal ecology, is Barth's connection between creation, covenant and Christology. While Murray and Northcott focus heavily on Old Testament texts, Barth's Christology moves the discussion of a covenantal ecology into the New Testament. Barth argues that the content and form of God's covenant of grace is none other than Jesus Christ, and this assertion entails an extension of the reconciliatory effects of Christ's life and death to all of creation.

As I indicated earlier, Barth's treatment will take up relatively more space in this chapter than the treatment of Murray or Northcott. This is necessary for three reasons. First, Barth's early twentieth century context is one largely unaware of the environmental issues Murray acknowledges in the latter part of that century and Northcott discusses at length into the early parts of this century. Therefore, more translation of Barth's creation theology is necessary in order to bring it into the contemporary discussion. Second, critiques of Barth's views on creation are numerous, necessitating discussion of those critiques throughout. Third, Barth's Christology is central not only for this chapter, but for my treatment of New Testament Christology in Chapter 4. This Christology is expansive, requiring a generous amount of explication if they are to substantively develop a covenantal ecology.

[38] Water, land, vegetables, and even celestial bodies are also called creatures (cf. 142, 143, 159).

*3.4.1. Barth's Critique of Post-Enlightenment Views of Creation*

Published in 1945, Barth's intentionally crafted his doctrine of creation as a protest against its treatment in his own European context. Barth's most consistent polemic was aimed at "natural theology," which he defined as:

> every (positive or negative) formulation of a system which claims to be theological, i.e. to interpret divine revelation, whose subject, however, differs fundamentally from the revelation in Jesus Christ and whose method therefore differs equally from the exposition of Holy Scripture.[39]

His "Nein!" was directed both at Emil Brunner, and natural theology, which he considered a "theology of compromise" from which "only the theology and the church of the antichrist can profit."[40] Barth's polemic was motivated by his understanding of

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[39] Barth, "No!," 74, 75. Du Toit describes Barth's resistance to natural theology as a resistance to "autonomous human reason, which includes all human endeavours to make sense of human existence outside the realm of revelation." Cornel W. Du Toit, "Some Barthian Perspectives on the Present Science-Religion Debate: What is the Place of 'Natural Theology' Today?" *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 63, no. 4 (11, 2007): 1448. This resistance has branded Barth the "sworn archenemy of natural theology." Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 154. One can see an example of this type of assessment by Colin Grant who argues that "With the hindsight of ecological awareness, theological devaluation of nature appears problematic from the point of view of theology as well as of ecology." Colin Grant, "Why Should Theology be Unnatural?," *Modern Theology* 23, no. 1 (Ja 2007): 101.

[40] Karl Barth, "No!: An Answer to Emil Brunner" in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace,"* trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: The Centenary Press, 1946), 72; "*Nein!*," 9, 128. Torrance states that for Barth, "the danger of natural theology lies in the fact that once its ground has been conceded it becomes the ground on which everything else is absorbed and naturalised, so that even the knowledge of God mediated through his self-revelation in Christ is domesticated and adapted to it until it all becomes a form of natural theology." Thomas F. Torrance, "The Problem of Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth," *Religious Studies* 6, no. 2 (06, 1970):125. Barth claims that Brunner has fallen into the "abyss" of natural theology in his division of the *imago dei* into material and formal aspects. As Barth understood Brunner, the former was considered completely destroyed in the fall, but the latter was only impaired, providing a "point of contact [Anknüpfungspunk]" which always exists between a person and the Word of God. Barth, "No!," 88; "Nein!," 25. This point of contact was a result of God's "preserving grace," or "the preserving and helping presence which God does not deny even to the fallen and estranged creature," that allowed *all* human beings to recognize God and, to some degree, know his will. Barth, "No!," 83. Barth states that this claim, "Taken by itself it might just as well be our condemnation to a kind of antechamber of hell!" Ibid., 84. Barth criticizes Brunner's position for its reliance upon "*soi-disant* data derived from reason, nature, and history" placed God on a "continuum of being with creation." As yet another object amongst others, God could be understood "in general terms that apply to or derive from creation." Barth, "No!," 77; see Don Schweitzer, "Karl Barth's Critique of Classical Theism." *Toronto Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (Fall, 2002): 232. Also, Barth claimed that Brunner's advocacy for a "point of contact" between God and humanity diminished the role and power of the Holy Spirit. Barth countered that the Spirit, "who proceeds from the Father and the Son and is therefore revealed

natural theology's relationship to the Enlightenment, which he described as "bad fruit [natural theology] growing on a bad tree [the Enlightenment]" (III/1, 414).[41] Barth was ever-critical of the "pressure" placed on theology by Post-Enlightenment science to set forth an objective, empirically-verifiable understanding of "nature" (III/1, 6). He claimed this pressure caused the separation of the two books of "nature" and "grace," or in Barth's language "creation" and "covenant." In practice this bifurcation forced a false choice between that which is "rational" and that which is "Christian," leading to the expulsion of the latter in favor of the former, as well as an understanding of nature as removed from the guidance and influence of the Creator (III/1, 414). Barth's critique of natural theology and the Enlightenment must then be understood, at least in part, as a stand against a godless, closed nature system.

To counter the Enlightenment's removal of the Creator from creation, Barth bases his treatment of creation in Scripture and church confessions. As Nathan Macdonald states, this methodology "reverses the post-Enlightenment trend of placing the creation narratives within a secular context, such as the natural sciences or the history and literature of the ancient Near East."[42] Instead, Barth's treatment of creation begins with

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and believed to be God, does not stand in need of any point of contact but that which he himself creates." Ibid., 68, 85, 121. What Barth seems to have in mind when he attacks natural theology is a modern version, which takes off in the 1800s with the rise of history and the accompanying quest for the historical Jesus. See Grant, 96 and Mark R. Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: The Theological Basis of Karl Barth's Opposition to Nazi Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 39. In regards to his quote concerning the Holy Spirit, Barth seems to be asking "Why couldn't God…speak to us without the aid of a point of contact?" Chung, 305.

[41] Cf. Busch, *The Great Passion*, 177-179

[42] Nathan MacDonald, "The Imago Dei and Election: Reading Genesis 1:26–28 and Old Testament Scholarship with Karl Barth," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 3 (July 2008): 311. While the present task will not allow a lengthy discussion of Barth's hermeneutics, it is important to note in this context that Barth saw no issue with approaching the Scriptures confessionally. He writes, "There is a notion that complete impartiality is the most fitting and indeed the normal disposition for true exegesis, because it guarantees a complete absence of prejudice. For a short time, around 1910, this

the Apostle's Creed, "I believe in the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, " which he understands as the "the simplest and most comprehensive form of the teaching of the Church on creation" (III/1, 3). Stressing the words "I believe," Barth casts creation in terms of belief rather than the results of empirical investigation. Since the nature of creation is something revealed by God, Barth explicitly draws upon Scripture's witness concerning creation. He uses the creation accounts of Genesis, i.e., Gen. 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-25 as a scriptural framework in which to work out the relationship between creation and covenant.[43]

Barth's polemic against the Enlightenment and natural theology is significant for two reasons. First, his critique calls into question many of the theological underpinnings

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idea threatened to achieve almost canonical status in Protestant theology. But now we can quite calmly describe it as merely comical." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2: The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 469. For Barth, "faith" was not something to be overcome, but meant "allowing God to speak to us through the biblical witness, it entails subordinating ourselves to the witness of Scripture." Paul See also, Michael T. Dempsey, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Spiritual Interpretation: The Revelatory Presence of God in Karl Barth's Theology of Scripture," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 120–131. Barth scorns the liberal notion of "unbiased" interpretation, but it would be a mistake to interpret Barth's comment as an endorsement of uncritical readings of Scripture. As Robert Sherman points out, Barth was "fully conversant in the historical-critical skills of his day, yet never reduced the meaning of Scripture to the sum of the often ill-fitting parts produced by this approach. Instead, he always employed these products in the service of his theological interpretation." Robert J. Sherman, "Reclaiming a Theological Reading of the Bible: Barth's Interpretation of Job as a Case Study," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, no. 2 (July 2000): 176. George Hunsinger describes Barth's methodology as "hermeneutical realism," that led Barth to make "no attempt to justify the truth-claims of Christian theology by appealing to any kind of neutral, self-evident and universally accessible assertions, whether historical, transcendental, existential or some other species." George Hunsinger, "Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth's Hermeneutical Realism," *Modern Theology* 3, no. 3 (Ap 1987): 209, 219. See also Paul E. Capetz, "The Old Testament as a Witness to Jesus Christ: Historical Criticism and Theological Exegesis of the Bible according to Karl Barth," *Journal of Religion* 90, no. 4 (October 2010): 477–478. For two excellent assessments of Barth's influence on biblical exegesis, see Hans Madueme, "Theological Interpretation After Barth," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3, no. 1 (Spr 2009): 143–156; George A. Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality," *Theology Today* 43, no. 3 (O 1986): 361–376.

[43] Robert Sherman cites this move as an excellent example of Barth's hermeneutic. Using modern methodology Barth separates the two accounts and acknowledges their different sources of composition (i.e., the Priestly and Yahwist authors), while simultaneously approaching the texts with confessional, theological commitments (e.g., God as an active, covenanting God). Sherman, "Reclaiming a Theological Reading of the Bible," 176. See also, MacDonald, "The Imago Dei and Election," 309–313; Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1-3* (New York: P. Lang, 1999).

of stewardship. As I showed in the previous chapter, stewardship draws upon the notion of an absent God, which leads it to the necessity of a managerial role for human beings. Barth's critique therefore situates stewardship both within the Christian tradition and the faulty lineage of the Enlightenment. Second, in response to these Enlightenment concepts, Barth reintegrates creation with covenant, a move amenable with Murray and Northcott's own projects, and which, along with those two, lays the theological foundation for a covenantal ecology that I flesh out in the ensuing chapters.

### *3.4.2. The Relationship between Creation and Covenant*

Barth's description of the connection between covenant and creation informs the construction of a covenantal ecology. Similar to how Murray understands the cosmic covenant to link heaven and earth and Northcott understands God's justice to be woven into the created order, Barth describes covenant and creation as having an "indissoluble connexion and mutual relationship" and an "inner and real connexion" (III/1, 76, 333).[44] Connected, but not synonymous, Barth argues that to confuse creation and covenant is to confuse "the existence and being of the one loved" with "the fact that it is loved" (III/1, 97). The two must be separated and distinguished if the connection is to fully understood and appreciated. Creation is "the external basis of this covenant," which means that creation makes the covenant possible by bringing into existence creatures with which he might be covenanted (III/1, 96). As "the road to the covenant" it "takes precedence

[44] For a concise overview of this relationship, see Keith L. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 202–207.

historically" (III/1, 231, 232). As Kevin Hector points out, creation is not a general or neutral category for Barth, but exists as "creation-for-covenant."[45]

Covenant is the "internal basis of creation" that establishes the foundation, nature and teleology of creation (III/1, 97, 231; cf. II/2, 50). As Kenneth Oakes argues, this means that covenant "is not something later layered upon a self-enclosed creation;" covenant is determinative for creation."[46] As the work of God in which God creates and then establishes relationship with something other than Godself, it is a "covenant of grace" that establishes the goodness of creation (III/1, 43). Creation takes precedence historically, but covenant, given its provenance in the divine life, takes precedence "in substance" (III/1, 232). Barth explains, "It would be truer to say that creation follows the covenant of grace since it is its indispensable basis and presupposition. As God's first work, it is in the nature of a pattern or veil of the second, and therefore in outline already the form of the second" (III/1, 44). The covenant is a blueprint of sorts for the ensuing creation that details the willful, intentional design of the covenanting God.[47] While Barth can distinguish between creation and covenant, they are inseparable, for one cannot exist without the other.

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[45] Kevin W. Hector, "Ontological Violence and the Covenant of Grace: An Engagement between Karl Barth and Radical Orthodoxy," in *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack and Clifford B. Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 336. For Barth, creation is not the same as "a dumb destiny, or irrational life-energy, or involuntary natural impulse" (III/1, 110).

[46] Kenneth Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant-Partner," *Modern Theology* 23, no. 4 (O 2007): 601.

[47] Although not explicitly commenting on Karl Barth, Charles McCoy describes the relationship between creation and covenant in a way that will help elucidate Barth's own understanding. McCoy states, that "covenant signifies an inclusive view of God as the Faithful One and of God's faithful will as embodied in the wholeness of creation." Charles S. McCoy, "Creation and Covenant: A Comprehensive Vision for Environmental Ethics," in *Covenant for a New Creation: Ethics, Religion, and Public Policy*, ed. Carol S Robb and Casebolt, Carl J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 214.

Proponents of stewardship environmental ethics refrain from ascribing any kind of intrinsic value to creation, but for Barth, the relationship between covenant and creation demands an appreciation of that intrinsic value. Barth rhetorically asks, "Who is able to do justice to its intrinsic value in quality only (to say nothing of the quantitative wealth all around us), and to be genuinely and correspondingly joyful and thankful?" (III/1, 372). Joy and thankfulness are the only appropriate responses to creation, not simply because creation provides for human needs, but for the simple fact that it exists. Its existence is not primarily for human usage, but as an expression of God's grace, is "created for its own sake, " having its own "dignity" apart from humanity (III/1, 18, 143, 152). By virtue of its relationship with God, and aside from any use humanity could imagine for it, this relationship demands that its goodness is unequivocally affirmed. Barth writes:

> in the order of created existence as such there can be nothing better than what is. What is by God and is thus well pleasing to God, what is elected, accepted and justified by God, is for this reason not only good, but very good, perfect. Even the good and the best, which awaits its fulfilment [sic] at the goal of its fellowship and dealings with God, can add nothing to the perfection of its being as such. Even its future glorification presupposes that it is already perfectly justified by the mere fact of its creation. At this point there can be advanced only the affirmation of creaturely existence in this sense. Creation may be good, and is good, because the judgment with which God confronts it is good, because God is good who in actualising it also justifies it. (III/1, 366).

Barth does not equate creation's "perfection" with its fulfillment or "future glorification." Creation's current perfection is no more in doubt its existence; its perfection is implicit in its existence. "Perfection" does not mean that all is as it should be, but created by God, the creation perfectly witnesses to God's grace and goodness towards all creatures.[48]

[48] See Ibid., 217–218.

This leads Barth to claim that creation is, in fact, "infinitely better and more beautiful than we can possibly suspect" (III/1, 372).

God's first creative act is the result of God's desire to live in a covenant of grace with something other than Godself. Therefore, Barth is insistent that creation, as the product of God's first creative act, is inseparable from God's covenant. For Barth, this means that creation exhibits beauty and goodness not dependent upon human valuation. For a covenantal ecology, creation's foundation in God's covenant of grace means that care for a good and beautiful creation is an expression of fidelity to the preservation of that covenant. Barth's insistence that covenant and creation are inseparable has been crucial in my development of a covenantal ecology, which also presupposes this inseparability and the significance it ascribes creation. As I show moving forward, it is the particularity of this covenant that makes it significant for a *Christian* environmental ethic, for Barth understands the form and content of this covenant to be none other than Jesus Christ.

### *3.4.3. The Christological Core of the Covenant and Creation*

Barth's incorporation of Christology into the discussion of covenant and creation opens up new area of a covenantal ecology. In an attempt to guard against a "legalistic or idealistic interpretation of the notion of the covenant" Barth grounds his understanding of covenant in a trinitarian and scriptural narrative that reveals the christological core of the "covenant of grace" that is inseparable from creation (III/1, 48). Barth begins this narrative by explaining why creation exists:

> As Creator He does not exist as a monad, but in the overflowing plentitude of His life as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in the desire and love in which He does not will to keep His glory to Himself but also to magnify it outside Himself, in which

> He does not will to live only for Himself but also for another distinct from Himself (III/1, 363).[49]

God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not under compulsion from any external source in the decision to expand the scope of his relationships from the inner-trinitarian life to an external reality. However, because of these intra-trinitarian relationships, the divine love is one in which God, "wills really to exist for His creature. That is why He gives it its own existence and being…Love wills to love. Love wills something with and for that which it loves" (III/1, 95). The desire to love something other than Godself is ultimately what leads God to create, and in the act of creation God "binds" creation to himself and himself to creation (III/1, 96, 223, 363). Creation, therefore, is not a detached work *ad extra* of the Trinity, but an outward expression of the inner divine life and love.[50]

Barth repeatedly asserts that God loves and is unequivocally committed to his creation; however, the Father's love for his creature begins with love for his Son. Barth explains:

> as God in Himself is neither deaf nor dumb but speaks and hears His Word from eternity, so outside His eternity He does not wish to be without hearing or echo, that is, without the ears and voices of the creation… the expression Son or Word of God also indicates the One who in the divine decree and will humbled Himself

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[49] This is but one example of "a fairly typical statement by Barth that acknowledges God's freedom as the freedom that is his alone as the one who loves in freedom without being a prisoner of his freedom so that, as one who loves self-sufficiently, God must be understood to be the only self-moved being." Paul D. Molnar, "Can Jesus' Divinity Be Recognized as 'Definitive, Authentic and Essential' If It Is Grounded in Election? Just How Far Did the Later Barth Historicize Christology?," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 52, no. 1 (March 2010): 52.

[50] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/1: The Doctrine of Creation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 56–67. While much of the volume, and Barth's corpus generally, focuses on the relationship between the Father and Son, Barth insists that it is "the Holy Spirit who makes the existence of the creature as such possible, permitting it to exist, maintaining it in its existence, and forming the point of reference of its existence. For it is He who in that counsel anticipates and guarantees its reconciliation with God and redemption by Him in the union of the Father and the Son…it is only in the Holy Spirit that there can be revealed to it [the creature] that unity and agreement between the Father and the Son as that which makes it possible and legitimate" (III/1, 56-67). It is the Holy Spirit who makes the relationship between Father and Son, the archetype of God's relationship with creation and amongst creatures, possible.

> already from eternity and therefore before the creation of all things…He created it because he loved it in His Son…" (III/1, 50).

Out of love for his Son, who in Barth's theology exists eternally as the incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth, the Father brings creation into existence.[51] It is in and through the Son, then, that God reaches out towards something that is not God. This reaching-out is the core of God's covenant with creation, which Barth describes as the "divine election of grace."[52] For Barth, this is not an abstract notion of covenant, but God's covenant of grace that was "disturbed and jeopardized, the purpose of which is now fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the work of reconciliation" (IV/1, 22). This covenant, then, is God's covenant actualized in the history of Israel and fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Barth understands Jesus Christ as both the "form and content" of the covenant of grace, i.e., the covenant of grace looks and exists as none other than Jesus

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[51] Bruce L. McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *The Cambridge companion to Karl Barth*, ed. J B. Webster, Cambridge companions to religion (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100; Bruce L. McCormack, "Seek God Where He May be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. van Driel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 1 (2007): 68. McCormack further argues that for Barth the *Logos incarnadus* (Word moving toward incarnation) is at the same time *asarkos* (without flesh) and *ensarkos* (in the flesh). Barth describes Jesus Christ as "the One who in the will of God was to be, was, is, and will be both very man and very God." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/2: The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 92. McCormack argues that this is possible because of Barth's understanding of God's being as being-in-act. Therefore, "the being of God in eternity, as a consequence of the primal decision of election, is a being which looks forward. It is a being in the mode of anticipation." McCormack, "Grace and Being," 100. For a further discussion of Barth's understanding of God's time, see Hilary C. Martin, "Eternity and Temporality in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Science & Christian Belief* 21, no. 2 (October 2009): 101–110.While McCormack's claim has been supported by Kevin Hector and highly contested by Paul Molnar, Barth's presentation of the Trinity in III/1 would seem to support McCormack's claim. See also, Kevin W. Hector, "God's Triunity and Self-determination: A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 3 (Jl 2005): 246–261; Paul D. Molnar, "The Trinity, Election and God's Ontological Freedom: A Response to Kevin W. Hector," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 3 (July 2006): 294–306; Paul D. Molnar, "Can the Electing God be God Without us? Some implications of Bruce McCormack's Understanding of Barth's Doctrine of Election for the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 49, no. 2 (2007): 199–222.

[52] Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/2: The Doctrine of God*, 7.

Christ.[53] The connection of Jesus Christ to covenant and creation is an important move, for it potentially opens the entirety of Christian environmental ethics to oft-neglected christological discussions. However, this move is significant specifically in the theological development of a covenantal ecology for three more reasons.

First, Christ's existence as the form and substance of God's covenant entails a two-fold ontological connection between Christ and creation. As the second member of the Trinity, the Son exists eternally, and is not only part of the gracious decision to create and the one in whom all of creation is loved, but as the Word of God, is also active in the creative act itself. Barth points to several New Testament passages (e.g., Col. 1:15-17, 2:10; I Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:3) to show that there is "an ontological connection" between Jesus Christ and creation, or that "Christ stands as God and with God before and above the beginning of all things brought into being at the creation" (III/1, 51). As the creating Word "lays the foundation" of creation, the "cosmos exists in no other way than by the Word of God" (III/1, 52, 111). In addition to his creative act, Jesus Christ's ontological connection to creation exists because he is the form and content of the covenant bound with creation, and this connection marks time and space with God's beneficence. This connection to creation is an indication not only of the stability of creation, but of its true character:

> The process whose fundamental purpose, as we have learnt from the biblical testimony to creation, is the history of salvation which culminates in Jesus Christ, cannot itself be hostile or indifferent, but can only be a benefit and can only be understood as such…We have to realize that any loosening or obscuring of the bond between creation and covenant necessarily entails a threat to this statement, and that it collapses altogether if this bond is dissolved." (III/1, 330, 332, cf. 334).

[53] Ibid., 157.

Creation is neither "hostile" nor "indifferent;" as the manifestation of God's gracious reaching out, it is "a unique sign of the covenant" that supports all life as "grace itself" (III/1, 97, 153, 232).[54] Therefore, creation is not a neutral sphere needing human stewards to manage it; bound together with the creative Word who reaches out to it, it is imbued with, and sustained by, God's grace.

Second, Jesus Christ's existence as the form and content of the covenant of grace is noetically significant because he enters creation as a creature, revealing the Creator's love for creation. Barth states that God's covenant of grace to be with and for his creation is "actualized in the manger of Bethlehem, the cross of Calvary and the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea" (III/1, 51). The term "actualized," for Barth, means "God's being is always a being in act."[55] In the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's love for his creation is actualized, and because Jesus Christ is "the Word by which God has fulfilled creation and continually maintains and rules it," his incarnation proclaims that:

> He who as Creator has all power and right over it, has always desired its good, that he has honoured and loved it from the very first, that He has always willed to procure its right, that He has always willed to be helpful, that He has always been friendly disposed towards it" (III/1, 28, 39).

Therefore, the incarnation reveals that God is one who acts and does so to reach out to his creation. While stewardship posits an absentee God, a covenantal ecology, drawing upon this notion of an ontological connection between Christ and creation, posits the event of the incarnation as indication of God's eternally-active beneficence towards, and involvement with, his creation.

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[54] Contra Dumbrell, who claims that it is "insufficient" to side with Barth, who regards creation "as merely the ground of the covenant, the basis upon which a covenant with man can proceed." Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 41.

[55] George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 30.

Third, Barth's description of Jesus Christ as creation's representative extends the reconciliatory effects of Christ's life and death throughout creation. When Jesus Christ enters space and time, he enters as a particular first-century Jewish male, but represents all of creation as a "creature for all creatures" (III/1, 381). The Son is the "Bearer of human nature, and to that extent the *Representative of all creation*" (III/1, 97, emphasis added). As Barth explains, this representation is never-ending:

> [Christ] lives eternally: not only as the Son of God but also as the Son of Man; not only as Creator of all things, but *also as the creature* whom He assumed to Himself, whose nature and cause He made His own, whose nature and cause He defended for a short time and conducted to eternal victory…It is the divine conflict and victory which forms the climax of the covenant and therefore the meaning and end of creation. And in Him the created Word is already perfect in spite of its imperfection, for the Creator is Himself a creature, both sharing its creaturely peril, and guaranteeing and already actualizing its hope. (III/1, 384, emphasis added).

As the Representative of creation, Jesus Christ brings the covenant to its apogee by working for the good of creation as a creature. Christ's incarnate, representative existence brings about "reconciliation" or "restoration of fellowship" between the Creator and the creation (IV/1, 67).[56] Barth looks to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as evidence of these creation-wide soteriological implications. Creation suffers during his crucifixion – e.g., the shaking of the ground and darkening of the skies at his crucifixion, and later undergoes the "dawn of the new creation" after he is raised to the dead (III/1, 28, 168).[57]

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[56] Despite Thomas Günter's contention that Barth's doctrine of creation (fehlen …[eschatologisch] Konturierungen), "lacks eschatological contours," one can see the movement of creation towards reconciliation and the "hope" for it in Barth's doctrine of creation. Günter Thomas, "Chaosüberwindung Und Rechtsetzung: Schöpfung Und Versöhnung in Karl Barths Eschatologie," *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 21, no. 3 (2005): 260.

[57] It must be acknowledged that this is but one of Barth's opinions concerning the scope of reconciliation. While this creation-encompassing thread is present, so is another more anthropocentric thread that understands the salvific effects of the resurrection to refer to humanity, his full covenant-partners. See (III/1, 26, 219, 387). I have offered the more comprehensive picture due to the inseparability of covenant and creation for which Barth himself so adamantly argues. If creation has the covenant of grace

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus thus mark "the passing of one whole order of reality and the coming of another," and in the movement from death to new life, the Creator is reconciled with his creation (III/1, 33). This new creation is one grounded in Jesus Christ's triumph over death, which Barth describes as the "climax of the covenant" of grace. However, Jesus Christ's advocacy for his creation does not end on the cross or with the Ascension, but is a perpetual reality. First, as eternally both Creator and creature, Jesus Christ stands as intercessor for his creation in two important capacities. As the Word who brings it into being, he continues to guarantee its existence and goodness and lead it towards its final, eschatological fulfillment. Second, when Jesus Christ ascends to the heavens after his resurrection, he does not leave behind creatureliness, but eternally advocates on behalf of creatures as a creature. Jesus Christ, both Creator and creature, "binds the life which He has created with the covenant in which He willed to make Himself the Lord and Helper and Saviour of man; with the reconciliation of the world with Himself to be accomplished in Jesus Christ" (III/1, 375). As the form and content of God's covenant to be with and for creation, Jesus Christ does not slough off his creatureliness but redeems it, and with it all that is created.

Jesus Christ, the form and content of God's covenant of grace, is connected to creation in two profound ways: as Creator and as creature. His creative activity has marked creation as the object of God's grace and care. As the Representative of creation, Jesus Christ fulfills God's covenant of grace and creation. Jesus Christ's life and ministry, empowered by his existence as God's covenant in flesh, is not aimed at

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as its basis and it is the fulfillment of this covenant that Jesus Christ takes upon himself, then this interpretation is consonant with Barth's overall project. As Eberhard Busch describes it, the new creation is not shielded from, but stands im Licht des einen Gnadenbundes, "in the light of one covenant of grace." Eberhard Busch, "Der Theologische Ort Der Christologie: Karl Barths Versöhnungslehre Im Rahmen Des Bundes," *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 18, no. 2 (2002): 137.

managing or maintaining a broken world, but transforming it, and reconciling humans and nonhuman creation with each other and God.

### *3.4.4. Conclusion: The Covenant Embodied in Christ, the Creator and Creature*

I develop three aspects of Barth's covenant/creation theology for the theological foundation of a covenantal ecology, or the relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation established by God's covenant. First, Barth's critique of the Enlightenment's view of "nature" as a neutral sphere serves as a critique of stewardship, which also proposes to manage the environment as if it were a depository of resources. Second, Barth counters this erroneous Enlightenment by positing creation as that which is inseparable from God's covenant. As such, creation's goodness is unquestionable and in no way dependent upon human valuation. This inseparability also implies any human discussion of faithfulness to God's covenant cannot, like stewardship proponents, be comprehensively done without incorporating this good creation into that discussion. Third, I draw upon Barth's incorporation of Christology into the discussion of covenant and creation. This connection moves my exploration of a covenantal ecology into the New Testament, thus providing for a biblically comprehensive environmental ethic. Barth's Christology also reaffirms creation's goodness through and ontological connection with Jesus Christ, and because of this connection, the incarnation reveals (contra stewardship) a beneficent God ever at work in his creation. Finally Barth's Christology puts forward the event of the incarnation as an event that carries with it soteriological significance for all of creation. Jesus Christ is not only as the "Fulfiller of the covenant attested already by the Old Testament" but as the Fulfiller of "being as a

whole" (III/1, 332, 377).[58] In the becoming flesh, Jesus Christ initiates the restoration relationship between humans, nonhuman creation, and God that is fulfilled at the end of days.

### *3.5. Conclusion: The Theological Foundations of a Covenantal Ecology*

The theology of Robert Murray, Michael Northcott and Karl Barth form the theological foundations of a covenantal ecology, i.e., the relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation initiated and established by God's covenant. First, Northcott and Barth challenge any cosmic imaginary that portrays creation as a neutral, godless realm called "nature." Both challenge this portrayal as the product of a modern, Enlightenment cosmic imaginary. In their place, Northcott, Murray and Barth argue for a cosmos ordered by covenant. Whether in the form of the ancient near eastern cosmic covenant (Murray), natural law (Northcott), or God's covenant of grace in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Barth), these scholars argue that the Creator is continually involved in creation. While stewardship proponents are apprehensive to ascribe any type of intrinsic value to creation, these three scholars portray creation – established and maintained by God's covenant – as a good, beautiful and significant aspect of God's covenantal love and eschatological plans.

Second, as Northcott points out, the same misunderstandings of nonhuman creation and God described above engender an anthropology that is ultimately misanthropic, for it harms humanity by positing them as beings created only for the purpose of consumption. If consumption is the *telos* of the human life, effective

[58] This move runs counter to movements in post-World War I Germany, which sought to distance Jesus Christ from his Jewish roots, if not outright deny them. See Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49, 89, 96; Eugene Simpson Tanner, *The Nazi Christ* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Bros, 1942), 9

management of natural resources becomes the means to a fulfilled life. Yet, as Northcott argues, this fulfillment remains ever elusive. As I have shown throughout the chapter, a covenantal ecology argues that human beings are creatures called to live, not as managers, but as creatures whose purpose – like the rest of creation – is to live as faithful partners in God's covenant. As Murray illustrates, this cosmic understanding of covenant posits God as one who initiates and sustains covenantal relationship with both human and nonhuman creation, thereby establishing a covenantal relationship between them. This covenantal partnership demands recognition of the connection between human civilization and nonhuman creation and a response to that recognition that enables the flourishing of both.

Third, within this covenantal ecology, I propose an understanding of Jesus Christ as the Fulfiller of God's covenant with creation. In addition to expanding the understanding of covenant, as Murray advocates, beyond narrow, Sinaitic understandings of covenant, it also opens up the New Testament as a resource for describing a covenantal ecology. Drawing upon Barth, I understand Jesus Christ as the one who creates and also enters creation as the embodiment of God's covenant to be with and for all of his creation. The incarnation, therefore, is not just good news for humans, but for the entire cosmos. Jesus Christ's ministry begins the restoration of broken relationship between humans, nonhuman creation and God, with that work culminating in the New Jerusalem, God's dwelling place at the end of days in a new heaven and earth. In what follows, I apply this theological lens to a reading of the Christian Scriptures, beginning with the Old Testament.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Covenant and Creation in the Old Testament

### *4.1. Introduction*

The previous chapter established the theological foundations of a covenantal ecology in which God, humanity, and nonhuman creation stand in a relationship initiated and sustained by God's covenantal initiative. Specifically, a covenantal ecology posits God as one who binds creation to himself, humanity as one partner in this covenant, and nonhuman creation as another. All three exist as participants in an irrevocable covenant that orders proper relationship with one another. Following the methodology of the three scholars whose work most directly influences its theological construction – i.e., Robert Murray, Michael Northcott and Karl Barth – it is necessary to examine the manner in which the Christian Scriptures, in specifically in this chapter, the Old Testament, can be read through this theological hermeneutic. This methodology addresses the hermeneutical shortcomings of other models, and especially stewardship, but is primarily aimed at further describing and explicating the covenantal ecology that maintains relationships between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation.

These Old Testament texts describe God's covenantal demands from, and fidelity towards, not only Israel, but all of God's creation, thus bringing into view new facets of the relationships between Creator and creation, and between human and nonhuman creation. Some of these texts are the traditional loci of covenant studies in the Old Testament (e.g., God's covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses and the Hebrew people,

David); others are less familiar yet uniquely add to this study (e.g., Genesis creation accounts, Psalms, prophets).

Beginning in Genesis, the chapter examines the Noachic covenant, a text often overlooked due to its unique description of God's covenant with creation, and which defies more common understandings of God's covenant. This is followed by the Abrahamic covenant: a text which shows even more clearly just how intricately connected to and dependent upon God's creation this covenant is, particularly in issues of land and progeny. Next, I examine the Mosaic covenant and levitical laws, which set forth the proper treatment of nonhuman creation by rooting them in the Sabbath obedience. Moving out of the Pentateuch, I turn to II Samuel, the Psalms, and Jeremiah, all of which present the cosmic foundations of the Davidic covenant and the significance of rightness (*ṣedeq*) and right order (*mišpāṭ*) for creation. I then examine the prophetic books of Hosea and Isaiah, which demonstrate how humanity's unfaithfulness to God's covenant affects nonhuman creation and how God's covenantal fidelity, along with human *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*, restores it. To conclude, I summarize my findings and address the Genesis creation accounts in light of those findings.

Placing these texts in dialogue not only expands the understanding of Old Testament covenant, but given their relationship to creation, fleshes out a covenantal ecology. The chapter takes into account the gains of critical scholarship while simultaneously setting forth an interpretation that is "belief-full, that is, in the service of the church's best, most responsible faith."[1] Therefore, the ensuing exegesis draws upon

[1] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 18–19.

pertinent discoveries of biblical scholarship with the intention and hope of engendering a faith responsible to God, fellow humans, and nonhuman creation.

### *4.2. The Noachic Covenant: God as Covenant Partner with Creation*

The Flood story and the establishment of the Noachic covenant in Genesis 6-9, with its profound description of the corruption, near-total destruction, and covenantal reconstitution of creation, provides a significant starting point for a covenantal ecology.[2]

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[2] The story is familiar to a variety of individuals, religious and non-religious, and therefore, "has potential to unite people, regardless of belief, in colourful, creative activity on the climate threat today." Paul Bodenham, "Lifestyle: Operation Noah - the Community Climate Change Campaign," *Ecotheology* 10, no. 1 (April 2005): 113. Bodenham's interpretation of the story reflects this modern day application: "God warned Noah of an approaching climatic disaster, and asked him to safeguard the web of life by building an Ark." The text's portrayal of disaster and its effect upon Noah also serves as a warning that even if humanity survives the global upheaval many are predicting, the existential, let alone environmental, consequences are far greater than we could imagine. Elie Wiesel reflects on the post-diluvian portrayal of Noah, and more specifically how his planting of a vineyard reflects his mental state, writing, "in Noah's case, it must have been his guilt-feeling when he discovered his own impenetrable solitude. All survivors are haunted if not plagued by such feelings, at one time or another. At one point, Noah must have wondered: "Why me?"… Having survived cosmic tragedy, he is not happy - how could he be? Haunted by his memories, he escapes into . . . sleep. He drinks and sleeps." Elie Wiesel, "Noah's warning," *Religion & Literature* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 18–19.

At the outset it must be acknowledged, that throughout the primeval history, and in many of the passages relating to the Abrahamic narrative, there is a weaving together of multiple sources; while acknowledging that the imprint of at least two authorial sources can be found within these narratives, they will be read and presented as single literary units. In regards to the Noachic covenant, John W. Rogerson points out that it is difficult to parse out these sources in chapters 6-9. John W. Rogerson, R.W.L. Moberly, William Johnstone, *Genesis and Exodus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 86. See also Anne Gardner, "Ecojustice: A Study of Genesis 6.11-13," in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman C Habel and Shirley Wurst, *The Earth Bible* Volume 2 (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 18 fn.7. Brueggemann notes that many critical scholars have moved past trying to parse apart the J and P elements of this story, and now choose to "deal with the text as it now stands." Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 75.

Steven Mason's recent work on the "eternal covenant" in the Pentateuch deserves special consideration here. Mason's commitment to read Gen. 6:8-17 and 9:1-7 together is laudatory, especially because they have historically been treated separately. For discussion of this historical treatment, see Rachel Montagu, "A Covenant between Heaven and Earth," *Epworth Review* 35, no. 2 (April 2008): 8; Horsta Krum, "The Rainbow Covenant," *Ecumenical Review* 39, no. 1 (January 1987): 82.

Mason argues that this unit of text, despite "grammatical and thematic similarities," portrays two "*linked, but distinct, covenants*," and that they represent a conditional covenant. To support his theory of two covenants in Genesis 6-9, Mason argues that those with whom God covenants differs between Gen. 6 (Noah only) and Genesis 9 (Noah and all living creatures). He also notes that while God's remembering Noah is pivotal in both accounts, the rainbow is given only in the latter. While these differences are note-worthy, I am unconvinced that they are indicative of two linked, but distinct, covenants. Mason also argues that word play is another indication of two distinct covenants. He cites the differences between Gen. 6:7, where God promises destruction, and Gen. 8:21 where God promises never to destroy in this way again; similarly in 6:17 it is said that a flood is coming, while in 9:9, that a covenant is coming. Is it not just as

Genesis 6:18 marks the first scriptural occurrence of the term covenant (*bĕrît*) in the Old Testament, and the Noachic covenant set ups foundational aspects of the relationships between God, humans, and nonhuman creation. I first describe four ways in which this covenant places God, humanity, and nonhuman creatures in relationship as partners. Then I argue that God even includes the earth (*ʾereṣ*) itself as a partner in this covenant. After the Flood, there is no part of creation that stands outside of this covenantal relationship with God.

### *4.2.1. God and Creatures Bound Together in Covenant*

Genesis six portrays a chaotic, dire situation in which human injustice has so degraded creation it is almost unrecognizable from its original state of goodness. The use of the Hebrew term *šāḥat* (corrupt) in v.11 to describe the *ʾereṣ* (earth) indicates that something is so corrupted, that it is incapable of fulfilling its original purpose. Therefore, the earth can no longer function as "a source of life, habitat for, and sustainer of, land

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likely that these differences are simply indications of plot development, and would not these narratival developments point to the singularity of the texts and the Noachic covenant itself? Steven D. Mason, "Another Flood? Genesis 9 and Isaiah's Broken Eternal Covenant," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 2 (2007): 180–195.

Mason also argues against reading the covenant between God and Noah as unconditional. His argument is founded on the much-neglected construct "As for you/as for me" employed in Gen. 9:7, 9. He argues that this construct entails a conditional covenant in which humanity's obedience to the covenantal obligations established in v.1-7 influences God's fidelity to the covenant. God's faithfulness to his promise is described by Mason as a "reward." Steven D. Mason, *"Eternal Covenant" in the Pentateuch: The Contours of an Elusive Phrase* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2008), 56, 60–64, 67, 82–87. Obligations (and consequences for violating those obligations) are placed upon creation and especially humanity in this covenant, but understanding God's promise never again to cut off all flesh by water as a "reward" misses the nuance of God's covenantal initiative. Busenitz, for example, reminds us that "God's covenants began with blessings, with even greater blessings to follow. His covenants were 'front-loaded,' so to speak, with divine blessings, wholly undeserved and unmerited, and secured with promises of eternal fidelity." Irvin A. Busenitz, "Introduction to the Biblical Covenants; the Noachic Covenant and the Priestly Covenant," *Master's Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 179. It would seem then, that Mason's perceived "rewards," one of which should be considered sheer survival, come regardless obedience.

creatures."[3] Following Cain's murder of his brother (4:1-6) and the negative influence of fallen angels on humanity (6:1-4), human *šāḥat* has in effect thwarted the Creator's purpose for creation.[4] Bernard Anderson writes:

> The language suggests that violence is a disease, as it were, that contaminates all those things, human and nonhuman, that live in the same earthly *oikos*. A lifestyle based on violence, as we well know today, cannot be contained or confined. Violence affects human beings, it permeates the nonhuman realm of animals, birds, and fish; it pollutes the earthly environment.[5]

Just as disease can spread throughout an organism, violence and sin, though beginning with just humanity, have permeated the entire created order.

The situation becomes so bleak that God sets in motion a plan that will result in near-total destruction of creation. In Gen. 6:18, God tells Noah that he will establish[6] a

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[3] Anne Gardner, "Ecojustice: A Study of Genesis 6.11-13," in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. by Norman C Habel and Shirley Wurst, *The Earth Bible* Volume 2 (Sheffield, England.: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 119. The form of the verb is found in two other verses in Jeremiah. In Jer. 13:7, it is used to describe a girdle so deteriorated that it can no longer be used, and in Jer. 18:4 to describe a clay vessel so misshapen that the potter is forced to make another. I am indebted to the Rev. Laurie Furr-Vancini for her conversations on, and insight into, the Noachic covenant.

[4] The Nephilim myth, more fully explained in I Enoch, is briefly touched upon in Genesis. The myth tells of angels, or Watchers, who fall to earth, father children with women, the Nephilim, and teach humans enchantments and warfare. The net effect is a fundamental debasement of human nature. See Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 147; Bernhard W. Anderson, "Creation and the Noachic Covenant," in *Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Creation Tradition* (Bear & Co., 1984), 53.

[5] Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation and the Noachic Covenant* (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1984), 52.

[6] Scholars disagree on whether *hēqîm bĕrît* should be translated as the establishment or perpetuation of a covenant with Noah. Dumbrell, drawing on a number of Old Testament texts (e.g., Gen 9:9, 11, 17; 17:7, 19, 21; Ex. 6:4; Lev 26:9; Deut 8:18; 2 Kings 23:3) argues that in 6:18, "the institution of a covenant is not being referred to but rather its perpetuation…We may probably now surmise that what is being referred to in Gen. 6:18 is some existing arrangement presumably imposed by God without human concurrence, since it is referred to as 'my covenant'….The nature and the details of this arrangement are not clear form Gen. 6:18…The details will become quite clear, however, when Gen. 9:1ff is reached." Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 26. While Dumbrell's argument for the maintenance of a previously established covenant supports much of my thesis of an overarching cosmic covenant, Mason shows that *hēqîm bĕrît* can in fact be used to indicate both the "institution" and "perpetuation" of a covenant (e.g., Exodus 6:4 and Ezekiel 16:60, 62).Mason, *"Eternal Covenant" in the Pentateuch*, 48–56. While I agree with Mason that this is "possible," I do not concur that it is "the most natural reading of Gen 6:18." Ibid., 54, 55. If God's covenant is established at creation with creation this would then, in fact, be an incorrect

covenant with him, a significant declaration of hope given both the enormity of the postlapsarian situation portrayed in the opening verses of this chapter and God's declaration that he will destroy everything on the earth except the occupants of the ark. God's initial covenant with Noah alone in 6:18 is then expanded in 9:9-16. In the latter text, God's eternal covenant (*bĕrît ʿôlām*) never again to "cut off all flesh by the waters of a flood" is made not only with Noah and his descendants, but with "every living creature" housed in the ark.[7]

Robert Murray argues this covenantal inclusion of non-human creatures along with human beings displays God's concern and care for all creatures and binds them together as "the Creator's partners." Murray pushes this covenantal bond further, asking, "if both are God's covenant partners, how can they not be in some sense covenantally bound to each other?"[8] Four features of the flood narrative support Murray's assertion of a covenantal "binding" between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. The first example is the ark, a vessel built by human hands at God's command that was not only

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reading. However, I have chosen to use the term "establish" because, read canonically, this is the first *explicit* instantiation of a covenant (*bĕrît*) narrative in the Old Testament.

[7] One finds anthropocentric interpretations at two notable points in this text. First, despite the text's explicit inclusion of "every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark" in this covenant, some Old Testament scholars resist the idea the God enters into covenant with nonhuman creatures. See, for example, Claus Westermann, who includes only humanity as partners in the Noachic covenant and Walter Brueggemann, who states that only "human persons are covenant partners with Yahweh." Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 159–160;Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 454. Second, Anne Gardner notes that the phrase "all flesh" in 9:11 has often been historically interpreted to mean *only* human beings, but that its usage in other texts (e.g., Gen. 7:21) includes "all sentient beings of land and air." Gardner, "Ecojustice," 121.

[8] Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (Tigris, 2007), 102. John Olley sees a similar "bonding" between human and nonhuman creatures in God's repeated reminder to Noah that the animals were "with" him on the ark. John Olley, "Mixed Blessings for Animals: The Contrasts of Genesis 9," in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman C Habel and Shirley Wurst, The Earth Bible Volume 2 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 136.

meant to preserve humans, but animals – both clean and unclean – as well. God charges Noah to keep all of the creatures aboard the ark alive, and even specifies that Noah is to take a variety of food with him, not only for use by him and his family, but by all the creatures aboard the ark (Gen. 6:19-7:9). The flood threatens the survival of humanity, but Noah and his family are charged not only with their own survival, but the survival of the creatures. The image of the ark is compelling, as human beings and animals literally ride out the flood together, the former charged with the care of the latter. The flood narrative further indicates God's concern for all of the ark's occupants by stating that after God remembers Noah, his family *and* the nonhuman creatures, God caused the waters to subside (Gen. 8:1).[9] All creatures on the ark, not just human, are present in God's thoughts and recipients of God's sustaining action. God's concern for the survival of all these creatures brings them together in the ark, and bound together by God's covenant, they survive.

Second, the covenantal bond between God, humanity, and nonhuman creatures is also displayed by the representative sacrifice of every clean bird and animal (8:20) that Noah offers to the Lord upon the survivors' egress from the ark. The odor of these sacrifices pleases the Lord and prompts him to pledge the cessation of destruction; in this way animals provide the means for the establishment of the covenant with their lives. After the flood, the relationship between human and nonhuman creatures is dramatically different. Admittedly, the sacrifice of these creatures creates a "growing anxiety as to whether the Flood story is a good story to think about and use. . . " for those searching for

[9] See S. van den Eynde, "The Missing Link: ברית in the Flood Narrative: Meaning and Peculiarities of a Hebrew Key Word" in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History*, edited by André Wénin, (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2001), 476.

biblical texts that promote creation care.[10] However, animal sacrifice is a powerful example of the relationship between creation and covenant, and it remains a constitutive aspect of covenantal establishment and maintenance throughout the biblical narrative. Given the care for nonhuman creatures exhibited by God throughout the flood narrative, animal sacrifice should not be understood as an indication of human primacy or the expendability of nonhuman creatures, but as indication of the enormity of human sin. As evinced at the beginning of the flood narrative, human wickedness not only causes strife between humans and alienates humanity from God, but also corrupts creation. Animal sacrifice then becomes the bloody reminder of the far-reaching, polluting effects of human sin God so decisively condemns and washes away in the flood.

Third, the covenantal bond between God, humanity and nonhuman creatures is expressed in God's desire that all of the creatures on the ark continues to be "fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 8:17, 9:1, 9:7), As Ann Gardner notes, these commands are an allusion to the first creation account found in Genesis 1:1-2:4. The command to be fruitful and multiply is identical to God's commands to both human and non-human creatures in Gen. 1: 22, 28. However, the charges in the Flood narrative omit the command to 'subdue' the earth and "have dominion" over other creatures found in Genesis 1:28. Similarly, the command to "fill" the earth found in Gen.1:18 is replaced by the command to *šārṣ*, or "abound on the earth" (9:7). *Šārṣ* can be construed as a command to increase in population (e.g., Exodus 1:7), but when it is interpreted in the context of Noah's planting of a vineyard after the waters recede (9:20) it is best understood as a command to enable creation to flourish (e.g., Gen. 1:20-21). After the flood, the cultivation of the now

[10] R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 106, 107.

ravaged earth provides the means for creaturely multiplication.[11] Given the devastation of to both flora and fauna caused by the flood, fruitfulness, multiplication, and filling the earth will be a short-lived process if Noah and his family do not work for the well-being of other creatures or at least allow them to re-establish themselves and thrive. All creatures are called live within these divinely proscribed boundaries so that all might flourish. As a constitutive part of the Noachic covenant, all creatures are commanded to live with an ark-like respect for the lives of others.

The fourth example of the covenantal bond between God, humanity and nonhuman creatures is made explicit in God's command that human beings and animals respect the "lifeblood" of every living thing (9:4). The sacrifice of clean animals has already been enacted, and now the mutual killing of one another is foreseen as animals are filled with the "fear and dread" of human beings (Gen. 9:1-3).[12] However, despite this enmity God still demands, as a part of the eternal covenant he establishes with both human and non-human creatures, that the life he has given to each creature must be respected; God will require a "reckoning" from every animal and human beings should the blood of another be spilled. While the text emphasizes the ramifications of taking

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[11] Gardner, "Ecojustice: A Study of Genesis 6.11-13," 126. While Gardner's reading is helpful, I believe she overextends her argument in her treatment of "dominion." She notes that, "Nowhere in these postdiluvian charges is found a command to "have dominion," *rādâh* over nonhuman creatures." Then, drawing upon Psalm 72, which delineates between appropriate and oppressive forms of dominion, Gardner concludes that the wickedness which led to the flood was the result of humanity's failure to "live in accord with God and to direct non-humans, protecting the weak and overruling other creatures who would harm them in some way." Ibid. As I showed earlier, the terms utilized in the passage do not support the idea that their commission is to "protect the weak."

[12] John Olley points out that "fear and dread" is often used in military contexts and, as indicated by Jeremiah 23:4, when caused by a ruler, "is a sign that there is something terribly (literally) wrong in the relationship." Olley, "Mixed Blessings for Animals: The contrasts of Genesis 9," 135. Mason notes that the language of "into your hands they are delivered" and "fear and dread" are used in the context of strife between enemies, or even holy war (e.g., Joshua 2:9, Numbers 21:2). Mason, *"Eternal Covenant" in the Pentateuch*, 75.

*human* life, the command to respect lifeblood of all creatures reveals that the "life of any *nefesh hayya* [living creature] is precious, not because it has value in itself but because of its relation to the Creator."[13] It is not the blood of the creature *per se*, which demands this respect, but the fact that this blood, both animal and human, has been created by the same God, and in this sense, "it is in the same blood which runs in our veins."[14] The post-diluvian relationship between human and nonhuman creatures is not idyllic, but the demand to respect lifeblood serves as a reminder that both human and nonhuman creatures are held accountable for the blood of one another.

### *4.2.2. The Inclusion of Earth (ʾereṣ) in the Covenant*

One final aspect of this covenant merits our attention. While much of the foregoing discussion centers on the covenantal bonds between the Creator and living creatures, God covenants with the earth (*ʾereṣ*), as well. In Gen 9:13, God declares "I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." Some understand this as a summary statement, i.e., shorthand for God's pledge never to destroy "all flesh" with another flood.[15] Such an interpretation, however, would

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[13] Anderson, "Creation and the Noachic Covenant," 57–58.

[14] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Theological Resources for Earth-Healing: Covenant and Sacrament," in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, ed. by Maura A Ryan and Todd Whitmore (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 59–60. Joseph Blenkinsopp argues that the command to abstain from ingesting the blood of an animal encourages and "inhibits the kind of indiscriminate, thoughtless, and cruel slaughter of animals for their flesh, pelt, tusks…" Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Global Stewardship: Toward an Ethic of Limitation," in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, ed. by Maura A Ryan and Todd Whitmore (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 45.

[15] At times, it seems that Olley interprets the term this way, but his usage is inconsistent. Ibid., 130, 137; Similarly, Mason claims that in v. 14 the term eretz is used as a metonymy for all humans and living things that participate in this covenant. Mason claims the term is used in 9:8-17 "in construct to communicate every living thing or all flesh that exists, but it refers to the actual land." Steven D. Mason, *"Eternal Covenant" in the Pentateuch: the Contours of an Elusive Phrase* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2008), 85.

not be consistent with the narrative's use of *ʾereṣ*, which is repeatedly used throughout to indicate the non-creaturely aspect of God's creation in distinction from its inhabitants.[16] Therefore, as Dumbrell contends, "the parameters of covenant must be drawn even more widely…In that verse the arrangement is said to stand between God and the fullest and final sphere in which man, around whom the covenant has been structured, will move."[17] While we might wish to challenge the anthropocentrism of Dumbrell's claim, he rightly notes that the "covenant circle" has widened as the Flood narrative progresses, from Noah, to his descendants, to nonhuman creatures, and finally to the earth itself. The covenant between God and the earth, *ʾereṣ*, refers to just that, a covenant between the Creator and the non-creaturely aspects of his creation, from the base of the olive tree upon which the dove alighted to the very "tops of the mountains" (8:5). All of creation has suffered because of humanity's wickedness and the subsequent flood, but now all of creation, including the once-submerged- earth, receives "divine assurances of 'never again.'"[18] As von Rad points out, God's covenant with the earth (*ʾereṣ*) is a final,

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[16] Examples of this distinction between the earth and its inhabitants include: 6:12, 13; 7:3, 21; 8:3,17; 9:1 10, 16, 17. While verse 14 does not make an explicit distinction between living creatures and earth, it uses *eretz* to denote the earthly sphere over which the rainbow stands. This could be taken as a summary statement, but seems to refer to the physical earth, as a rainbow would stand over it regardless of if there were living creatures on the earth. Verse 11 is a bit more ambiguous in its usage, God states, "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." These two clauses could be read as parallel promises that refer to the same subject. However, such an interpretation would not take into account the six other occurrences which surround this verse, and use of the term as a reference to physical earth and not living creatures.

[17] Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 28–29. See also Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 83.

[18] Irvin A. Busenitz, "Introduction to the Biblical Covenants; the Noachic Covenant and the Priestly Covenant," *Master's Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 185.

"solemn guarantee of the cosmic orders."[19] In this final declaration, God includes the earth in the covenant with Noah, his family, and all living creatures.

### *4.2.4. Conclusion: God's Covenant with Creation*

The Noachic covenant provides a scriptural foundation for a covenantal ecology. Like the Noachic covenant, a covenantal ecology is founded upon a covenantal relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. The Flood narrative begins with creation-wide suffering caused by human corruption and ends with a stabilization and revitalization of creation through an ever-active and ever-present God. In addition to the oft-recognized covenantal relationship between God and humanity, there is a "third party" in the covenant: nonhuman creation.[20] God covenants with Noah, his descendants, all living creatures and the earth never again to send a flood. Within the covenant, God also sets boundaries for the relationship between human and nonhuman creatures; these boundaries that are also important to a covenantal ecology, for they provide for the flourishing of all creatures. Nonhuman creation is included in this covenant not only because animal sacrifice initiates God's post-diluvian covenantal actions or because of the predator/prey relationships regulated in the covenant, but because nonhuman creation is a partner with God and humanity in a covenantal relationship that establishes not only its survival, but flourishing. As James A. Nash describes it, "The Noachic Covenant is a symbol of the unbreakable bonds among all the creatures and with their Creator."[21] These

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[19] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p.134.

[20] Mason, *"Eternal Covenant" in the Pentateuch*, 86.

[21] James A Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 101. While Nash is most probably using "creature" to only refer to animals (human and nonhuman), I will use it in Barth's sense of referring to anything created by the Creator.

bonds are described early in the book of Genesis are further developed in God's covenant with Abraham.

### *4.3. The Abrahamic Covenant: Land, Heirs, and the Blessing of Creation*

Building on the covenantal relationships established in the Noachic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant further develops the relationship between covenant and creation. Steven D. Mason best expresses the relationship between these two covenants in his description of the Abrahamic covenant as "a microcosmic Noachic eternal covenant that defines and ensures fruitfulness and multiplication in the Promised Land."[22] Mason's description of the Abrahamic covenant as a "microcosm" of the Noachic is significant,

[22] Mason, *"Eternal Covenant" in the Pentateuch*, 89. Mason points to a number of important parallels which link the two accounts. However, like in his treatment of the Noachic, he contends (drawing upon Gen. 17) that God's promise of descendants and land are conditional upon the obedience of "Abraham and his seed" to the Lord's commands (e.g., the changing of Abraham and Sarah's names, circumcision). Ibid., 117. Mason's focus on *bĕrît ʿôlām*, which only occurs in chapter 17, is incredibly insightful, but obfuscates God's similar promise in 12:1-3 and covenant in 15:18. Mason eschews the use of the term *bĕrît* in 15:18 for its absence of *ʿôlām*, because, he argues, *bĕrît* and *bĕrît ʿôlām* are not necessarily synonymous. However, *bĕrît* alone is used repeatedly in chapter 17 (v. 2, 4, 9-11, 14, 21) to describe the covenantal interaction between God and Abraham. Instead of addressing these uses at any length, Mason instead focuses on the verses where *bĕrît* and *bĕrît ʿôlām* are used together (v. 7, 13, 19). As the rest of this section unfolds, it will become obvious that I find much of his scholarship on chapter 17 profitable, but this artificial bifurcation between *bĕrît* and *bĕrît ʿôlām*, and the decision to allow the latter to control his understanding of covenant, seems unnecessary. See, 93-98, 107.

Similarly, Alexander points out several linguistic (e.g., the use of *hēqîm bĕrît and ʿōlāh*) and thematic (e.g., the inclusion of a sign) parallels between the Noachic covenant in Genesis 6-9 and the Abrahamic covenant in chapters 17 and 22. He argues that God establishes the covenants with Noah and Abraham "on account of the sacrifices" Noah performed and Abraham was willing to perform. T. Desmond Alexander, "Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 25 (Fall 1983): 19–20.Much like my criticism of Mason, I believe that Alexander's claim does not take into account the overall narrative's portrayal of God as already faithful to the covenant before these events. In Noah's case, it is God's faithfulness to the covenant (established in 6:18) that even allows for the possibility of the sacrifice of animals by Noah and God's response to it. In Abraham's case, it is God's faithfulness established in Genesis 17 that allows Abraham to take Isaac up to Mt. Moriah to offer him up to the Lord. Surely, these texts portray a new development in the covenantal relationships between God and creation, but to claim that the sacrifices are *necessary* for the establishment of a covenant, misses God's faithfulness to earlier covenantal interactions. I find myself in agreement with Walter Brueggemann, who points out that without enough time to prove that that Abraham can "walk humbly… God issues *a dominical claim* over Abraham's future (vs. *3b-8).* The covenant now enacted is unilateral…Abraham does not vote or assent; he is in covenant. God's claim on Abraham and God's commitment to Abraham issues in a new future…" Walter Brueggemann, "Genesis 17:1-22," *Interpretation* 45, no. 1 (January 1991): 56.

for while one can easily find marked enthusiasm for the environmental implications of the latter, there is a dearth for the former. Yet, as I will show, the understandings of land, progeny, and blessing set forth in the Abrahamic covenant merit its inclusion in broader scripturally-based environmental ethics. It describes a covenantal ecology in three important ways. First, to fulfill the promise of offspring, God pursues both natural and supernatural means to ensure the birth of Abraham and Sarah's son, Isaac; this mirrors the way God acts in a covenantal ecology to ensure creation is preserved. Second, God places Abraham, and later Israel, in an intimate relationship with the land. In this relationship, both the land and Israel act as partners in the fulfillment of God's covenantal promise to Abraham. Finally, God blesses Abraham and calls him to extend that blessing not only to other humans, but to all of creation, which reaffirms that nonhuman creation is included in the covenant.

### *4.3.1. Procreation: Natural & Supernatural*

Despite their advanced age, God includes a promise of procreation in his covenantal relationship with Abraham and Sarah.[23] With the introduction of Abraham and Sarah, the issue of human infertility makes its first appearance in the canon. Infertility is a powerful metaphor that describes not only Abraham and Sarah's inability to conceive a child, but the future consequences of that barrenness. Brueggemann writes:

> It is simply reported that this family (and with it the whole family of Gen. 1-11) has played out its future and has nowhere else to go. Barrenness is the way of

[23] See Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 73. In 12:7-8, this covenant is said to extend to Abraham's descendants, much like the covenant with Noah in Genesis 9 and this parallel is later affirmed in 17:7 with its description as a *bĕrît ʿôlām*, or eternal covenant.

> human history. It is an effective metaphor for hopelessness. There is no foreseeable future. There is no human power to invent a future.[24]

The decades which pass between God's initial promise to Abraham that he will make him a great nation and the birth of Isaac leave Abraham and Sarah doubting, if not scoffing at, the promise that they will have a child.[25]

As Westermann points out, this promise of a single son (Gen. 17:15) is often overshadowed by, or subsumed into, God's promise of innumerable descendants. Yet, it is the gift of the solitary heir that addresses Abraham's lament (Gen. 15:2-4) and makes any future generations a possibility.[26] Isaac's birth brings into focus two important facets of the relationship between the Lord's covenantal interactions with his creation. First, it is an example of how God does not simply dismiss the created order so that Abraham and Sarah might have a child, but works through it in order to fulfill his covenant with Abraham. The fact that Abraham - who despite his age is never said to be incapable of producing a child – and Hagar conceive Ishmael is in indication that the conception and birth of his children were in some way dependent upon biological and environmental factors. This is a reality which Abraham's descendents, namely Rebekah and Rachel (Gen. 25:21, 29:31) but also future generations, would come to experience as they

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[24] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 116.

[25] God informs the 75 year old Abraham the he will be "a great nation" (12:2); that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars (15:5); and to the 99 year old Abraham, that he would make him "exceedingly numerous" (15:5). Isaac was finally born when Abraham was 100 years old (21:5). Verse 17:7 indicates that Sarah is only 10 years younger than Abraham.

[26] Westermann understands this as an "absolute" promise in no way conditional upon Abraham's own actions. Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 131. However, Westermann also differentiates the use of the term berit in Gen. 15 & 17. In the former, he argues that it is more fitting to interpret the term as "a solemn promise or oath;" however he is comfortable with describing the latter as a "covenant which establishes mutuality." Westermann, *Genesis*, 205.

brought God's promise that Abraham's descendants would be "exceedingly numerous" (15:5) to fruition. Like her descendants after her, if Sarah is to bear a child it will be through the biological act of procreation that is contingent upon her and Abraham's fertility.

Yet as Lord of creation – and this is the second facet worthy of consideration – God removes the natural constraints of age which would normally prohibit offspring and the miraculous occurs: a 100 year old man and his 90 year old wife (cf. Gen. 17:7, 21:5) produce a son. Similar to the way God speaks creation into being in the priestly account of creation (Gen 1:3), God's call to Abram and Sarah (Gen. 21:1) "has its way over the barrenness…The speech of this God is at the same time imperative and promise, summons and assurance."[27] In the birth of Isaac, God reveals himself not as fettered to the familiar rhythms of creation but free to intervene within the created order to bring life where there is none, just as he did in the initial act of creation.[28]

God is faithful to his covenant with Abraham, including his promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would bear a child. The Lord brings together natural and supernatural means to bring about the birth of Isaac, thus providing the first of many who would point to Abraham and Sarah as ancestors. As Clare Amos points out, circumcision, the sign of God's covenant with Abraham, is then "an appropriate visible mark for a covenant that promised the provision of an heir "[29] It is a reminder not only of God's faithfulness to

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[27] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 117.

[28] Some may be concerned that God's exercise of freedom in this area negates the value of creation, and while I share that concern, it is my belief that this supernatural activity actually *affirms* the value of creation. This is evident in the next section, which addresses the creation-wide blessing that comes through this supernatural exercise of power.

[29] Clare Amos, *The Book of Genesis* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2004), p. 99.

that covenant, but that God brings this promise to fulfillment both through the human reproductive act and by sustaining the fertility of a couple well past the age of natural conception.

*4.3.2. Israel: 'A People Born out of Soil'*

Similar to the Noachic covenant, land (*'ereṣ*) is also significant in the Abrahamic covenant. In God's initial speech to Abram, God commands him to leave his homeland to journey to a land that God will show him (12:1). The covenantal significance of the land of Canaan, not only to Abraham but to his subsequent generations as well, cannot be overstated. It is not simply the backdrop in which the story of Israel unfolds. It is the place to which God initially calls Abram, and is, therefore, the "substance of the promise" God makes to Abraham.[30] While the profound social implications of the gift of the land (Gen. 15:18) will be discussed more thoroughly in the treatment of the Mosaic covenant, it is important to note that this initial gift from the Lord establishes a bond between Israel and the land.

Luc Dequeker reads the land aspect of the Abrahamic covenant in the context of God's promise in the Noachic covenant to "never again… curse the ground because of man" (Gen. 8:21). Dequeker writes, "beginning with Noah and continuing in the history of Israel, the divine promise refers to the bond, the existential link between the man and his dwelling-place, the earth."[31] Dequeker's description of this as an "existential" bond should not be read in the "psychological" sense, but in the sense that the covenantal bond

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[30] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p.150.

[31] Luc Dequeker, "Noah and Israel: the Everlasting Divine Covenant with Mankind," in *Questions Disputées d'Ancien Testament* (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1974), 127.

between humans and land allows humanity to exist. For Noah it is dry land, and for Abraham it is a discovered land, but in both cases a new encounter with land is a sign of God's covenantal fidelity and of hope for a continued existence.

Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod argues that this co-existence was familial in nature. When Abraham and Sarah are faithful to God's command to move to this land, he writes, "[a] people is born out of a soil which is its mother," thus establishing "an eternal link" between Israel and the land.[32] Just as a child is connected to and shaped by its birth mother, so too is Israel shaped by and connected to this land. The land directly determined if Israel would barely survive or thrive; therefore, the Abrahamic covenant established "the significance of economic life and labor" for Israel.[33] The land was not simply a place for Israel to live, but a place in which their covenant with God would find its expression in the flourishing of his people and the land. Survival and flourishing were not the results of proper management of natural resources, but of an intimate existence with a place in which they could be sustained and supported throughout the generations. Israel depended on the land, and (as I will show in my treatment of the Mosaic covenant) the land depended on Israel to provide for it a Sabbath.

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[32] Michael Wyschogrod "Judaism and the Land" in *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 92, 103.

[33] Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity: Covenants of Redemption" in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, edited by Tikva Frymer-Kensky et. al., (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000) 145. Westermann points out that the use of the term *nātan* in 15:18, "characterizes the promise of the land. It is intended as a gift, a transfer, or a conveyance…" Westermann, *Genesis*, 146.

*4.3.3. Blessing for Creation*

The ability to have a child is considered a "blessing" (*bārak*) and this term is repeatedly encountered throughout Abraham's story.[34] The "blessing" in Gen. 12:3 – "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" – is often understood as extending to the nations, or humanity in general.[35] Yet, the inclusion of, and provision for, nonhuman creation in the Noachic covenant makes such a provincial interpretation unwarranted. Following Terence Fretheim, I would suggest that blessing (*bārak*) is a gift from God "that empowers recipients to experience and bring forth life, goodness, and well-being" throughout the entirety of creation.[36]

The blessing of Genesis 12:1-3 is variously described as an "antidote" to the curses pronounced in Genesis 3:14-24,[37] or the "antidote to the sorry state of the nations"

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[34] The term is used 5 times in 12:1-3 and 17:16. See Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*, 136; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 69.

[35] See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology.* (New York: Harper, 1962), 164; Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*, 157; Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method and Cases* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 320. While these stand in a long line of Christian interpretation, Walter Moberly offers an alternative reading which asks, "May the real concern of the divine speech be not the benefit of the nations but rather the benefit of Abraham?" Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, pp.149-161. While scholars disagree about how *bārak* should be translated in this text, I am persuaded that the "structure and logic" of the passage that Abraham is to be understood as the means of blessing for those he encounters. Following Benjamin Noonan, I read the Niphal of *bārak* in Genesis 12:3 as a passive ("all the families of the earth will be blessed by you"), and not reflexive ("all of the families of the earth will bless themselves by you") construct. See, Benjamin J. Noonan, "Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Reexamination of the Niphal and Hitpael of *brk* in the Patriarchal Narratives," *Hebrew Studies* 51 (2010): 87. See also Chee-Chiew Lee, "Once Again: The Niphal and the Hithpael of ברך in the Abrahamic Blessing for the Nations," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36, no. 3 (2012): 279–296.

[36] Terence E Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 106.

[37] James M Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (2007): 254.

in the primeval history.[38] Throughout the primeval history, curses disrupt relationships between: God and humanity (3:16-17, 8:21), family members (3:14, 4:12, 9:25), nations (4:15), humanity and the earth (Gen. 3: 17-19; 4:11, 12) and human and nonhuman creatures (Gen. 3:15). Thus, if the Abrahamic blessing is the antidote to primeval curses, it seems logical that the blessing serves as an antidote for both "social" and "natural" ills.

The connection between human civilization and the natural world is increasingly supported by contemporary scientific understandings. As Northcott states, "Human life and society are intricately bound up with the life and community of ecosystems and the biosphere."[39] Therefore, if the blessing of Abraham, his descendants, and the nations can only come about through the natural world on which they depend for existence then the natural world is also blessed. Returning to Fretheim's definition of blessing, it might be said that humanity cannot experience "life, goodness, and well-being" without cultivating the same for nonhuman creatures and the land. With this ecological understanding of the interconnectedness of all life, Abrahamic blessing can and should be understood as one that extends God's covenant and grace not only to Abraham, his progeny, or even the nations, but "indeed for all creation."[40]

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[38] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 498. Many of the passages enumerated in the text above are found in Gary V. Smith, "Structure and Purpose in Genesis 1-11," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 4 (Dec. 1977): 307–319.

[39] Northcott, *Christianity and Environmental Ethics*, p.173.

[40] Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume III, part II,* ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas Forsyth Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), p. 581.

*4.3.4. Conclusion: Covenant Blessings for Creation*

God's covenant with Abraham contributes to the Old Testament description of a covenantal ecology in three ways. First, God works through both natural and supernatural means to bring about the birth of Isaac, and a covenantal ecology is dependent upon a Creator who works in and through creation, while not be constrained by creation. In his interactions with Abraham and a covenantal ecology, God works naturally and supernaturally to bring his covenantal promises to fruition. Second, the Abrahamic covenant establishes a relationship between Israel and the land in which Israel's existence is dependent upon, and shaped by care for, the land; a covenantal ecology recognizes this covenantal partnership between humans and the land as necessary if both are to flourish. Third, a covenantal ecology draws upon a more inclusive understanding of the "blessing" to which Abraham is called. In fidelity to God's covenant, Abraham is called to bless, i.e., "bring forth life, goodness, and well-being," not only to other people, but to all of creation, establishing nonhuman creation (like in the Noachic covenant) of God's covenantal concern. The character of the blessing towards land (and other creatures) is admittedly undeveloped in the texts that describe the Abrahamic covenant, but is explicitly developed in the Mosaic covenant, to which I now turn.

## *4.4. The Mosaic Covenant & Levitical Ordinances: Sabbath for Creation*

More specific articulations of a covenantal ecology can be found in the Mosaic, or Sinaitic, covenant and the statutes and ordinances set forth in Leviticus. Throughout the law, or *tôrâh*, covenantal concern for animals and the land (both tamed and untamed) is exhibited. e.g., not boiling a kid in its mother's milk (Ex. 23:19, 34:26; Dt.14: 21), not taking the life of a nesting mother bird (Dt. 22:6-7), not cutting down fruit-bearing trees

during a siege (Dt. 20:19-20).[41] Christians have historically misunderstood *tôrâh* only as law, and in some cases as a "law of death"[42] adhered to by a legalistic religion.[43] However, as I show through the law codes, the description of the treatment of animals and land in the Mosaic covenant and Levitical law codes does not fit within this simple and hostile juridical framework.

Therefore, I treat *tôrâh* (following Walter Brueggemann) as "guidance, instruction, and nurture – a process of exploration and imagination that cannot be flatly subsumed under obedience."[44] As it pertains to a covenantal ecology, this view entails that the Mosaic covenant and *tôrâh* are best understood as guides for Israel toward the well-being of all creatures and the land. While there are any number of commandments, statutes, and ordinances that could be included in a covenantal ecology, I wish to focus on sabbatical observance protects creation. Specifically, I argue that faithful observance

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[41] There are a significant number of laws aimed at the protection of nonhuman creation in the Pentateuch. See Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 139. However, it is inaccurate to say that the relation between humans and nonhuman creatures is *all* positive in *tôrâh*, for one part of maintenance of the covenant entails the sacrifice of animals (e.g., Ex. 24). However, like the Noachic covenant, this sacrifice is also accompanied by covenantal regulations that define the relationship amongst creatures and between humanity and the land. For reflections on these verses and an interesting history of interpretations of the prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk, see Irving Welfeld, "You Shall Not Boil a Kid Its Mother's Milk: Beyond Exodus 23:19," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (June 2004): 84–90; J. Webb Mealy, "You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk (Exod. 23:19b; Exod. 34:26b; Deut. 14:21b): A Figure of Speech?," *Biblical Interpretation* 20, no. 1 (February 2012): 35–72; Gunther H. Wittenberg, "Plant and Animal Rights -- an Absurd Idea or Ecological Necessity: Perspectives from the Hebrew Torah," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 131 (July 2008): 76–79.

[42] Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 161.

[43] David Novak, *Talking with Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2005), 31–33; Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 582.

[44] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 582. It is important to note that *tôrâh* is also "used frequently in the Old Testament to refer to the complete covenant obligation (cf. Deut. 4:44)." Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 91. It may also be understood as "the expression of God's will for the conduct of the Jewish people." Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 161. See also Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 91 and Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2004), 402.

of weekly Sabbath, the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee – as described in Exodus and the Holiness Code in Leviticus – provides relief and rest for all creatures and the land.[45] These sabbatical requirements are aimed at establishing and maintaining proper relationships between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation, and as such, sabbatical rest and relief are significant parts of a covenantal ecology.

### *4.4.1. The Sabbath Day*

After leading the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt and through the wilderness, the Lord brings them to Mt. Sinai, where he had earlier told Moses the Hebrews would worship (Ex. 3:12). The Exodus and the giving of the covenant (*bĕrît*, 19:5) thus forms the necessary background of the sabbatical commandments contained therein. Brevard Childs writes:

> The commandments are prefaced by the formula to make clear that they are understood as the will of Yahweh who has delivered his people from bondage. Yahweh has identified himself as the redeemer God. The formula identifies the

[45]In these texts, we see the several different authorial sources. Brevard Childs points out that "The extreme difficulty of analyzing the Sinai pericope has long been felt. In spite of almost a century of close, critical work many of the major problems have resisted a satisfactory solution." Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 344. For a summary of the development of scholarship see Ibid., 344–351; He-Won Ro, "The Exodus Decalogue in Deuteronomistic Redaction," *Asia Journal of Theology* 16, no. 2 (October 2002): 315–317. Questions regarding dating the relationship to the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26) and the other sources, particularly P, also remain. See Robert A. Kugler, "Holiness, Purity, The Body and Society: The Evidence for Theological Conflict in Leviticus," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 76 (December 1997): 3; Jacob Milgrom, "Covenants: the Sinaitic and Patriarchal Covenants in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-27)," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume*, ed by. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom Paul M. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 91–101; Richard J. Bautch, "An Appraisal of Abraham's Role in Postexilic Covenants," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (Ja 2009): 57–58; Jeffrey Stackert, "The Sabbath of the Land in the Holiness Legislation: Combining Priestly and Non-Priestly Perspectives" (Catholic Biblical Association of America, April 2011).

The concepts of Sabbath and Jubilee have become key concepts for those pursuing environmental reads of Scripture. See, Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 276–296; F. Ross Kinsler, "Leviticus 25," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 53, no. 4 (October 1999): 395; Wittenberg, "Plant and Animal Rights," 80–83; Uriah Y. Kim, "Leviticus 25:1-24," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 65, no. 4 (October 2011): 396–398; Andy Crouch, "The Joyful Environmentalists" (*Christianity Today International*, June 2011); Laura M. Hartman, "Christian Sabbath-keeping as a Spiritual and Environmental Practice," *Worldviews: Environment Culture Religion* 15, no. 1 (March 2011): 47–64.

> authority and right of God to make known his will because he has already graciously acted on Israel's behalf.[46]

The Lord has redeemed his people and, out of his liberating actions, now gives them guidance as to how to live into that freedom in relationship with him, their community, and nonhuman creation.

One example of this guidance, or *tôrâh*, comes in God's command to observe a Sabbath: a day of rest "blessed" (*bārak*) by the Lord, once every seven days (Ex. 20:8-11). This particular commandment lies near the heart of the Decalogue, both in terms of literary position (Ex. 20:8-11) and importance.[47] While the command to rest once every seven days may seem a simple acknowledgement of the constraints of finite bodies, it is also a reflection of the divine rest in the initial act of creation (Gen. 2:2-3). The Sabbath is a day in which *all* of Israel – landowners, family, servants, alien residents, and even livestock – is to refrain from labor as it imitates God's own rest following the initial creative act. Therefore, Sabbath observance serves as both a "sign of the perpetual covenant (*bĕrît ʿôlām*)" God establishes at Sinai (cf. Exodus 31:16-17) and a sign of creation's participation in God's creative activity and rest.[48]

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[46] Childs, *Exodus*, 401.

[47] Rolf Knierim describes Sabbath-keeping as one of the two "distinctive marks" (circumcision being the other) of postexilic Israel. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 412. Its inclusion in the Decalogue is significant *per se*, for, as Patrick D. Miller points out, the Decalogue, "stands at the beginning of all the legal material and as such occupies primary place in the divine instruction that comes through the law or laws of Scripture. The contexts in which the Commandments appear give significant and obvious clues that these words are special." Patrick D. Miller, "The Place of the Decalogue in the Old Testament and Its Law," *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 230.

[48] Norman C. Habel, "Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis 1," in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman C Habel and Shirley Wurst, The Earth Bible Volume 2 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 55.

Sabbath has often been interpreted as a provision for the benefit of human beings.[49] However, the text's explicit inclusion of various social classes and species means that the Sabbath "is rest for all, rich and poor, master and servant, human beings and animals."[50] Sabbatical rest is not simply a strategy for increasing the productivity of one's livestock; Ex. 23:12 states sabbatical rest for livestock is necessary so that they might have "relief" (*nôaḥ*). As Jeffrey Stackert points out, "Deuteronomy 5:15 even offers an additional motivating reminder to the Israelites: because they once suffered under the forced labor of Egypt, they should practice a Sabbath that extends to their servants and beasts of labor."[51] As former slaves oppressed by Egyptian taskmasters, the Sabbath was a safeguard against similar types of oppression in Israel. Rest is provided for all who labor, lest landowners become "ruthless" (Ex. 1:13) like their Egyptian taskmasters. If Israel is to be obedient to the covenant, they must extend the same care to nonhuman creatures as God does to them. This *tôrâh*, or guidance, towards rest and relief, however, is not restricted to ancient Israel, but serves to remind all people – who live as partners in a covenantal ecology with other creatures – that rest and relief is to be extended to those most vulnerable to human abuses: the marginalized and domesticated creatures.

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[49] Stackert, "The Sabbath of the Land in the Holiness Legislation," 239. Stackert claims that "The numerous biblical prohibitions against work on the Sabbath day are directed toward humans, and even the animal rest occasionally highlighted in Sabbath rules (Ex. 20:10; 23:12; Deut 5:14) is secondary to and controlled by humans and their own labor cessation. Such consistency in the envisioned legal agent of the Sabbath command—even among other varying legal details—makes the deviation from this norm in Leviticus 25-26 (and its reflex in 2 Chr. 36:21) particularly remarkable." However, it is not necessary to view Leviticus as a deviation from Exodus, but as an explication and advancement of the thought already present in Exodus 23:12. See Habel, "Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis 1," 55.

[50] Terence E Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 230.

[51] Stackert, "The Sabbath of the Land in the Holiness Legislation," 249.

*4.4.2. Sabbatical Year and Jubilee*

While the land is not specifically mentioned in the list of those who were to be afforded rest on the weekly Sabbath, it would have also rested, for there would have been no one – owner, servant, or domesticated animal – to work it that day. Like the Abrahamic covenant, the land is given a prominent position in the Sinaitic covenant. Brueggemann notes that despite the fact:

> conventional Christianity has wanted always to talk about Yahweh and neglect land… Israel's involvement is always with the land and with Yahweh, never only with Yahweh as though to live only in intense obedience, never only with land, as thought simply to posses and manage; always *with land* and *with Yahweh*…[52]

Obedience to the Lord cannot be separated from proper care of the land the Lord made and to which he brought Israel. The connection between the Lord and the land demands trusting the former while the latter rests, not only for a day, but once every 7th year (Sabbath year), and once every 49th/50th year (Jubilee). Texts concerning the sabbatical years prohibit farming the land, and the Sabbath year is described in Leviticus 25:1-7 as a year of "complete rest" (*šĕbat šabātôn*) for the land (*ʾereṣ*, cf. Ex. 23:10-11; Deut 15:1-11). "Complete rest" is used only to describe the Sabbath year and the Day of Atonement, a holy day in which no work is allowed.[53] This "terminological piling on of '*Shabbats*'" thus uniquely emphasizes the importance of rest for the land every seventh year.[54] While

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[52] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 49.

[53] Young Hye Kim, "The Jubilee: its Reckoning and Inception Day," *Vetus Testamentum* 60, no. 1 (2010): 151. See Ex. 31:15; 35:2; Lev 16:31; 23:3, 32; 25:4. Cf. Ex. 16:23.

[54] Leonard J. Greenspoon, "From Dominion to Stewardship? The Ecology of Biblical Translation," *Journal of Religion & Society* 3 (2008): 168. Greenspoon notes that the "exact signification is elusive, but this surely has the ultimate purpose of highlighting the distinctiveness of one of the Bible's most revolutionary ideas: allowing the land itself to have a periodic rest. And, while we might see such a practice in terms of its benefits to humans, the biblical text hones in on its value to the land as a living organism, akin to humans and animals in requiring a periodic time out." Leonard J. Greenspoon, "From

the land rested during *šĕbat šabātôn*, landowners, their laborers, livestock, and even wild animals were allowed to eat whatever the fallow land yielded in addition to the bumper crop promised in the 6th year (Lev. 25:20-21). [55]

Providing the land with rest to recuperate vital nutrients is prudent agricultural practice, but the observance of these years of "complete rest" also serves as an indicator of Israel's faithfulness to God's covenant. Should Israel not provide a "complete rest" for the land, they will be removed from the land (Lev. 26:32-35, 43-45).[56] Their removal would, of course, be disastrous for Israel, but the text notes that the land would benefit from that removal, as it made up for unobserved sabbatical years. It was shown in the Noachic covenant that God establishes his covenant with the land (*ʾereṣ*), and in this levitical promise of restitution for unobserved Sabbaths, God treats the land (*ʾereṣ*) like

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Dominion to Stewardship? The Ecology of Biblical Translation," *Journal of Religion & Society* 3 (2008): 168.

[55] The reliance upon a promised bumper crop in the 6th year may seem unwise at first glance. However, as Sun-Jong Kim argues, these statutes stem from the creation theology of the Priestly writer in Leviticus. He explains, "According to the creation narrative in Gen 1:1-2:4a (P), the land created by God could produce plants without human intervention, and these plants were used for the food of humans and animals that were created subsequently to the land." The Priestly author understood the ground to be fertile and productive even without humanity's intervention; this was the nature of God's creation. Therefore, landowners, their families, and those who worked their land, could trust the Creator's promise to bless them with sustenance; whatever the untended land provided would be enough to sustain them. Sun-Jong Kim, "The Group Identity of the Human Beneficiaries in the Sabbatical Year (Lev 25:6)," *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 1 (2011): 75. Gerhard von Rad argues that this passage "does not depend upon the doctrine of creation, but rests directly on belief in a historical act of grace on God's part. Nor does it lead in to a doctrine of creation, since so far as one can see it is quite *unrelated* to it." Rad, "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," 132. Italics mine. While he does not define "doctrine," von Rad seems to mean something like "teachings on" or "expressions of" a particular subject. Ibid., 133, 138. It is difficult to see how this passage, which directly establishes both God's and humanity's relationship to the land, is unrelated to "teachings on" creation. Again, von Rad's commitment to the division between creation and redemption causes problems for his interpretation of Old Testament passages, and this would seem to indicate that any such division is not rooted in the reality of the Creator's relationship to his creation. As W.H. Bellinger points out, the pages of the Old Testament "speak of God's acting to deliver and of God's work in creation; both perspectives are essential to its message." William H. Bellinger, "Maker of Heaven and Earth: The Old Testament and Creation Theology," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 32, no. 2 (1990): 30.

[56] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 188.

an "agent"[57] or "a separate participant in the covenant" whose well-being is considered and promoted in this covenant.[58] Northcott is therefore right to claim that, "In the cosmic covenant, the land is not just the context on which Israel works out her covenant with Yahweh, but a part, a vital part of the community itself."[59] As a participant in this cosmic covenant, the land's rest becomes no less important than that of the humans or livestock who work it.

Leviticus 25-26 sets forth comprehensive statutory regulation of "basic ecological and economic realities – the care of the land and those who worked the land, debts, slavery, and the distribution of the land… [are] presented as critical spiritual matters."[60] In addition to the sabbatical regulations for the land, one also finds prohibitions against selling the land in perpetuity (25:23), and commands to deal fairly with others (25:17), support impoverished families (25:29) and release Hebrew slaves (25: 40-41). This compilation of statutes, which echo the sabbatical commandment of Ex. 20:8-11, is, according to Brueggemann, not accidental:

> Sabbath in Israel is the affirmation that people, like land, cannot be finally owned or managed. They are in covenant with us, and therefore lines of dignity and respect and freedom are drawn around them that must be honored by people who will have land as a covenanted place.[61]

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[57] Stackert, "The Sabbath of the Land in the Holiness Legislation," 243. See also, Milgrom, Jacob *Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2336.

[58] William D. Barrick, "Inter-Covenantal Truth and Relevance: Leviticus 26 and the Biblical Covenants," *Master's Seminary Journal* 21, no. 1 (Spr 2010): 89.

[59] Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 187.

[60] Kinsler, "Leviticus 25," 395.

[61] Brueggemann, *The Land*, 59, 60.

The Lord's covenantal statutes are guided by the experience of slavery and freedom; Israel was aware that this verdant land wielded a "seductive power" that could tempt it to recast a "new identity that perverts the land, distorts Yahweh, and destroys Israel."[62] In the Decalogue and in this section of Leviticus, Israel is reminded that the character of the land to which the Lord has brought them is determined by liberation; the land must be worked and their existence lived out as a reflection of the Lord's grace. Israel lives out the memory of their own liberation as Hebrew slaves are released, kinsmen are treated properly, and, like its inhabitants, the land rests.

The sabbatical year also makes provisions for the relief of all animals: domesticated and wild (Lev. 25:7). Given any agrarian society's perpetual struggle to prevent animals from destroying crops and the fear that predators evoke (e.g., Lev. 26:22-32, Dt. 7:22, Ez. 34:25), the provision for wild animals is significant. Israel is commanded to open their fields to creatures that threaten their lives, the lives of their domesticated animals and their crops; they are a threat to the very survival of Israel. As Sun-Jong Kim argues, this emphasis on sabbatical respite for wild animals is an example of the Priestly author's creation theology, which posited all creatures, even carnivorous predators, as co-existing peacefully in prelapsarian creation and drawing their sustenance from plants and trees (Gen. 1: 29). The sabbatical statutes and ordinances in Leviticus aim to re-establish this relationship – albeit, intermittently - and in a postlapsarian setting by allowing "all animals [to] participate in the sabbatical celebration in the same way as

[62] Ibid., 50.

humans."[63] Now with the inclusion of wild animals into the sabbatical regulations, all of creation is allowed to participate in covenantal peace and rest.

### *4.4.3. Conclusion: A Covenantal Rest for Creation*

It is uncertain if the Sabbatical year and/or Jubilee were practiced as prescribed or if they were merely "idealistic" expressions of a hoped for reality.[64] The question of implementation is important but, as I will show in the following section, human obedience to God's covenant and *tôrâh* is not necessarily an indication of its importance and implementation; the prophets show that there are fundamental aspects of covenant-obedience that are neglected by God's covenant people. Rooted in the experience of liberation from oppression, these sabbatical statutes and *tôrâh* provide humanity with a guide to living as faithful partners in covenant with God and nonhuman creation and are, therefore, constitutive aspects of a covenantal ecology. The rest and relief provided in the Mosaic covenant and levitical statutes for humans, their fellow creatures, and the land point to the Lord's care for creation. The commands for sabbatical relief prevent the overburdening of domesticated animals and the land and provide a respite between wild animals and humans. Even power dynamics between human beings are removed or at least mitigated during those years. Through these regulations, human "society" and "nature" are not treated as two separate spheres but as intertwined aspects of one covenantal reality. There can be no Jubilee that does not involve the economic restoration

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[63] Kim, "Group Identity," 75.

[64] Robert Gnuse and John E. Anderson doubt these years were practiced. Robert Gnuse, "Jubilee Legislation in Leviticus : Israel's Vision of Social Reform," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15, no. 2 (April 1985): 46; See also John E. Anderson, "A Biblical and Economic Analysis of Jubilee Property Provisions," *Faith & Economics*, no. 46 (Fall 2005): 29. Milgrom, on the other hand, finds proof for these historical practices. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2264–2269.

of Israel and there can be no Sabbath rest that does not include provision for land and animals. Sabbath regulates the relationships between God, humans and nonhuman creation with its calls for rest and relief, and the Davidic Covenant demonstrates the effects this "right order" has not only on individuals or civilizations, but on the entire creation.

### *4.5. The Davidic Covenant, Rightness and Right Order*

The Davidic covenant portrays the king who adheres to God's covenant, statutes and ordinances as one who advances a right order throughout creation. The Davidic covenant can be found in its most complete form in II Samuel 7 (cf. I Chr. 17), but there are references and allusions to this covenant scattered throughout the Old Testament.[65] The following analysis of the Davidic covenant treats several of these texts and proceeds in two parts. First, I turn to Psalm 89 and Jeremiah 33, texts that describe the permanence of the Davidic covenant in terms of cosmic stability, and argue that God's covenant with David is ontologically connected with a covenant that regulates the cosmos. Second, I

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[65] The term *bĕrît* (covenant) is not used in II Samuel 7 to describe this relationship, the term *ḥesed* (steadfast love), which carries a strong covenantal connotation, is used in II Sam 7:15 to describes the Lord's faithfulness to David. The term *bĕrît* is used of God's relationship with David in several other places (II Sam 23:5; 2 Chr. 13:5; Ps. 89:28, 34, 39; Jeremiah 33:21) and *bĕrît ʿôlām* (eternal covenant) in II Samuel 23:5 and Ps. 89:3. There are also several parallels between God's covenant with David and other covenants in the Old Testament. Similar to the Lord's reminder to Israel in the preamble of the Decalogue (Ex. 19:4), the Lord reminds David of his divinely assisted rise from shepherd to prince (II Sam. 7:8). One also finds resonance between God's covenant with Abraham and David, particularly in their mutual inclusion of land and progeny (although the latter comes with a monarchial twist). The land promised to Abraham had subsequently become the scene of many battles and consequently much bloodshed, but God now promises to David a respite from their enemies, which will lead to the land's unification as one kingdom (v. 11). Abraham's promise of progeny was aimed at the populating of the nation of Israel, David's, its governance. God declares that upon David's death, he will raise up his son as king, this son will build him a home, and his line will endure "forever" (*ʿôlām*; v. 13, 16). See Kruse, "David's Covenant," 149, 162; Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2006), 30. For the similarities between the II Samuel account of the covenant with David and other ancient Near Eastern covenant accounts, see Antti Laato, "Second Samuel 7 and Ancient Near Eastern Royal Ideology," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (April 1997): 244; Omer Sergi, "The Composition of Nathan's Oracle to David (2 Samuel 7:1-17) as a Reflection of Royal Judahite Ideology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 261–279.

argue that this ontological connection is expressed in the king's establishment of right order and rightness (*mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*) throughout creation. These texts strengthen the relationship between creation and covenant and connect the human *ṣedeq* and *mišpāṭ* with a rightness and right order woven into the cosmos: both of which are important aspects of a covenantal ecology.

*4.5.1. The Davidic Covenant: Established in the Created Order*

Psalm 89 "illustrates the endurance of the throne" of David by comparing it to the stability of celestial bodies.[66] Verse 37 describes God's covenant with David as "established forever like the moon, an enduring witness in the skies."[67] In addition to this comparison, the structure of the psalm is an indicator of the covenant's relationship to those celestial bodies and creation in general. The covenant with David is first mentioned in vv. 3-4, followed by praise for the Lord in vv. 5-8. The psalm then moves into a description of God's creative acts (vv.9-12) and praise of the power they exhibit (vv.13-18) before once again returning to the subject of God's covenant with David (vv. 19-37).[68] Melody D. Knowles explains the significance of this structure:

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[66] Veijola, "The Witness in the Clouds," 414. Examples include Ps. 72:5; 89:5, 37. As Veijola points out, the use of celestial bodies to describe the Davidic line is repeatedly employed in the royal psalms for this exact purpose.

[67] The identity of the "witness" mentioned in this verse has been the subject of a scholarly exchange in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Arguments were made that the "witness" referred to the sun or the moon, the Davidic throne, or Yahweh. Respectively: E Theodore Mullen, "The Divine Witness and the Davidic Royal Grant : Ps 89:37-38," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 2 (Je 1983): 207–218; Paul G. Mosca, "Once Again the Heavenly Witness of Ps 89:38," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 1 (Mr 1986): 27–37; Veijola, "The Witness in the Clouds." While the identification of the witness as sun and moon would buttress the argument for a cosmic covenant, the identity seems far from resolved.

[68] J.J.M. Roberts points out the parallel between David and the Lord that arises from this structural comparison. "God puts David' s hand on the Sea and his right hand on the rivers, God's two cosmogonic enemies (v. 26). Thus, the victories of the Davidic king are simply a participation in and reinstatement of God' s primeval victories." J. J. M. Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David: The Abiding Theological Significance of the Kingship Language of the Psalms," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

> Such placement emphasizes both God's sole agency in the choice of David and the eternal nature of the covenant. By placing the choice of David before creation, the author undercuts any human involvement. The placement also supports the eternal trustworthiness of the unconditional covenant, the covenant that God emphasizes will last "forever" (vv. 5, 29-30). The unconditional language is reinforced by the chronological presentation. In this regard, the final verse of God's second oracle deserves special mention: "[David's] throne shall endure before me like the sun. Like the moon (it will be) established forever" (vv. 37b-38a). David's throne will endure like the sun not only because God says that it will or because of kingship's link with creation. It will endure also because, in the chronology that the psalm presents, God set it up before founding the world [v.11].[69]

The throne will endure not because of its inherent success but because of - as the psalm reiterates (cf. vv. 3-4, 19-20, 25, 27-29, 34-35) - God's active agency in choosing and supporting David and his line: a choice that precedes the very act of creation.

In Jeremiah 33:20-21, 25 the significance of the use of this celestial metaphor to describe the Davidic covenant is further developed. The covenant with David is certain not only because it *precedes* creation, but because it is *established in* the same covenant that upholds and sustains the created order, here represented by the sun and the moon:

> Thus says the Lord: If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken, so that he would not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with my ministers the Levites…Only if I had not established my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth, would I reject the offspring of Jacob and of my servant David…[70]

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64, no. 4 (October 2002): 679.

[69] Melody D. Knowles, "The Flexible Rhetoric of Retelling: The Choice of David in the Texts of the Psalms," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (April 2005): 240–241.

[70] This passage, along with the book of Jeremiah in general, has been challenging in the history of interpretation, with much of the uncertainty stemming from its absence in the LXX, but inclusion in the Codex Marchalianus and Masoretic Text. For discussions, see Norman Henry Snaith, "Jeremiah 33:18," *Vetus Testamentum* 21, no. 5 (D 1971): 622; Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "The Prophecy for 'Everlasting Covenant' (Jeremiah xxxii 36-41): An Exilic Addition or a Deuteronomistic Redaction?," *Vetus Testamentum* 53, no. 2 (2003): 201; Marvin A. Sweeney, "Dating Prophetic Texts," *Hebrew Studies* 48 (2007): 60–66; Dane Ortlund, "Is Jeremiah 33:14-26 a 'Centre' to the Bible? A Test Case in Inter-canonical Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (April 2012): 121. Also at issue is the hopeful tenor of Jeremiah 30-33, the

Murray notes that this text is "unique in the Hebrew Bible in that it speaks of the stability of the cosmos…in terms of a covenant. . . "[71] The Lord declares his covenant with David to be breakable only if the covenant that regulates day and night is breakable. Irreducible to poetic language or mere rhetorical flourish, this language indicates that "the very nature of the universe guarantees the stability of the covenant grant" and that it does so because the cosmos is itself upheld through God's covenant.[72] The very foundation of the Davidic covenant is therefore ontologically connected to the covenant that is said to uphold the cosmos: as the one persists, the other does as well.

While there is no explicit link between the stability of the cosmos and the other covenants I have treated, a covenantal ecology posits this type of ontological connection between creation and the other Old Testament covenants. In addition to the Davidic covenant, this connection is most easily seen in God's establishment of the bow in the sky so that he will remember his covenant with Noah, his descendants, other creatures and the earth (Gen. 9:13-15). However, creation's close connection to both the

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"Book of Consolation," given the surrounding context of doom and destruction. See Gary E. Yates, "New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon," *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (2006): 2. While scholars generally point to an exilic or post-exilic composition, these factors make it incredibly difficult to determine an author, or even date, for this text. Yet, as Dane Ortlund notes, vv.14-26 present us with "a unique cluster of pivotal biblical theological themes" that should not be passed over. Ortlund, "Jeremiah 33:14-26," 120.

[71] Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 5. Both Lundbom and Fretheim understand this covenant with night and day to refer to the Noachic covenant (Gen. 8:21-22). Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys Pub, 2002), 479; *Jeremiah 21-36* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 544. However, other commentaries are devoid of discussion of this ontological connection. See William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, chapters 26-52*, ed by. Paul D. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 228–231; Tiberius Rata, *The Covenant Motif in Jeremiah's Book of Comfort: Textual and Intertextual Studies of Jeremiah 30-33* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 81, 84; Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 378–379.

[72] Mullen, "The Divine Witness," 214. In his interpretation of this verse, Brueggemann argues, "Historical structures rooted in God's promises are as sure as cosmic sequences authored by God who creates and presides." Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 320.

Abrahamic covenant and the sabbatical regulations of the law should also be understood as an indication of the ontological connection between covenant and creation. As I show in the following section, this connection means that care for creation is a cosmic matter of "*ṣedeq*," "*mišpāṭ*" and covenantal fidelity.

*4.5.2. Right Order and Rightness: The 'flowering of nature' and the King*

The ontological connection between the Davidic covenant and creation explains why the king is charged with establishing "righteousness" (*ṣedeq*) and "justice" (*mišpāṭ*) throughout creation in Psalm 72.[73] These Hebrew terms "designate realities that, while ethical and moral, are part of the structure of physical reality."[74] Righteousness and justice, or if we follow Murray's translation "rightness" and "right order" respectively, reflect the "proper functioning" not only in the ethical deliberations of the king and his people, but of the entire creation which comprises his realm.[75] As the "mediator of God's blessing for nature and society," the king upholds the oppressed through his own rightness (*ṣedeq*) and the hills respond with rightness (*ṣedeqāh*, v.3) in the form of an

[73] Gerhard von Rad interprets creation language to only be concerned with creation insofar as it relates to God's "saving acts;" it is not considered a subject of independent investigation. Von Rad assumes that if God's redemptive acts and creation are paired, creation must be considered a secondary theme in the text. However, as this exposition shows, the two are intimately related in such a way that the one cannot be spoken of without the other. Von Rad, "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," 137–138.

[74] Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David," 680–681.

[75] Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 42. See also H.H. Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation:' Creation Theology' as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed by. Bernhard W Anderson (Philadelphia, Penn: Fortress, 1984), 105–108; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 77, 80; Walter Houston, "The King's Preferential Option for the Poor: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Ethics in Psalm 72," *Biblical Interpretation* 7, no. 4 (October 1999): 341–367.

abundance of grain waves "on the tops of mountains" (v.16).[76] The recounting of the Davidic covenant promises punishment for the king who does not obey the Lord's commands (II Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:31-32), but if the king is committed to the covenant and right order with which God constituted creation, "the flowering of nature is seen as an expected corollary to the just rule of the king."[77]

### *4.5.3. Conclusion: The Pursuit of* Mišpāṭ *and* Ṣedeq *in Creation*

The Psalter is, as W.H. Bellinger describes it, "held together as the faith confession of a worshiping community, as the prayer and praises of this community confessing faith in YHWH and so encountering YHWH."[78] Psalms 72 and 89 reveal but one aspect of this community's confession in its description of a covenanting God, whose covenant with David determines right order and rightness for the king, Israel and all of creation. While I have shown that covenant and creation are bound together in the Noachic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants, the Davidic covenant most explicitly addresses the ontological connection between the two in the description of the Davidic covenant as "breakable" only as God's covenant which regulates creation is "breakable."

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[76] Bernd Janakowski, "Das Licht Des Lebens: Zur Lichtmetaphorik in Den Psalmen," in *Metaphors in the Psalms*, ed. Pierre Van Hecke and Antje Labahn (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010), 104. Janakowski understands the king's influence on both spheres as complementary aspects and his role as mediator to be an adaptation and transformation of the ancient Near Eastern understanding of the King as the Son of God.

[77] Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David," 683. Goran Eidevall describes Psalm 72 as a demonstration of a rightly "cultivated landscape" that allows "all good values in life" to flourish. Goran Eidevall, "Metaphorical Landscapes in the Psalms," in *Metaphors in the Psalms*, ed. Pierre Van Hecke and Antje Labahn (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010), 17.

[78] William H Bellinger, "The Psalms as a Place to Begin for Old Testament Theology," in *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed by. Stephen Breck Reid (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 33. See also, William H. Bellinger, "Portraits of Faith: The Scope of Theology in the Psalms," in *An Introduction to Wisdom Literature and the Psalms: Festschrift for Marvin E. Tate*, ed. H Wayne Ballard and W Dennis Tucker (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 113–114.

This connection is further expressed in Psalm 72 and in Jeremiah 33:20-21, 25, texts that reveal a correlation between a rightly ordered society and a rightly ordered world. Roberts' description of just monarch in Psalm 72 is applicable to both texts: "it is the divine king' s maintenance of right order and rightness (*mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*) that allows not only humans but the living things of the sea and the field and all the trees of the forest to thrive."[79]

A covenantal ecology draws upon the ontological connection between covenant and creation, and especially the ethical implications of that connection, described in texts related to the Davidic covenant. As these texts demonstrate, *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* are not only inner states of being resulting from remaining in covenant relationship with God, but are greater ontological realities woven into the fabric of the cosmos. Like the king described in the Psalms, when individuals express their own *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* they find themselves acting in accord with, and furthering, the *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* that sustain creation. As I have shown in my treatments of the preceding covenantal narratives, nonhuman creation is a covenant partner with God and humanity, and *tôrâh* expressly demands that humans care for its many forms. However, the Davidic covenant stresses that working for the well-being of nonhuman creation is not one option among many; acting any other way runs counter to the structure of God's creation. In terms of a covenantal ecology, acting in a way that creates disorder in nonhuman creation, produces disorder in the greater relationship between God, humanity and nonhuman creation. In the next section I look to the prophetic corpus to describe the effects of what happens

[79] Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David," 681. It is interesting to note, as Gerald H. Wilson does, that Psalms 72 and 89, which hold together creation and covenant, also form the "seams" of Books 2 and 3 of the Psalter, forming transition points into the next book. Gerald H. Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 35 (Je 1986): 85–94.

when humans choose to act in a way that runs counter to "rightness" and "right order" woven in to the created order, as well as the need for, and effect of, covenantal renewal for creation.

### *4.6. The Prophets: The Mourning & Restoration of Creation*

In the previous section I demonstrated that the king's establishment of right order (*mišpāṭ*) and rightness (*ṣedeqāh*) profoundly affects all of creation, i.e., it enables a creation-wide flourishing. Moving to prophetic reflection on covenant in the books of Isaiah and Hosea, one finds both bleak descriptions of how human infidelity to God's covenant negatively affects the created order and hopeful descriptions of a covenantal renewal of creation initiated by God and further by the human pursuit of *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*. The negative effects of human sin on creation and the portrayal of divine and human efforts at its renewal reinforce the importance of the relationships that make up a covenantal ecology and God's presence and activity in creation.

#### *4.6.1. The Mourning of Creation*

*Isaiah 24:4-7.* There are several prophetic texts that speak of a "languishing" (*ʾāmal*) or "mourning" (*ʾābal*) of creation.[80] The clearest connection between these types of suffering and God's covenant can be found in Isaiah 24:4-7, a text which begins the "Isaiah Apocalypse" (Isaiah 24-27), a unit that primarily serves as a pronouncement of

[80] For a comprehensive study of these texts, see Katherine M. Hayes, *The Earth Mourns: Prophetic Metaphor and Oral Aesthetic* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002).

judgment on the nations described in chapters 13-23.[81] The "Apocalypse" contains a dire warning of the creation-wide effects of human sin in vv.4-6:

> The earth [*ʾereṣ*] dries up [*ʾābal*] and withers, the world languishes [*ʾāmal*] and withers; the heavens languish [*ʾāmal*] together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant [*bĕrît ʿôlām*].[82] Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left.

Laurie Braaten argues that Isa. 24:1-7 reveals a "deeds-consequence" framework in which "sinners suffer the consequence of their own actions—they reap what they sow. . .

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[81] Sweeney cautions that we not read this as only interpreting chapters 13-23, for 24-27 also serves to interpret parts of the book not contained in these oracles of judgment. Marvin A. Sweeney, "Textual Citations in Isaiah 24-27 : Toward an Understanding of the Redaction Function of Chapters 24-27 in the Book of Isaiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 1 (Mr 1988): 51. Although this text is usually treated as an exilic or post-exilic insertion that post-dates the prophet Isaiah, Otzen points out that at least some of the content, particularly the idea of world-judgment, is indicative of prophecy from the late pre-exilic period. Benedikt Otzen, "Traditions and Structures of Isaiah 24-27," *Vetus Testamentum* 24, no. 2 (April 1974): 201. Unlike a number of texts in Isaiah, the lack of specific historical references makes this unit difficult to date.

[82] The exact identity of the violated "eternal covenant" (v.5) is unclear. Some understand this as God's covenant with Noah (e.g., Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, Westminster Bible companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 192; John Goldingay, *Isaiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 138; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 179; Steven D. Mason, "Another Flood? Genesis 9 and Isaiah's Broken Eternal Covenant," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 2 (2007): 177–198.). Others, God's covenant with Moses (e.g., Dan G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: an Integrative Reading of Isaiah 24-27* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1988), 27–29; Donald C. Polaski, "Reflections on a Mosaic Covenant : The Eternal Covenant (Isaiah 24:5) and Intertextuality," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 77 (Mr 1998): 55–73; Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 157. Still others interpret this as a covenant established at creation (e.g., Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 74.). Others still understand this as some combination of covenants (e.g., Donald C. Polaski, *Authorizing an End: The Isaiah Apocalypse and Intertextuality* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 117–145; Robert B. Chisholm, "The `Everlasting Covenant' and the `City of Chaos': Intentional Ambiguity and Irony in Isaiah 24," *Criswell Theological Review* 6 (1993): 237–253. However, I suggest that this text describes the "evil effects of the breach of the 'cosmic covenant'." Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 21. Patricia Tull points out that although this idea of a unifying covenant is foreign to modern scholarship, the author(s) of this text from Isaiah would have seen "a single divine trajectory manifested over the course of time on particular occasions." Tull argues that this universalizing of covenantal infidelity becomes the reason for universal punishment in verse six. Cf. Jer. 25:15-30. Patricia K. Tull, *Isaiah 1-39* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2010), 371. The Mosaic and Noachic covenants (along with the Abrahamic and Davidic) are then viewed as "particular instantiations of this fundamental cosmic covenant," and have all been violated because the cosmic covenant in which they are founded has been violated. Jonathan Moo, "Romans 8.19—22 and Isaiah's Cosmic Covenant," *New Testament Studies* 54, no. 1 (January 2008): 85 fn.41.

"[83] Human beings "have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant," and therefore the "earth lies polluted under its inhabitants" as a "curse devours the earth." In this desolate land, there are no harvest celebrations and the cities lie in ruin. The devastation wrought by failure to adhere to God's covenantal will not only affects human society but the entire created order. The wine and vine (v.7), or "basic elements of agriculture in Israel,"[84] are disrupted by this pollution to the detriment of both humans and animals. The consequences of human sin, as Braaten states, "surely foul the nest of others."[85]

*Hosea 4:1-3.* Hosea 4:1-3 echoes many of the same themes found in Isaiah 24, but adds two important details that help flesh out the full implications of a covenantal ecology: (1) it provides more details on the cause of the land's mourning and (2) it outlines how the "inhabitants" (Isa. 24: 6) are affected by this transgression. The text begins with the Lord pronouncing an "indictment" (*rîb*) against his people.[86] Due to the

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[83] Laurie J. Braaten, "The Groaning Creation: The Biblical Background for Romans 8:22," *Biblical Research* 50 (January 1, 2005): 32; Laurie J. Braaten, "All Creation Groans: Romans 8:22 in Light of the Biblical Sources," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 28, no. 2 (2006): 146. See also Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 151. Read canonically with the judgment of the nations in chapters 13-23, it would seem that this covenantal violation is not particular only to Israel, but to all the nations. See Otzen, "Traditions and Structures of Isaiah 24-27," 203; Polaski, "Reflections on a Mosaic Covenant," 63.

[84] Katherine Murphey Hayes, *The Earth Mourns: Prophetic Metaphor and Oral Aesthetic* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 144.

[85] Braaten, "All Creation Groans," 146. I believe Braaten is correct when he states, "Presumably the inhabitants that are being consumed with the earth (v. 6) include more than the inhabitants that have caused the corruption through sin (v. 5), although the latter are no doubt included." However, this only becomes explicit in the following passage.

[86] The exact meaning of *rîb* is an unsettled matter. Many interpret it in a juridical sense as a "covenant lawsuit" God undertakes against Israel. See, Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 184; James Luther Mays, *Hosea: a Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2002), 62; Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: a Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 67; R Michael Casto, "Conversing with the Text : Application of Conversational

failure of the priests (vv.4-6) there is no knowledge of the Lord or faithfulness (*ḥesed*) to his covenant. The people are engaged in a variety of sins: swearing, lying, murder, theft, adultery, and bloodshed (v.1-2). Israelite society is imploding as these sins "break forth" (*pāraṣ*), a term that signifies that these are "vigorous and aggressive acts" (Ex. 19:22, 24; II Sam. 5:20).[87] While this list of sins may give the reader an initial impression that covenant infidelity affects only humanity, verse three shows that the suffering is felt throughout the entire creation: "the land mourns [*ʾābal*], and all who live in it languish [*ʾāmal*]; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing." Israel's unfaithfulness has "set off a reaction which has repercussions far beyond the boundaries of their own society."[88] The biosphere, including the entire animal kingdom (represented by the wild animals, birds, and fish), is grossly affected by human transgression.[89] Using the language of mourning and languishing, the author portrays "a

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Exegesis to Hosea 4:1-3," *Duke Divinity School Review* 40, no. 1 (Wint 1975): 27–28. However, others argue against such a narrow reading. See Michael DeRoche, "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea," *Vetus Testamentum* 31, no. 4 (O 1981): 408; J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2010), 146; David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009), 105. See especially, Carl J. Bosma, "Creation in Jeopardy : A Warning to Priests (Hosea 4:1-3)," *Calvin Theological Journal* 34, no. 1 (Ap 1999): 82–87.

[87] Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 149. Dearman also points out that in its noun form, *pāraṣ* is used to indicate a thief (Jer. 7:11; Ezek. 7:22) or violent person (Ez. 18:10). Hubbard describes these acts as "general yet vicious mayhem that violates human rights in letter and spirit." Hubbard, *Hosea*, 106.

[88] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 193–194.

[89] Despite its prevalent use to describe the political entity "Israel," there seems to be overwhelming agreement that in v.3, *ʾereṣ* refers to creation proper. Melissa Tubbs Loya, "'Therefore the Earth Mourns': The Grievance of Earth in Hosea 4:1-3," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 55–56; Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 42; Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 153; Walter Brueggemann, "The Uninflected Therefore of Hosea 4:1-3," in *Reading from This Place, vol. 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 1995), 241; Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 193; Bosma, "Creation in Jeopardy," 110; Gunther Wittenberg, "Knowledge of God : The Relevance of Hosea 4:1-3 for a Theological Response to Climate Change," *Old Testament Essays* 22 (2009): 506–507. DeRoche convincingly argues that just as wild animals, birds, and fish represent all nonhuman creatures in the first creation account (Gen. 1:28), so too "they represent the three spheres in which the animal kingdom lives; the sea, the heavens, and the land. Thus, the list is representative of all animal life…"DeRoche, "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea," 403.

vast sorrow that touches all elements of creation…the cessation, or curtailment, of normal activities, and the earth's figurative mourning may entail a breaking off of natural productivity and growth."[90] Human sin, in its many forms, has interrupted the created order established by God and brought about a "reversal of creation."[91]

The descriptions of cosmic suffering portrayed in Isaiah 24:1-7 and Hosea 4:1-3 show that covenantal infidelity, while a matter of personal piety, affects all of creation. Failure to follow the statutes, or remain within the "boundaries," of the cosmic covenant lead not only to an estrangement between humans and God but between humans and nonhuman creation as well.[92] Brueggemann notes the proclivity of the modern mind to scoff at the connection between faithfulness to God's commandments and wide-spread destruction on the scale portrayed in Hosea, writing:

> Now we are more sophisticated than the poem of Hosea…nonetheless, we can notice with even more analytical categories, the alienation of people from land, and both the land and people end up being abused and displaced. We are more sophisticated in our explanations, but the calculus is the same as that voiced by the prophet. The drive for more money leads to displacing people. As the people are displaced, the land goes untended, unloved, unrespected. A little at a time, the land forfeits its will to produce and to multiply, the earth ceases to be fruitful, and chaos comes…"[93]

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[90] Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 44–45. For similar assessments, see Elizabeth Rice Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 36; Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary*, 65.

[91] DeRoche, "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea"; Braaten, "All Creation Groans," 143; Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 153. Braaten reminds the reader that despite the fact this passage focuses on the mourning as a result of human sin, it is not out of the question to see God's activity in the background of this passage, given his activity throughout the book. See Braaten, "The Groaning Creation," 29–30; Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 41; Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 190; Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary*, 65; Brueggemann, "Uninflected Therefore," 243–249; Bosma, "Creation in Jeopardy," 108. As Lundbom points out, this includes both the priests and the people. Jack R. Lundbom, "Contentious Priests and Contentious People in Hosea 4:1-10," *Vetus Testamentum* 36, no. 1 (Ja 1986): 56.

[92] The term *ḥūqqâh used in Isa. 24:5* can mean "boundary, limit" as well as "decree, statute." Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 157.

[93] Brueggemann, "Uninflected Therefore," 246.

As Brueggemann points out, modern analysis reaffirms the poetic language of Hosea: infidelity to God's covenant has a negative impact upon human relationship with God, other people and nonhuman creation. As John Barton argues, "Righteousness is thus a cosmic reality, not just an interpersonal one as it is for most modern people. Its neglect can be quite literally earth-shattering."[94] Yet, just as these dire warnings portray the threat of covenant infidelity on the part of human beings for the entire creation, texts from these same books describe a created order renewed by God's covenantal fidelity and a human response to that fidelity in the forms of *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*.

*4.6.2. The Covenantal Restoration of Creation*

*Hosea 2:18-23.* The preceding texts' use of "languishing" and "mourning" describe the consequence of human infidelity to God's covenant. However, Hosea and Isaiah also describe a renewal of creation driven by God's faithfulness to the covenant and his creation. One such text is Hosea 2:18-23 in which the Lord tells Israel:

> I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness [*ṣedeq*] and in justice [*mišpāṭ*], in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.
> On that day I will answer, says the LORD, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah, and I will say to Lo-ammi, "You are my people"; and he shall say, "You are my God."

This text is replete with remarkable imagery, and its literary context adds to the significance of the Lord's covenantal promise. In vv.2-13, the Lord warns of judgment in the forms of drought, attack by wild animals, and agricultural collapse because of Israel's

[94] John Barton, *Isaiah 1-39* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 56.

accommodation to the Baal cult. Yet, in v.14, the Lord promises to persuade his covenant-partner Israel to return to him. He proclaims that she will no longer call him her master (*bāʿal*), but her husband (*ʾîš*) – a "sign of covenant intimacy" – which is affirmed by a unique covenant in the Old Testament.[95] The reader encounters this covenant in v. 18, where God declares:

> I will make for *them* a covenant [*bĕrît*] on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make *them* lie down in safety.[96]

In this text, God acts as a mediator or "guarantor" of the covenant between Israel and animals by restoring a peaceful relationship between human and nonhuman creatures. [97]

Some interpret this covenant as a means of protecting human life by ending the dire threat animals posed to human life and crops throughout the Old Testament (and specifically in Hosea 2:12). In this interpretation, the covenant is only made for protection and benefit of humans, but two recent interpretations of this text note the need

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[95] Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 124. See also Mays, *Hosea*, 48. Gary W. Light understands this change in agrarian terms. "the new covenant envisioned by Hosea, YHVH is not the owner *(bāʿal)* of a farm which is merely his possession. Instead, YHVH is the farmer in living relationship with his farm *(ʾîš)* through a mutual answering, or responding, *ʿānâh* (2:21-22)." Gary W. Light, "The New Covenant in the Book of Hosea," *Review & Expositor* 90 (1993): 233. This covenantal expectation is heightened by vv. 14-15, which allude to a "second Exodus" in the wilderness, in which Israel will depend upon the Lord. Hubbard, *Hosea*, 91.

[96] Italics added. The Hebrew for both of the terms translated "them" indicates the third person plural (them) and not the second person plural (you). Greenspoon points that the "New Revised Standard Version's 'for you' is a change, without textual warrant, to bring this verse in line with the second person of the immediate context." Greenspoon, "From Dominion to Stewardship?," 176. James D. Nogalski notes that this is a reasonable way to translate the verse. See James Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2011), 57.Braaten understands "them" to refer to the entire "earth community," or "or all members of God's creation on Earth, animate and inanimate." Laurie J. Braaten, "Earth Community in Hosea 2," in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, ed. Norman C. Habel (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 188 fn.6, 195–196. While I agree that the terms should be translated as "them," Braaten's interpretation that "they" represents the entire earth community seems somewhat redundant. God would then be cutting a covenant on behalf of the earth community (including land animals, fish, and birds) with land animals, fish, and birds. It seems more likely that it refers to Israel as a group. See Hubbard, *Hosea*, 94.

[97] Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, 27; Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 276–277.

for animals to also receive protection from human action.[98] First, Laure Braaten notes that in other texts, these animals are not only agents of destruction, but are described as suffering from the lack of produce, drought, and warfare (2:3, 9) that results from human sin.[99] Second, Hilary Marlow reminds us that Hosea 4:1-3 "indicts the people, not just for failure to keep the covenant, but for the consequent devastation of the whole natural world."[100] Therefore, nonhuman creatures do not bear the responsibility for ecological collapse; human sin in its manifold forms initiates this ecological collapse. In light of the observations of Braaten and Marlow, it would be best to understand the covenant described in 2:18 as one that prevents humans and animals from further harming each other. Israel's return to the Lord will end animal-executed-judgment upon humans and human-induced-destruction of creation. Therefore, when the covenanting God says he "will make *them* lie down in safety," he refers not only to human beings (both Israelite and non-Israelite), but also, "in a context of future peace," to all creatures as recipients of this covenantal renewal.[101]

Having described a cessation of the hostility between Israel and nonhuman creatures, the chapter shifts from a threat of desiccation to the promise of verdancy for the "land" [*ʾereṣ*], a term which is used here to describe both Israel and the land upon

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[98] Elizabeth Achtemeier understands Hosea to be channeling the Israelite understanding of the Lord using animals as beasts of judgment (Jer. 5:5-6; 8:17; 15:3; Ezek. 5:17) and this to be a reversal of the promise that "wild animals will destroy them" (v. 12). Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, 27. Dearman points to this same strand as a consequence for the breach of the Mosaic covenant. Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 126. See also Mays, *Hosea*, 49; Wolff, *Hosea*, 51; Hubbard, *Hosea*, 93.

[99] Braaten, "Earth Community in Hosea 2," 196–197.

[100] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 182.

[101] Greenspoon, "From Dominion to Stewardship?," 176. Greenspoon continues, "If this is so, Hosea has actually gone beyond the vision of Isaiah 7 – where leopards and young goats (but so far as we know, not humans) will lie down together without harm to anyone or anything. The general meaning of this prophetic verse is not in doubt."

which it resides.[102] The Lord, Israel's faithful husband, promises her a "bride price,"[103] a payment akin to a dowry. In this case, the bride price is directly given to the bride, Israel, to renew "the fundamental terms of covenantal fidelity," i.e., steadfast love, faithfulness, and mercy, in relationship with her groom, the Lord (vv.19-20).[104] Israel is also said to return to rightness and right order (*ṣedeqāh* and *mišpāṭ,* v.19), terms that indicate both a restoration of an ethical Israelite society and an improvement to the "well-being of the natural world."[105] Verses 22-23 describe this two-fold restoration:

> On that day I will answer, says the Lord, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth [*ʾereṣ*]; and the earth shall answer [*ʿānâh*] the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; and I will sow him for myself in the land [*ʾereṣ*]. (vv.22-23)

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[102] There are two prevalent interpretations of *ʾereṣ* in vv. 22-23, and throughout Hosea. As I noted in the treatment of 4:1-3, the term seems to refer to physical earth, but it can also represent the geographical and political land that is Israel (e.g., 1:2). Therefore, some opt for more localized interpretations of "land" here and in other places as referring only to the Promised Land upon which Israel rests. See Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, 27; Mays, *Hosea*, 49–50. Others understand this promise of restoration as referring to the entire earth. See, Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 126. Written against the backdrop of the impending Assyrian invasion of the 8th century and Hosea's focus on Israel's role in precipitating this invasion, the former seems more likely. However, we must quickly add that this does not exclude a cosmic restoration; such a restoration is simply outside of the interest of the prophet. Laurie Braaten contends that in Hosea 1-2, *ʾereṣ* refers to "land *per se*." Braaten, "Earth Community in Hosea 2," 186. Braaten argues, "The call to accuse Land with the charge of whoredom is actually a rhetorical device employed to get the Israelites involved in pronouncing judgment upon themselves as the true guilty party." Israel has practiced the prostitution of the Baal fertility cult thereby bringing Land into prostitution." Braaten also argues that since Hosea 1 & 3, which focus on the sin of the people, frame Hosea 2, the "effect is to focus the reader on the responsibility of the people, and not the Land." While these are not insignificant points, it does not follow that God's charge against Israel's active idolatry would include the earth's unwilling accompaniment in those acts. Ibid., 192.

[103] Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, 27. See also Wolff, *Hosea*, 53. For more on the covenant of marriage in Hosea 2, see Mordechai A. Friedman, "Israel's Response in Hosea 2:17b: 'You Are My Husband,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 199–204.

[104] Walter Brueggemann, "The Recovering God of Hosea," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 30 (2008): 15.

[105] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 179. See also, Nogalski, *Book of the Twelve*, 58.

The earth responds (*ʿānâh*) to the Lord's covenantal initiation, showing a "movement from the cosmic realm to the earthly."[106] The Lord's covenantal fidelity is expressed not only in terms of a restored relationship with Israel, but with a land that answers the Lord with fecundity.

This covenant described in Hosea has at times been described as a "new" covenant, despite the fact that it is nowhere described as such in Hosea.[107] Instead, this covenant, like the others surveyed, is further evidence of an overarching cosmic covenant that establishes and sustains creation. In Hosea, the covenant includes all of creation in the process eschatological renewal. Humans bring about and suffer judgment, which is both enacted and suffered by the earth and the animal kingdom, but the covenant instituted by God brings about the flourishing of all creation. Its fulfillment brings about peaceable relations in creation that mirror those described in the Genesis creation accounts (1:1-2:25).[108] The antagonistic relations engendered by the Fall and perpetuated by human sin have been overcome by God's covenantal fidelity to human and nonhuman creation, his partners in a covenantal ecology.

*Isaiah 11:1-9.* Another prophetic text that draws upon the imagery of the Genesis creation accounts is Isaiah 11:1-9.[109] Like Hosea, Isaiah 11:1-9 reiterates the creation-

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[106] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 180. For descriptions of the agricultural cycle, see Mays, *Hosea*, 52; Wolff, *Hosea*, 53.

[107] Mays, *Hosea*, 51. Wolff, *Hosea*, 55.

[108] Hubbard, *Hosea*, 94. DeRoche points out that Hosea 2:20 lists the animals in the same order as Gen. 1:30, "suggesting that Hosea is now announcing a return to the state of harmony that existed between man and the beasts at the time of creation." DeRoche, "The Reversal of Creation in Hosea," 406–407.

[109] One finds a lack of agreement in the secondary scholarship concerning authorship and date of composition, both of this text and its larger context (10:5-12:6). For discussion, see Sweeney, "Dating Prophetic Texts," 56–60. Some date this as an 8th century text (740-700) and thus a composition (at least in

wide significance of *ṣedeqāh* (righteousness, or rightness) and offers a vision of restoration that complements and develops the peaceful setting initially encountered in Hosea. While the text does not explicitly describe this covenantal renewal as driven by God's covenantal initiative, its similarities with Hosea 2:18-23, the references to the Davidic line and its use of the terms *šāpaṭ* and *ṣedeq* are indications that it is at the very least related to the covenant-driven renewal of creation described in the preceding section. While Hosea 2:18-23 focuses on the divine aspects of this renewal, Isaiah 11:1-9 describes how human "rightness" can also contribute to it.

Isaiah 11:1 claims that "a shoot from the stump of Jesse" will judge (*šāpaṭ*) in righteousness (*ṣedeq*), vanquishing the wicked and advocating for the "meek of the earth (*ʾereṣ*)." The identity of this "shoot" is uncertain, with some scholars arguing that it is a Davidic king,[110] others the remnant people of Judah,[111] and still others who find no reason to demarcate the two.[112] In favor of the latter, Marlow argues that drawing a sharp divide between the king and the people can be difficult because "Judah's understanding

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some form) of the prophet Isaiah; others consider it a Josianic redaction dating sometime between 640-610; others view it as an even later composition. In favor of an earlier composition, Seitz argues "that precisely because Isaiah's salvation preaching was vindicated in the course of history—with Assyria stopped at Jerusalem's neck, with Immanuel establishing and upholding the throne of David, with a remnant returning—so too his wider salvation proclamation was preserved, even when it spoke of a day that was yet to come, that had not yet taken place or proved true." Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 102. Clements, on the other hand, finds it more likely that the references to the downfall of the dynasty (e.g., the stump) refer to "the taking of the throne from the Davidic family in 587."R. E. Clements, *Isaiah I-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1980), 122.

[110] Clements, *Isaiah I-39*, 121; Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 83; Jake Stromberg, "The 'Root of Jesse' in Isaiah 11:10: Postexilic Judah, or Postexilic Davidic King?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 4 (Wint 2008): 655–669; Tull, *Isaiah 1-39*, 225.

[111] Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 97.

[112] Sweeney, "Dating Prophetic Texts," 59. For a discussion of the argument, see Stromberg, "The 'Root of Jesse' in Isaiah 11."

of her identity as God's chosen people is epitomized by the Davidic line."[113] As I have shown in the preceding sections, there is a need for both the king and people to live in accordance with the cosmic *ṣedeq* in all their affairs. When the king does so, the earth responds with verdancy; when the people fail to do so, all of creation suffers. The exercise of *ṣedeq* described in Isaiah 11:1 thus serves as a reminder that it is the responsibility of both the ruler and the ruled to "intervene on behalf of the poor and the vulnerable…who are unable to supply their own social leverage."[114] As nonhuman creation has been shown to be voiceless and vulnerable to the effects of human sin, the "meek of the earth (*ʾereṣ*)" described in v.11 should include people lacking social advantage (e.g., widows and orphans) and nonhuman creation.

Interpreters have often struggled to relate vv. 1-5, which focus on the exercise of *ṣedeq* for the king and Judah, with vv. 6-9, which provide a stirring vision of cosmic restoration.[115] However, as Brueggemann argues, the order and pairing of these two units of text again display an important connection between humanity and creation: the "reordering of human relationships" engenders "the new scenario for 'nature'."[116] This "new scenario" is astounding:

> The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the

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[113] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 241.

[114] Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 100. David Horrell points out this prophetic vision is one that provokes the pursuit of rightness in the present, for "the prophetic visions of a renewed, peaceable creation often is quite clearly intended to inspire and motivate conduct *in the present*…A vision of the future functions to shape present conduct in line with that vision." Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 138.

[115] See Clements, *Isaiah I-39*, 122; Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 106.

[116] Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 102.

> weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (vv. 6-9)

John Goldingay argues that given the preceding description of Assyria's aggression in Isaiah 9-10, "the talk of harmony in the animal world is a metaphor for harmony in the human world."[117] However, given the cosmic scope of the covenantal renewal, it is best to understand vv.6-9 as a declaration that when the knowledge of the Lord has spread from the holy mountain, peace will not only be found between nations but between species as well.[118] The animals named in these verses do not serve as a comprehensive list but as a series of contrasting pairs of predator and domesticated prey (e.g., wolf and lamb, etc.), thus indicating the breadth of "the scope of harmony."[119] In the contexts of eschatological transformation, both predator and prey live together in peace in a world renewed by the Creator. As Patricia K. Tull states, "Here it is not that the tables are turned. Rather, the cycle itself is broken. Aggression has gone so out of style that even the animals have reverted to eating vegetation as they did before the flood."[120] This is a radical and secure peace, sure enough for the child to lead these animals and even stir up the dreaded adder's nest without fear of harm (v.8). Similar to Hosea 2:18-23, the eschatological vision of Isaiah 11:1-9 is one of peace between species founded on the *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* that constitute the cosmos.

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[117] Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 85. See also, Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 106.

[118] As Seitz points out, "Enmity between the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom will give way to unity and peace within the broader circle of nations (11:11–16), themselves gathered around the ensign of the root of Jesse (11:10)."

[119] Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 240.

[120] Tull, *Isaiah 1-39*, 232. See also, Clements, *Isaiah I-39*, 124.

*4.6.3. Conclusion: From Languishing to Renewal*

In the prophetic books of Hosea and Isaiah, one finds dramatic descriptions of a covenantal ecology. There is a dynamic interaction between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation, where each of the three is intricately involved in both the denigration and restoration of creation. Isaiah 24:1-7 reveals that violation of God's covenant pollutes all of creation, and Hosea 4:1-3 depicts this creation-wide effect as "languishing" and "mourning" that disrupts the created order. Yet, humanity's covenantal infidelity does not have the final world. The Creator, in his unflinching, covenantal fidelity to creation, promises in Hosea 2:18-23 to restore humans to lives of right order (*ṣedeqāh*) and rightness (*mišpāṭ*) that not only halts the judgment-induced-desiccation of creation, but catalyzes the flourishing of creation. Similarly Isaiah 11:1-9 reveals that human rightness and right order also bring about peaceful relationships between species. A covenantal ecology recognizes the significant impact humans can have on the created order. Just as Hosea and Isaiah indicate, human sin causes decay of human societies and natural ecologies; conversely, human adherence to the *ṣedeq* and *mišpāṭ* that undergird creation bring about a flowering of creation. However, a covenantal ecology also acknowledges that the renewal of creation is not solely a matter of human effort. Like the covenantal renewal in Hosea, a covenantal ecology understands God to be active in the flourishing of creation. As humans respond to God's covenantal fidelity with *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*, predatory relationships between creatures are nullified, and human and nonhuman creation finds themselves at peace with one another and God in a covenantal ecology.

### *4.7. Conclusion: The Scriptural Basis of a Covenantal Ecology*

The Old Testament further describes the theological and ethical dimensions of a covenantal ecology. From the various passages treated in the foregoing sections, four important facets of a covenantal ecology have been established. First, covenant and creation are inseparable. In all of the texts treated, creation plays a major role, not only as the means by which the covenant is fulfilled (e.g., the gift of land to Abraham), but also as a recipient of God's covenantal care (e.g., the prohibition against the taking of lifeblood in the Noachic covenant and the levitical statutes concerning Sabbaths for creation). Second, God's covenants with Noah, Moses, Abraham and David are founded in the same cosmic covenant that upholds creation. Third, this cosmic covenant is bound up with *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*, rightness and right order. Therefore, when mišpāṭ and ṣedeq are absent human endeavors, creation collapses, languishes and mourns. However, when *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* abound in human activity, all of creation shares in the blessing of God's covenantal care and the earth responds with its own *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq* in the form of a flourishing creation. Fourth, the renewal of creation, while a response to human *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*, is also the product of God's covenantal fidelity, which is unwavering, even in the face of human infidelity. Counter to the stewardship environmental ethic, a covenantal ecology does not exalt humans as managers, but as creatures who fail to manage creation as they fail to manage themselves. It is God's covenantal fidelity that upholds nonhuman creation in the face of human sinfulness and that makes the renewal of creation possible.

The reader may wonder why, given the breadth of texts, the two creation accounts contained in Genesis 1:1-3:5 were not explored in this chapter. Admittedly, these texts

deal with creation at length and are therefore rife with promise for environmental ethics. First, as I noted in the chapter devoted to stewardship hermeneutics and critiques, stewardship tends to focus on the Genesis account to the detriment of other Old Testament texts that, as I have shown here, are more explicit about nonhuman creation's standing in ethical and theological matters and the way in which humans are called to interact with nonhuman creation. Second, while Gen. 1:1-3:5 treats creation, the text does not explicitly mention covenant, or *bĕrît*. However, having now explored these various covenantal texts at length, I would like to note three points of continuity between the initial creation accounts and the preceding texts.[121]

First, care for the earth (*ʾereṣ*) is a significant task given to the *ʾādām* in the second creation account. Genesis 2:15 states that even before the garden was created, God created Adam out of the ground to "tend and keep it." Read against the Davidic covenant and the prophets, I would suggest that "tending and keeping" are prelapsarian examples of right order and rightness, or *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq*. These activities constitute the means by which humanity will be in right relationship with God, one another, and nonhuman creation.

Second, as my treatment of the Davidic covenant and prophetic reflections on covenant show, the line between human society and the natural world is not sharply defined and the charge to humanity to tend and keep nonhuman creation (Gen. 2:15) destroys any bifurcation between the "human" and "natural" spheres. The creation texts reaffirm that the one cannot be thought of without the other: without the garden, the gardener would be without a home and a task, without the gardener, the garden would

[121] I treat the Genesis creation accounts at greater length in Brandon Frick, "Covenantal Ecology: The Inseparability of Creation and Covenant in the Book of Genesis," in *Genesis and Christian Theology*, ed by. Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott, and Grant MacCaskill (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

have no one to tend it. This divinely-established system of mutual service is not just an ideal to which humanity must aspire but a constitutive aspect of life on earth that is woven in to the very fabric of reality.

Third, one can see the effect of human disobedience to God's commands in the garden as humans eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While the commands are not explicitly referred to as belonging to a particular covenant (*bĕrît*), the repercussions of humanity's actions are similar to those described in the prophets. As Charles S. McCoy points out (and my exploration supports):

> Covenant…includes command, promise, and threat. God's covenant as embodied in nature and history contains the command to live in community, friendship, peace, and justice. The promise of the covenant is the enjoyment of well-being through the relations established and growing in creation. The threat of the covenant is that violation leads to the fragmentation of community, to alienation, to conflicts, and to injustice.[122]

Observance of this command, as in the case of the observance of the Sabbath, sabbatical year, and Year of Jubilee, leads to flourishing for all of creation. Yet, as I showed in the prophets, failure to follow those commandments leads to creation-wide calamity. Similar to the degradation of creation portrayed in the prophets, one finds that earth and nonhuman creatures are used to execute judgment on human sin (3:14, 18) and also suffer the punishment (3:15, 17). As Joseph Blenkinsopp points out, in these initial creation texts, "We then see how the well-being of the earth is in important ways dependent on what happens in human society. . . Social dysfunction, beginning with the first couple,

[122] Charles S. McCoy, "Creation and Covenant: A Comprehensive Vision for Environmental Ethics," in *Covenant for a New Creation: Ethics, Religion, and Public Policy*, ed by. Carol S Robb and Carl J. Casebolt (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 216.

results in the ground producing scrub, thorns, and thistles, requiring unremitting labor to provide a living."[123]

Much of the preceding treatment of the Old Testament sources of a covenantal ecology resonates with the Genesis creation accounts. While an explicit connection of those accounts to *bĕrît* would buttress my claim that covenant and creation are inseparable and potentially provide more insight into a covenantal ecology, I do not find it necessary to overextend my argument given the rich texts that do make the covenant/creation connection. In the previous chapter, I set forth the theological foundations of a covenantal ecology. In this chapter, I have developed a covenantal ecology in more detail by drawing upon Old Testament texts that describe the relationship between creation and covenant. In the following chapter, I further develop a covenantal ecology by turning to the New Testament in an attempt to establish a Christology rooted in this covenant that highlights the rightness (*ṣedeq*) of Jesus' ministry and the creation-renewing transformation that his ministry engenders at the end of days.

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[123] Blenkinsopp, "Global Stewardship: Toward an Ethic of Limitation," 46.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Jesus Christ and the Fulfillment of a Covenantal Ecology

### *5.1. Introduction*

In the previous chapter, I argued that the relationships between God, humanity and nonhuman creation as set forth in various Old Testament covenants describe a covenantal ecology. In this chapter, I continue this scriptural description with a turn to the New Testament. Aside from the fact that the Christian Scriptures are comprised of both Old and New Testaments, I make this move for two reasons.

First, within the larger discussion of Scripture an environmental ethics, the New Testament - and especially Christology - is often passed over in favor of the Old Testament texts and concepts because of "the apparent subsidiary or even casual role" creation plays in the New Testament. For example, Douglas J. Moo describes a:

> fissure between a theology embracive of nature and one indifferent or even hostile to it between the Old and New Testaments… The NT is heavily anthropocentric; the "world" is often viewed negatively; little is said about the natural world; and what little is said sometimes suggests that it is doomed to an imminent fiery end.[1]

When texts explicitly mention creation, they can be interpreted as negative assessments of creation, e.g., as an impediment to the Christian life (John 12:25) or a corrupted world destined to conflagration (2 Peter 3:10-13). Similarly, Christology has been largely absent in Christian environmental ethics, an oddity described by Elizabeth A. Johnson:

> Christian belief pivots around the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, cherished as Emmanuel, God with us; therefore insight from this quarter would be

[1] Moo, "Nature in the New Creation," 453, 477.

> vital. At first glance Christology's ecological relevance seems secondary, if not remote.[1]

A large swath of the Christian Scriptures has been either deemphasized if not disregarded due to a perceived detrimental impact on Christian environmental ethics. However, as I demonstrate in this chapter, there are New Testament passages, when interpreted in light of the previous chapters, which positively contribute to a Christian environmental ethic.[2]

Second, a treatment of New Testament is necessary if a covenantal ecology is to be developed in its fullest. The Old Testament texts treated in the preceding chapter fleshed out significant facets of a covenantal ecology, and this chapter builds upon those theological and scriptural descriptions and opens new dimensions of a covenantal ecology by incorporating christological insights that further describe the covenantal regulation of the relationships between God, humanity and nonhuman creation.

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[1] Johnson, "An Earthy Christology," 27.

[2] However, the need for an ecological-christological discussion will not compel the dissertation to attempt to find a "a Green Christ" in the gospels or follow scholars who claim that, "Nature and environment basically form the major themes of Jesus' saving message on earth." Respectively, Lyn Holness, "Christ and 'the Green Man,'" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 139 (Mr 2011): 87–90 and Ferdinand Nwaigbo, "Jesus, Justice and Ecology: An African Perspective," *AFER* 53, no. 2 (Je 2011): 354. As other scholars have argued, the gospels do not allow us to create an "eco-Jesus" or "pretend that Jesus was really a good environmentalist ahead of his time." Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 71, 72. Bauckham claims that Just because Jesus exhibited "closeness and sensitivity to the natural environment, doesn't make Jesus a modern ecologist." Richard Bauckham, "Reading the Synoptic Gospels Ecologically," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (T & T Clark International, 2010), 75. As Johnson points out, "It would be anachronistic to attribute to Jesus of Nazareth the environmental concerns of 21st-century people." Johnson, "An Earthy Christology," 28. As well-intentioned as such attempts may be, the gospels confront the reader with a picture of Jesus Christ as one who claims that God places more value on humans than birds or flowers (Mt. 6: 25-34, 10:29-31; Lk. 12:6-7), withers a fig tree (Mk. 11:12-14, 20-25; Mt. 21:18-22), and drives demons into pigs and then off a cliff (Mk. 5:1-20, Mt. 8:28-34, and Lk. 8:26-39). While Horrell argues these incidents are indicative of an anthropocentricity in Jesus' message, Bauckham argues they are a product of the fact that Jesus anticipates the Kingdom within a still unredeemed and unrenewed world." Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 67; Bauckham, "Reading the Synoptic Gospels Ecologically," 81. Similarly, Horrell argues that the reader focus on the creation-wide implications of the inaugurated eschatology of his ministry, i.e. the announcement and breaking in of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 67–68.

I argue that Jesus Christ's incarnate ministry initiates the fulfillment of a covenantal ecology, in a creation-wide transformation that is completed in the New Jerusalem. This transformation, which affects God, humanity, and nonhuman creation, is marked by non-exploitative, intimate relationships between the three. I describe this Christ-driven fulfillment in an exploration of New Testament texts. Beginning with Eucharistic texts in the New Testament in, I argue that the Incarnation is the proper starting point for discussion of the covenantal ecology in the New Testament. The connection made in Eucharistic texts between Jesus' blood and the covenant establishes Jesus Christ as the covenant-in-flesh. The connection between Jesus' body and the bread emphasizes his full creatureliness, which allows him to serve as a Representative of all creation. As both covenant in flesh and Representative of creation, Jesus initiates a new type of relationship between Creator and creation by uniting them in his life and ministry, i.e., he creates a covenantal ecology both in his person and through his work.

Then, drawing upon the Matthean Beatitudes, I argue that Jesus Christ's ministry also furthers the goal of Old Testament covenants, i.e., the establishment of a rightly ordered covenantal ecology. Christ's declaration that he has come to fulfill the law and prophets (Mt. 5:17-20) is a declaration that his ministry initiates the renewal of a covenantal ecology. Jesus describes this transformation in the preceding vv.3-16 as the overturning of a corrupt order and its replacement by a right order, i.e., the covenantal ecology that is expressed in non-exploitative relationships between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. Jesus calls his disciples to pursue this rightness, thus making them participants in a covenantal ecology.

Finally, I turn to Revelation 21:1-5a and argue that the transformation initiated by the Incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ and pursued by his disciples is completed in the new heaven and earth, which provides an eschatological portrayal of a *covenantal ecology* in its fullest expression: God, humans, and nonhuman creation bound together in relationship in the New Jerusalem. The "new" heaven and earth promised in this text are not replacements of an unredeemable creation, but a qualitative restoration of the existing created order. God "dwells" with creation in the New Jerusalem, leading to the end of "mourning" for a creation previously scarred by sin and oppression. To conclude, I summarize the results of this New Testament interpretation and discuss its implications for both stewardship environmental ethics and a covenantal ecology.

### *5.1.1. Preliminary Issues concerning Terminology in the New Testament*

Before proceeding to the christological discussion, a preliminary word on the difficulty in transitioning from Old to New Testament is in order. In the preceding chapter, I identified loci that merited attention based on a) their connection to covenant [*bĕrît*] in the Old Testament and b) the description of the relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation in that covenant. These criteria will not be pursued in this New Testament chapter for three reasons. First, the Hebrew *bĕrît* is not found in the Greek New Testament, which instead uses the Greek *diathēkē* as the term for "covenant."[3] There is undoubtedly conceptual overlap between *bĕrît* and *diathēkē*, but it

[3] Joseph Ratzinger notes that the translators of the Septuagint translated 267 out of the 287 uses of the Hebrew *bĕrît* with the Greek *diathēkē* (as opposed to *synthēkē*). Joseph Ratzinger, "The New Covenant : A Theology of Covenant in the New Testament," trans. Maria Shrady, *Communio* 22 (Wint 1995): 636. Bernard Cooke points out "philological studies on *diathēkē* made it clear that it was not only capable of carrying the *OT* meaning of *bĕrît,* but that it was the ideal word to signify a covenant in which the initiative was taken by the more powerful party…"Bernard J. Cooke, "Synoptic Presentation of the Eucharist as Covenant Sacrifice," *Theological Studies* 21, no. 1 (Mr 1960): 31.

would be a mistake to consider the New Testament *diathēkē* synonymous with the Old Testament *bĕrît*. Second, while *bĕrît* is used 287 times in the Old Testament, *diathēkē* is used only thirty-three times in the New Testament. Thus, restricting loci of investigation to instances where *diathēkē* is used would limit the field of investigation and, as I demonstrate in the chapter, occlude texts that deal with the covenantal relationship between God, humanity and nonhuman creation. Finally, the purpose of investigating the Noachic, Abrahamic, Mosaic/Levitical, and Davidic covenants, along with the prophetic reflections on covenant was to flesh out a covenantal ecology in the Old Testament. Each of those covenants illustrated significant connections between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation, but in the New Testament, these relationships are most clearly displayed in the event of God's becoming flesh in Jesus Christ. I turn now to the Last Supper texts in the New Testament to establish Jesus' connections with both covenant and creation.[4]

### *5.2. Blood & Body, Covenant & Creation*

When examining the Last Supper in the New Testament, four texts directly address its institution and practice: Mk 14:22-25, Mt 26:26-29, Lk 22:17-20, I Cor 11:23-25.[5] The subject of much Christian formulation and argumentation, these texts have

[4] Those familiar with eco-hermeneutics will have no doubt noticed the absence of Romans 8:19-22 in my description of texts to be treated in this chapter. A brief treatment of the passage and my reasons for not including in the chapter are set forth in an appendix at the end of the dissertation.

[5] The selection from I Corinthians is but one small section of an extended reflection by Paul on the importance of the Last Supper for Christians. For Paul, the Supper placed ethical norms on the early church that bound them together in covenant community. Paul often discusses sacraments "when urged to correct misconduct in his congregations. He deals with Baptism and the Eucharist predominantly in ethical contexts (I Cor. 6:8-11; 12:13; 20-26; 10:1-22; Rom. 6:1-6, 11-13)." Peter Lampe, "The Eucharist : Identifying with Christ on the Cross," *Interpretation* 48, no. 1 (Ja 1994): 36. In I Cor. 11: 17-22, Paul recounts the received institution of the supper in the context of Corinthian malpractice of the meal. Paul's description indicates that there is something is amiss in the way in which bread and wine are being

formed Christian Eucharistic practice and theology and now aid in the construction of a

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consumed: "one goes hungry and another becomes drunk" (I Cor. 11:21).

Such inequality in consumption was fairly commonplace in the Greco-Roman world in the form of voluntary association meals. In those meals, participants from various socio-economic positions met and dined together in an attempt to gain honor in society. For the wealthy, this came through patronage of the association, and for the lower classes, honor was earned through service and consequent promotion to higher station within the association. There was great inequality in the meal, with more prominent members partaking of a greater share of higher quality food in more prominent seating than the lesser members. This practice was viewed as a rightful honor to those who received it and an impetus for those of lower standing to rise in the club. Lampe, "The Eucharist." Rachel M. Mcrae, "Eating with Honor: The Corinthian Lord's Supper in Light of Voluntary Association Meal Practices," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 166.

Paul refuses to "commend" (11:22) the Corinthian church for perpetuating these Greco-Roman practices when dining together. The meal instituted by Jesus Christ stood as an explicit condemnation of such social practices and was instead a proclamation of "the Lord's death until he comes" (11:26). As McRae points out, Paul combats the practice by challenging "the values of the honor and shame code, teaching the members of the community mutual upbuilding, mutual servanthood, and power in weakness, and encouraging strong fictive kinship groups…" Ibid., 180. See also, Luise Schottroff and Brian McNeil, "Holiness and Justice: Exegetical Comments on 1 Corinthians 11.17-34," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 79 (S 2000): 56. No longer seeking honor through their participation in, and perpetuation of, an unjust social order, those who gather at the table are repeatedly called by Paul to "actively to give up [one's] rights for the sake of the other (cf. 1 Cor 9.12, 19; 10.23–4; 14.18–19), thus announcing the eschatological reversal of values that will come to fruition 'when he comes'." Suzanne Watts Henderson, "If Anyone Hungers…': An Integrated Reading of 1 Cor 11.57–34," *New Testament Studies* 48, no. 2 (April 2002): 202. As Batarchy points out, Paul's insistence on humility at the meal is not an innovation, but a reflection of Jesus' own subversion of cultural values around a "radically inclusive table." S. Scott Bartchy, "The Historical Jesus and Honor Reversal at the Table," in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed by. Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2002). Jesus' own dining with those at the bottom of society called into question both the Jewish understanding of cleanliness and the Greco-Roman understanding of honor, and in a self-denying practice of the meal, the Corinthian practices a similar subversion.

Paul's faith in Jesus Christ as "the Crucified and Risen one" drives this ethic. Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, & Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 64. The same one who broke bread with his disciples the night he was betrayed is the same one for whom the Corinthian community faithfully awaits. As Aitken argues, the ethical and eschatological dimensions of Jesus' death and resurrection is best understood in terms of the building of a covenant community:

> The memory of Jesus death thus constitutes a community and provides a certain shared identity within this reenactment of the covenant…The phrase 'in my blood' locates Jesus, and in particular his death, within the reenacted narrative as the offering that ratifies the covenant. Here one finds, I suggest, an indication that the formation of a narrative of Jesus' death took place in relation to the community's practice of renewing the covenant." Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, "Ta Drōmena Kai Ta Legomena : The Eucharistic Memory of Jesus' Words in First Corinthians," *Harvard Theological Review* 90, no. 4 (O 1997): 369.

It is Jesus Christ's fulfillment of the covenant that establishes and maintains a community called to express a covenantal fidelity, that like Christ, submits to God's will and sacrificially gives to the another. For the earliest Christian communities, this reinstitution meant "The community holds the meal in yearning and firm hope, 'until he comes' (1 Cor. 11.26). God's judgment will establish justice on earth, and bring about peace and the fullness of life on earth and in heaven." Schottroff and McNeil, "Holiness and Justice," 59. This hope - both in the Corinthian church and the church universal - is a sweeping and unmistakable restructuring of the unjust social order rooted in an understanding of their Lord, Jesus Christ, as the one in the flesh, who both embodied and fulfilled God's covenant. As I will show in this chapter, this covenantal living is another example of Jesus Christ's call to his disciples to live into a higher form of "rightness" (Mt. 5:20).

covenantal ecology.[6] The Supper accounts contribute to my project in two ways. First, all of the accounts report that Jesus Christ understood his "blood" as having a connection with the covenant (Mk 14:24, Mt 26:28, Lk 22:20, I Cor 11:25), and I argue that Jesus Christ is the "form and content" of the covenant, i.e., he is the covenant in flesh. Second, the accounts also report that Jesus spoke of his body and blood in terms of bread and

[6] One can see the influence of these texts on Eucharistic thought and practice as early as the second century writings of Ignatius of Antioch. During the Reformation, their interpretation became one of the most significant areas of contention not only between Protestants and Catholics, but amongst various Protestants groups. While the scholarship on this subject is nearly inexhaustible, several recent accounts provide helpful summaries of the issues at stake. See, Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); ibid.; Esther Chung-Kim, *Inventing Authority: The Use of the Church Fathers in Reformation Debates over the Eucharist* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2011); Amy Nelson Burnett, "The Social History of Communion and the Reformation of the Eucharist," *Past & Present* 211, no. 1 (May 2011): 77–119. In twentieth century research, issues surrounding authorship and composition have been the subject of much debate; the historicity of events recorded in the accounts "has been denied as often as it has been affirmed." Tom Holmén, "Jesus, Judaism and the Covenant," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 2, no. 1 (January 2004): 5. For a review of affirmations and denials, see Ibid., 5 fn.12. Lynne Courter Boughton summarizes the debates over authorship and composition as one between two positions. One the one hand, scholars argue that Paul's account, which elides any discussion of the supper occurring during Passover, is a predecessor to the synoptic accounts. On the other, scholars argue that Paul's description of the Supper is based on older narratives or sayings first recorded in the synoptic gospels (although there is disagreement over whether Luke's description or Matthew/Mark's description most accurately preserves the event). Lynne Courter Boughton, "'Being Shed for You/Many' : Time-Sense and Consequences in the Synoptic Cup Citations," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 2 (N 1997): 254–279. Thurston points out that despite the widely held opinion that Paul's account was the earliest known literary account, others "have suggested that the Gospel of Mark with its Aramaisms may contain the more primitive account. Matthew is an expanded and more liturgical form of Mark. The Lukan text, called the "longer text," is in most manuscripts and is quite different from either Mark or Paul." Bonnie See also, Andrew Brian McGowan, "'Is There a Liturgical Text in This Gospel?' : The Institution Narratives and Their Early Interpretive Communities," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118, no. 1 (Spr 1999): 77 fn. 12. Billings claims that the Lukan text is virtually absent this discussion of which account is the earliest source given the widely held theory that 22:19b-20 are a "conflation of Mark and Paul imported into the third Gospel by a later scribe so as to harmonize the biblical accounts of the Last Supper." He argues that these verses were in fact part of the original Lukan text, but later redacted in the face of persecution in second-century Lyons engendered by charges of cannibalism against Christians. The removal of Jesus' instructions to partake in the bread as his body and the wine as his flesh would then be an attempt "to avoid any further politically dangerous or socially incapacitating allegation." Bradly S. Billings, "The Disputed Words in the Lukan Institution Narrative (Luke 22:19b-20): A Sociological Answer to a Textual Problem," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 509–510, 525. However Eldon Jay Epp argues convincingly against many of Billings' conclusions, opting for a more traditional understanding of the Lukan text. See Eldon Jay Epp, "The Disputed Words of the Eucharistic Institution (Luke 22,19b-20): The Long and Short of the Matter," *Biblica* 90, no. 3 (2009): 407–416. Kobus Petzer (following several other scholars) argues that the differences in style within the "long text" are the product of Luke's quotation of another source juxtaposed with his own original composition. J H. Petzer, "Style and Text in the Lucan Narrative of the Institution of the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19b-20)," *New Testament Studies* 37, no. 1 (Ja 1991): 113–129. The dissertation does not treat the issues of historicity, composition, or authorship, but it is important to note these issues motivate much of current scholarship surrounding these texts.

wine (Mk 14:22-23, Mt 26:26-27, Lk 22:17-19, I Cor 11:23-25). I employ "embedded" and "deep" understandings of the Incarnation to argue this analogy is an indication of Jesus' materiality. As both the covenant in flesh and a material Representative for all of creation, Jesus Christ unites creatures and the Creator in a covenantal ecology, creating an intimate relationship between the two that allows for the restoration of order throughout creation.

*5.2.1. The Covenant in Blood*

The accounts of the Last Supper situate the Jesus Christ's life and ministry within a larger covenantal framework and, when interpreted in light of Barth's description of Jesus Christ as the "form and content" of the covenant of grace, set forth his existence as the covenant in flesh. Within the Synoptic gospels, the account of the Last Supper "is for practical purposes the only direct use of *diathēkē* [covenant]."[7] Luke's usage is the most unique in the Synoptics, for (like Paul's description in 1 Cor 11:25) the Lukan account describes this covenant as *kainē diathēkē*, a "new" covenant.[8] While some interpret the Jesus' use of *kainē* as "a break with the Mosaic covenant"[9] and Jesus' interpretation of the covenant as an "original imprint" [10] of the Jewish understanding, it would seem, to the contrary, that Jesus' reference to a *kainē diathēkē* is a continuation of Old Testament covenantal thought. As scholars note, this reference to a new covenant recalls the

[7] Cooke, "Synoptic Presentation of the Eucharist as Covenant Sacrifice," 15.

[8] Boughton points out that while the Lukan and Corinthian accounts both contain the "new covenant" language, Paul omits references "to a pouring out to beneficiaries of that act." Boughton, "Being Shed for You/Many," 249.

[9] Cooke, "Synoptic Presentation of the Eucharist as Covenant Sacrifice," 34.

[10] Holmén, "Jesus, Judaism and the Covenant," 27.

eschatological prophecy of a "new covenant" in Jeremiah 31:31.[11] By recalling this text, Jesus casts his ministry not as a new innovation or as something operating in a sphere independent of God's dealings with Israel but, like the promises described in Jer. 31, as another sign of God's *continued* covenantal fidelity to Israel.[12]

While neither Mark nor Matthew refer to the covenant as "new" each has its unique way of exploring the significance of the Old Testament roots of the covenant in its respective Supper account. James R. Edwards argues that the placement of the Supper account in Mark's narrative between Jesus' predictions that he will be betrayed (vv. 18-21) and denied (vv. 27-31) serves to:

> contrast the faithlessness of Jesus' disciples to the covenant faithfulness of God…It is a familiar theme from the prophets. Where human faithfulness fails, God's covenantal love stands. We see substantially the same picture with Jesus praying alone in Gethsemane while the disciples sleep, dying alone on Calvary after the disciples have fled. God's salvific covenant depends on *his* faithfulness, and it stands in spite of the faithlessness of his people.[13]

Edwards is correct that God's fidelity to the covenant is – as my treatment of prophetic texts revealed – a "familiar theme" in the prophets. Particularly in my treatment of Hosea, it was demonstrated that despite humanity's unfaithfulness, God faithfully restores creation despite humanity's disobedience to the covenant. The Supper account in Luke echoes this claim of God's faithfulness in the face (quite literally) of followers who,

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[11] Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, "Ta Drōmena kai ta Legomena : The Eucharistic Memory of Jesus' Words in First Corinthians," *Harvard Theological Review* 90, no. 4 (O 1997): 368; Cooke, "Synoptic Presentation of the Eucharist as Covenant Sacrifice," 34; Phillip Camp, "The Lord's Supper as Sabbath Observance," *Restoration Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2009): 86, 91.

[12] Bonnie Bowman Thurston, "'Do This': A Study on the Institution of the Lord's Supper," *Restoration Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1988): 212.

[13] James R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives," *Novum Testamentum* 31, no. 3 (Jl 1989): 211. Edwards argues that the author of the Gospel of Mark intentionally inserts an unrelated story into what would otherwise be a continuous, united pericope in such a way that "*the middle story nearly always provides the key to the theological purpose* of the sandwich." Ibid., 196.

despite having every cause to reciprocate that fidelity, would act unfaithfully to God incarnate.

Jesus' connection to Israel as the covenanted people of God is a prominent theme running throughout the gospel of Matthew. As many commentators point out, there are numerous allusions made between Jesus and significant figures in Israel's history. Throughout the gospel, Jesus' ancestral connections to both Abraham[14] and David[15] are made explicit, and the events of his life echo those of Moses' own life.[16] These allusions establish Jesus as an heir to Abraham's blessing, a king in the line of David and a prophet in line with God's *tôrâh*, and also as the "climax" and "consummation" of God's dealings with Israel and creation.[17] In the gospel accounts, Jesus is definitively connected to God's covenant.

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[14] See, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 158; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 35. Leroy Andrew Huizenga argues that the descriptions of Jesus as the "son of Abraham" draw a parallel between Jesus' death on the cross as a parallel and the near-sacrifice of Isaac. Huizenga argues that this underexplored parallel is important because it helps solve "the dissonant conundrum of a dying Messiah, as the Messiah never undergoes martyrdom in any of the various contemporary Jewish portrayals." While it is important not to neglect this specific parallel, it must be interpreted within the broader meaning of "son of Abraham" as referring to a descendant of Abraham. Leroy Andrew Huizenga, "Matt 1:1: 'Son of Abraham' as Christological Category," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 30, no. 2 (December 2008): 105–110.

[15] Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 13; Larry Chouinard, "The Kingdom of God and the Pursuit of Justice in Matthew," *Restoration Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2003): 234. See also, Hare, *Matthew*, 34–35; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 157.

[16] John P. Meier, "Matthew 5:3-12," *Interpretation* 44, no. 3 (Jl 1990): 282. Many, including Meier, are quick to stress that this is a typology in which Jesus Christ (the antitype or archetype) gives a fuller expression to the life and prophetic activity of Moses (the type). See Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 52; Hare, *Matthew*, 34; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 157; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 487; Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 14; Lloyd Gaston, "Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles : The Setting of Matthew's Christology," *Interpretation* 29, no. 1 (Ja 1975): 38.

[17] Respectively, Gaston, "Messiah of Israel as teacher of the Gentiles," 28; Mogens Müller, "The Theological Interpretation of the Figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew : Some Principal Features in Matthean Christology," *New Testament Studies* 45, no. 2 (Ap 1999): 165.

Against this overarching covenantal narrative, Jesus' association of his blood with the wine presented at the Supper (Mk 14:24, Mt 26:28, Lk 22:20, I Cor 11:25) becomes an explicit indication that he is, as Barth states, the "form and content" of the covenant of grace, i.e., the covenant of grace finds its full expression in the person and work of Jesus Christ.[18] The gospel authors describe Jesus' blood as being related to the covenant: either "my blood of the covenant" (Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24) or "covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20, I Cor. 11:25).[19] This phrase has often been understood as a device that foreshadows his crucifixion and resurrection, but it also describes Jesus Christ's lived existence as the covenant in flesh. Bernard Cooke reasons:

> In Hebrew thought there is a very close relationship, almost an identity, between the blood and life; the life is in the blood; the blood carries that force that makes an animal live. Thus, the blood is for practical purposes identical with the soul, the *nepesh*… Jesus' use of the word "blood" at the Supper must be taken in a concrete sense as referring to Himself in His totality as a living being, but with the emphasis on the living force "within" Him."[20]

When Jesus refers to his "blood of the covenant" or "covenant in my blood," he casts God's covenant as something inseparable from his person, making him "the covenant presence of God with men."[21] In this Supper revelation, Jesus not only foreshadows the gift of salvation offered through the cross, but points to the gift of his lived existence for creation.[22] The covenant of grace is not simply something outside of Christ that he must effect and fulfill, but is constitutive of, and gives meaning to, his person and work.

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[18] Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/2: The Doctrine of God*, 157.

[19] While either translation will suffice in this dissertation, the latter might be interpreted as being more consonant with the idea of a lived out covenant in Jesus' life and ministry.

[20] Cooke, "Synoptic Presentation of the Eucharist as Covenant Sacrifice," 27–28.

[21] Ibid., 36.

[22] George Ossom-Batsa, "Bread for the Broken: Pragmatic Meaning of Mark 14:22-25,"

Given the gospel authors' treatment of the Incarnation within an overarching covenant framework and Jesus' embodiment as the covenant of grace, his life and ministry serve as the focus of investigation for God's covenant in the New Testament. In my treatment of Old Testament covenants, I argued that creation (human and nonhuman) was bound together with each other and God in those covenants. As I explain in the next section, Jesus' existence as both the covenant-in-flesh and a Representative of creation intensifies that connection.

### *5.2.2. Jesus' Deep, Imbedded Existence as Representative of Creation*

Jesus' comparisons between his body and bread as well as his blood and wine (Mk 14:22-23, Mt 26:26-27, Lk 22:17-19, I Cor 11:23-25) are declarations of his full materiality: one that represents all materiality. These comparisons at the Last Supper are often interpreted as foreshadowing Jesus' impending punishment and bloodshed on the cross.[23] This future-oriented understanding of the Supper is certainly an important

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*Neotestamentica* 40, no. 2 (2006): 245. Ossom-Batsa argues that in Mark, the use of direct speech emphasizes the text as important. He writes, "Twice we have και ειπεν introducing the words of Jesus; in v. 23, it introduces Jesus' explicative words over the bread, and in v. 24, it introduces his explicative word over the cup, and the eschatological prediction in v. 25…By reporting the words of Jesus in direct speech, the narrator makes them stand out uniquely as when they were first spoken." Ossom adds that the use of the introductory "Truly I say to you…" in Mark 14:25 is another way to add emphasis to Jesus' speech.

[23] There are several types of argumentation for this reading. One example is Lynne C. Boughton's investigation of the participle "ἐκχυννόμενον" (poured out). Despite the use of a present-tense main verb in the synoptic texts, Boughton argues that "In classical and biblical Greek, a participle's time-sense is established by context rather than by tense." Understanding the Supper to initiate an act that is completed upon the cross, Boughton argues that the "The contextual suggestion that those present were to drink from 'this' the offered cup, not from their own cups, excludes simultaneity or unison, and indicates that the pouring out is not consumption of the cup's content but a future event…"Boughton, "Being Shed for You/Many," 259–260. However, this future-oriented context is more assumed than proven. While Jesus' crucifixion is surely the most significant account of his bloodshed, it might be argued that the bloodshed to which he references is that which he experienced in the course of a fully human life. Peter Lampe, reading the Supper account in I Cor. 11, argues that "The cup or the wine is *not* equated with Christ's blood. The cup signifies the new *covenant* that was established *because* of Christ's blood on the cross. In a similar way, the expression 'This is my body for you' does not necessarily refer to the bread. It is also possible that the demonstrative pronoun "this" picks up on the liturgical act of blessing and breaking the bread (11:24): This act signifies "my body (broken) for you"; this act points to Jesus' body on the cross and to his death on the

interpretive key to understanding Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection, but focusing on *only* this aspect can reduce the Supper to an "introduction to the whole of the passion story" to the detriment of the rest of the gospel accounts.[24] Instead, I offer a more comprehensive interpretation that applies to the whole of Jesus' incarnate existence.

While there is not an exact *identification* made between his body and bread and his blood and wine, there is an *analogical relationship* between these aspects of the created order. His body, like bread and wine, comes into being "not by destroying or replacing what is already there…but by elevating the old into the new."[25] Jesus does not come as an avatar or spiritual entity, but is born a human being; likewise, the meal he celebrates with his disciples is not comprised of ambrosial, spiritual fare, but commonplace bread and wine. The Incarnation and Supper both conform to what is already materially present in creation and, when cast in the new light of God's incarnate presence, are elevated into a new reality. Jesus Christ's words at the table point to his

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cross. The formulation *"do* this in remembrance of me" (11:24) supports the reading that, not the element of the bread, but the liturgical *act* of blessing and breaking the bread is what is interpreted in 11:24." Lampe, "The Eucharist," 43. While there is much to Lampe's interpretation, the type of parallelism Lampe bases his argument on is not consistent throughout the text. Unlike the Synoptic accounts, Paul does not include the language of the "pouring out" of blood; in Paul's account, Jesus simply presents the cup and wine. Therefore, if the text is focused on the future crucifixion, instead of unbroken body of Christ present at the Supper as Lampe argues, then the mere *presentation* of the cup would have to represent the shedding of Christ's blood for there to be a proper parallelism. While Lampe's argument cannot be defeated by this one observation, it does question his justification for his future-oriented interpretation of the significance of the Supper. Others focus on use of the terms "blood" and "covenant." It is argued that Jesus is making an allusion to the practice of sacrificing animals on the altar in Ex. 24:4-8. Thurston, for example argues that in both the case of the sacrificial animal and Jesus, "Blood indicated a life given up in death, which was the penalty for breaking the covenant." Thurston, "Do This," 212. Both John Paul Heil and Lynne C. Boughton specifically point to the sprinkling of blood on those present (Ex. 24:8) as resonant with the concept of "pouring out" of Jesus' blood in the Synoptics. Heil argues further that this reference to Exodus 24: 4-8 in Mark becomes even more significant against the backdrop of the Passover and Jesus' inauguration of a "new sacrificial meal" in no way dependent upon the "damned temple." John Paul Heil, "The Narrative Strategy and Pragmatics of the Temple Theme in Mark," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1997): 94–95. Boughton, "Being Shed for You/Many," 266.

[24] Ossom-Batsa, "Bread for the Broken," 243.

[25] Rudolf B. Brun, "Cosmology, Cosmic Evolution, and Sacramental Reality: A Christian Contribution," *Zygon* 37, no. 1 (Mr 2002): 188.

creaturely existence, and "deep" and "embedded" Christologies further elucidate that existence and in what sense Jesus can be said to be a "Representative of all creation" who transforms and fulfills creation.[26]

*Jesus' Embedded Existence*. Jesus of Nazareth, like all other humans, lived an embedded existence, which in his case was as a "man consciously embedded in his rural environment" who was affected by his natural and cultural context throughout his ministry.[27] Jesus was embedded in his first-century Palestinian context, and therefore interacted with his agrarian landscape, his own Judaism, and the Roman government. The bread broken at the supper in many ways symbolizes his embeddedness. As Franz Segbers notes, "Jesus used food produced by human labour, not berries plucked from the trees. Someone has sown, milled, kneaded, baked…the bread that the Lord blesses."[28] The bread - and the wine should also be included - is produced through the labor of his contemporaries, and thinking further about the process of milling of the grain (Dt. 25:4; I Tim. 5:18) it should also be added through the efforts of a domesticated animal native to his time. Human and natural forces play a part in making the bread and wine, and Jesus'

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[26] Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/1: The Doctrine of Creation*, 97.

[27] Bauckham, "Reading the Synoptic Gospels Ecologically," 71. For a list of the animal and plant references in Jesus' teachings, see Ibid., 73. Edward P. Echlin provides a valuable contribution towards this embedded approach by focusing on the both flora and fauna of first century Palestine that comprised Jesus Christ's natural context. Edward P. Echlin, "Jesus and the Earth Community," *Ecotheology*, no. 2 (Ja 1997): 31–47; Edward P. Echlin, *Earth Spirituality: Jesus at the Centre* (New Alresford: A. James, 1999), 53–70. See also Freyne, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean*, 24–59. Unlike Echlin, the dissertation does not take into account the inability the "piece together" the "*real*" or "historical" Jesus. Echlin, "Jesus and the Earth Community," 33. It will simply look to, as Jeanne Kay Guelke describes it, "the Jesus of the familiar Gospel stories, who walked by the Sea of Galilee, performed miracles, gathered disciples, and preached a moral code." Guelke, "Looking for Jesus in Christian Environmental Ethics," 116.

[28] Franz Segbers, "A Transformative Eucharistic Vision for the Entire Oikoumene," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9, no. 2 (May 2009): 145. Segbers points out that bread is a particularly poignant expression of the Incarnation, for "Bread, the biblical 'food', is at the same time the most material, most bodily and most spiritual thing in Christian spirituality." Ibid., 140.

life is no different. As the gospel accounts reveal, Jesus, a Galilean Jew, "participated in" and was "affected by the everyday experiences of life as lived in the region."[29] As Katherine Tanner notes:

> The humanity of Jesus is therefore not perfected from the first as an immediate consequence of the incarnation, making Jesus' struggles and sufferings something he merely decides to go along with (a merely 'economic' matter, as patristic theologians would say) for the benefit of others who do struggle and suffer at the mercy of a kingdom of sin and death…Jesus does not overcome temptation until he is tempted, does not overcome fear of death until he feels it…does not conquer sin until he assumes or bears the sin of others by suffering death at their hands."[30]

Jesus Christ experiences the struggle, temptation, death, and sin of a fallen creation. To say that Jesus is a Representative of creation is to say, in part, that just like the rest of creation, Jesus lived an embedded existence in which he acted and was acted upon by human and nonhuman creation.

*A "Deep" Incarnation.* Jesus Christ was embedded not only in first-century Palestine, but "in evolutionary history."[31] As Niels Henrik Gregersen points out, becoming incarnate in a body formed by the evolutionary process furthers "deepens" Jesus' representation of creation. To describe the Incarnation as "deep" means, "God assumed not only the body of a particular human person: Jesus from Nazareth. God also assumed a humanity and a vital and fragile body susceptible to decay and death. God

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[29] Seán Freyne, "The Galilean Jesus and a Contemporary Christology," *Theological Studies* 70, no. 2 (June 2009): 285.

[30] Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 28.

[31] J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, "Post-Foundationalism and Human Uniqueness: A Reply to Responses," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 27, no. 1 (March 2011): 80.

even united Godself with a human person. . . "[32] Gregersen also describes "deep" incarnation in this way:

> the divine Logos, in the process of incarnation, unites itself with the very basic physical stuff. In other words, the flesh that is assumed in Jesus Christ is not only the man Jesus but also the entire realm of humanity, animality, plant life, and soil…[33]

Jesus Christ is the Representative of creation not only in the sense that affected and was affected by his environment, but in the sense that he is made, as Elizabeth A. Johnson states, of the same "very basic physical stuff" that comprises all of the components of the physical universe. She explains this "stuff" in greater detail:

> Jesus of Nazareth was an earthling, a complex unit of minerals and fluids, an item in the carbon, oxygen and nitrogen cycles, a moment in the biological evolution of this planet. The atoms comprising his body once belonged to other creatures. The genetic structure of his cells made him part of the whole community of life that descended from common ancestors in the ancient seas. The *sarx* of Jn 1:14 thus reaches beyond Jesus, and beyond all other human beings, to encompass the whole biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which they are composed.[34]

When "the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us" it did so in a human body that was the result of evolutionary factors and comprised of the basic elements necessary for life. In the Incarnation, the Word of God enters as a participant into the processes that he, as the creating Word, initiated, and in that way comes to represent this creation.

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[32] Niels Henrik Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," *Dialog* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 205.

[33] Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation: Why Evolutionary Continuity Matters in Christology," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 26, no. 2 (2010): 182. Drawing upon this idea, Denis Edwards describes Jesus Christ's body as one that "includes the whole interconnected world of fleshly life and, in some way, includes the whole universe to which flesh is related and on which it depends." Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 58.

[34] Johnson, "An Earthy Christology," 30. Italics added.

*5.2.3. Conclusion: Christ, Enfleshed Covenant and Representative*

A covenantal ecology is a covenantally initiated and maintained relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. While the previous chapter focused on the role of Creator and creatures in various covenants (*bĕrît*), this chapter focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who in the New Testament Last Supper accounts is revealed as both the incarnate covenant of grace and the Representative of all creation. Gregersen summarizes the significance of the union of these two in Jesus Christ for a covenantal ecology:

> Incarnation signifies God's coming-into-flesh, so that *God the creator and the world of creation are conjoined in Jesus Christ*. God links up with all vulnerable creatures, with the sparrows in their flight as well as in their fall (see Matt 10:29), indeed, with all the grass that comes into being one day and ceases to exist the next day. *In Christ, God is conjoining all creatures and enters into the biological tissue of creation itself in order to share the fate of biological existence.*"[35]

Jesus Christ deepens the relationship between Creator and creatures by binding them together in himself. Jesus Christ renews and restores relationships throughout creation by uniting creation and the Creator in a new way: in the person and work of who exists as both the covenant in flesh and the Representative of creation. Creator and creature are bound together in the Incarnation as God takes unto Godself the finitude and frailty of creation and "the whole of creation is awakened and called and enabled to participate in the being of God."[36] God's covenants with Israel created a covenantal ecology between God, humanity and nonhuman creation, but in Jesus Christ a covenantal ecology is achieved through a flesh and blood union. In the next section, I offer Matthew 5:3-20 as

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[35] Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation," 182. Italics added. See also, Ibid., 184; Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ," 205.

[36] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1: The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 670.

but one example of how this union further deepens the covenantal bonds between God, humans, and nonhuman creatures.

### *5.3. The Restoration of Right Order in Jesus' Ministry*

The gospel of Matthew presents a unique christological perspective that further illuminates a covenantal ecology, and in particular how Jesus, as the covenant in flesh, begins the restoration of God's cosmic covenant to a proper order.[37] Matthew's Christology has historically been constructed from the author's use of certain titles (e.g., King, Son of Man, Emmanuel, etc.) to describe Jesus of Nazareth, but this approach has neglected Matthew's narrative description of the person and work of Jesus Christ.[38] However, this dissertation follows other contemporary scholars who look to Matthew's narrative as a source of christological reflection.[39] Mogens Müller describes this as an "indirect Christology," i.e., "the constructing of the theological impact of Jesus in the

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[37] This dissertation follows the majority of scholars who understand the Gospel of Matthew to be of Syrian origin penned in the last quarter of the first century. For discussions, see Gaston, "Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles," 27. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 58, 138, 146. Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 3; Hare, *Matthew*, 3. For a concise chart outlining the variety of opinion on authorship, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 10–11. While R.T. France does accept its Syrian provenance, he does not accept the conventional dating of the text, arguing that the Jewish Christian identity of the author could very well include Matthew, Jesus' disciple. He favors a date in the sixties. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 16–18.

[38] M. Eugene Boring, "Matthew's Narrative Christology: Three Stories," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 64, no. 4 (October 2010): 359.

[39] Ronald F. Thiemann, "Matthew's Christology : A Resource for Systematic Theology," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 4, no. 6 (D 1977): 350–362; Boring, "Matthew's Narrative Christology"; Müller, "The Theological Interpretation of the Figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew"; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 5; Warren Carter, "Narrative/Literary Approaches to Matthean Theology : The 'Reign of the Heavens' as an Example (Mt 4.17-5.12)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 67 (S 1997): 3–27. Boring argues that it is more profitable, even for advocates for the titular approach, to situate these titles within the greater narrative. For example, "There is an obvious focus on royal titles: Christ, king, and son of David are clearly in this category, and both Son of God and Son of Man have royal overtones elaborated in Matthew's narrative." Boring, "Matthew's Narrative Christology," 359. Boring details these confirmations in Ibid., 363–367.

way of telling his story."[40] The following examines the indirect Christology engendered by reading together literary units which, despite neighboring one another, are rarely treated together: Matthew 5:3-16 and vv. 17-20.[41]

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[40] Müller, "The Theological Interpretation of the Figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew," 157.

[41] The paring of these two sections of material does not follow the prevailing division of texts; vv.17-20 are typically isolated from vv.1-16, and instead treated as a subunit that prefaces vv.21-48, verses known as the 'antitheses' in which Jesus treats six specific examples of he law. R.T. France, for example notes that when interpreted together, vv. 17-48 comprise a "concentrated section of teaching on a single theme, the fulfillment of the law." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 177. Luz considers the references to "the Law and the prophets" in vv. 5:20, 7:12 to form what he calls an "*inclusion*." See also , Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 39; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 51; Hare, *Matthew*, 47; Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 51; Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 23–26; Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 181; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, viii; Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51. Talbert describes 5:17-20 as a "control" on the way the 5:21-48 is to be read. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 59. Allison describes it as a "hermeneutical key" for the antitheses. Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 1999), 8. Similarly, Garland describes v.17-20 as the "Key for unlocking meaning of the law and the prophets." Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 62. However, there are three reasons to interpret vv. 3-16 and vv.17-20 as one unit. First, scholars acknowledge that outside of a general narrative flow in the gospel, there is nothing within the text that necessitates the prevailing bifurcation between vv.3-16, 17-20. Any outline of the gospel is "thus imposed by the interpreter, not dictated by the author, and is therefore open to discussion as to whether it truly represents the intended shape of the narrative." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2. See also, Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 21; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 49; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 72. Second, there are three links between the two units of text. R.T. France, for example, argues that vv.13-16 comprise a "transitional passage in which the speaker moves from the life of the blessed future, promised in 5:3-12, to the demands of life in the present, outlined in 5:17-7:12." France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 178–179. Georg Strecker argues that, "The transition from verse 16 to verse 17 is easily achieved. The demand for good works (v. 16) is nothing other than the obligation to the 'law and the prophets,' which Jesus does not want to abolish but to fulfill." Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 53. Verse sixteen's command to "let your light shine" is, in Strecker's interpretation, Jesus' way of commanding his disciples to act in accordance with the "law and prophets" mentioned in the following verse. Finally, Dale C. Allison, reading 5:3-48 as one speech given by Jesus, argues that the holding together the Beatitudes and the antitheses with the intervening verses is a rhetorical strategy used to prepare the audience for the demands that will follows. He claims, "Before delivering his hard imperatives, Matthew's Jesus first encourages and consoles the faithful." Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 178. Allison describes vv.13-16 as "the general heading for what follows…the main body of imperatives." Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 44. Allison describes 5:17-19 as a *prokatalepsis*, or *pre*-buttal, that anticipates the incorrect objections to Jesus' description of the law's requirements in vv.21-48. Verse twenty, he argues, is an announcement of the theme of vv.21-48, "the greater righteousness." Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 181. While I agree with Allison that these verses center around a discussion of law and righteousness, there is no reason to read vv.13-20 as a preface to vv.21-48 at the exclusion of reading them as concluding thoughts on the Beatitudes, particularly given vv.13-16 connection to vv.3-12. Third, there is a thematic relationship between the Beatitudes (vv.3-16) and vv. 17-20. The Beatitudes speak of *dikaiosunē* in vv.6, 10, and in v.20, one finds Jesus making a call for a higher righteousness *dikaiosunē*. This connection and others lead Betz and Carter to understand the Beatitudes as structured around *dikaiosunē*.

I argue that when these units are read together, they reveal how Jesus Christ rectifies disorder throughout creation, and consequently initiates the eschatological fulfillment of a covenantal ecology. Verses 3-20 will not be treated in their entirety, but with an eye towards themes resonant with those discussed in the preceding chapter. I first examine what is meant in Jesus' claim that he has come to "fulfill" the "law and prophets" in vv.17-20. I argue this claim means that Jesus fulfills the Hebrew Scriptures and consequently renews the covenantal ecology they describe. Then, turning to the Beatitudes in vv. 3-16, I examine Jesus' proclamations that the poor in spirit, meek and mourning are blessed, and expound their connection to the earth and kingdom of heaven. I argue that Jesus is setting forth his vision of a restored social and created order, and consequently, of a fulfilled covenantal ecology. Finally, I continue the exploration of the cosmic dimensions of "rightness" (Hbr., *ṣedeq*; Grk.; *dikaiosunē*) begun in the preceding chapter. I argue that Jesus' blessing of those who hunger and thirst for rightness, and especially for a surpassing rightness, is a call to his followers to pursue the fulfillment of a covenantal ecology that he initiates in his incarnate ministry by living in covenantal relationship with God and creation.

### *5.3.1.The Fulfillment of the Law and Prophets*

As both the covenant-in-flesh and Representative of creation, Jesus Christ initiates the restoration of a covenantal ecology, which Matthew 5:17 describes as the

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Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 142; Carter, "Narrative/Literary Approaches to Matthean Theology," 25. While it is rightly argued that the higher *dikaiosunē* of v.20 is more fully described in v. 21-48, the Beatitudes' reflections on *dikaiosunē* should also be brought to bear on this larger discussion. Indeed, if the placement of vv.17-20 between the Beatitudes and antitheses is the intentional move of a later redactor, the necessity of reading the verses concerning *dikaiosune* together becomes necessary if the term is to be more fully understood. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 162. Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 53. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 179. This thematic link, along with the structural and rhetorical markers described above make the interpretation of vv.3-16 in light of vv.17-20 possible, and as shall be shown below, profitable towards further establishing the christological dimensions of a covenantal ecology.

"fulfillment" of the "law and prophets." The phrase "law and prophets" describes the Hebrew Scriptures.[42] Various interpreters have focused on different aspects of the Hebrew Scriptures as the object of fulfillment: prophecy[43], the law[44], the covenant[45], and God's will and purpose.[46] However, as I showed in the preceding chapter, all of these genres attest to a covenantal ecology that maintains the relationships between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. Therefore, I understand Jesus as the one who fulfills a covenantal ecology as he fulfills the Hebrew Scriptures.

What, then, does it mean that Jesus has come not to abolish[47] (*kataluō*), but to fulfill (*plēroō*) the Hebrew Scriptures and a covenantal ecology? With sixteen

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[42] Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 138;Warren Carter, "Jesus' 'I Have Come' Statements in Matthew's Gospel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Ja 1998): 53. Carter notes vv. 1:22; 2:15,17,23; 3:15; 4:14 as examples of *plērōsai* as referring to the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

[43] Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 486.

[44] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 183; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 63.

[45] J Daryl Charles, "The Greatest or the Least in the Kingdom : The Disciple's Relationship to the Law (Matt 5:17-20)," *Trinity Journal* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 145–148.

[46] Carter, "Jesus' 'I Have Come' Statements in Matthew's Gospel," 53.

[47] As Betz points out, the accusation that Jesus would attempt to abolish (*kataluō*) the law and prophets would have been a serious accusation in both Jewish and Greek worlds, "for it amounted to nothing less than being branded a heretic and an apostate." Hans Dieter Betz, "The Hermeneutical Principles of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-20)," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 42 (Mr 1983): 21. The accusation that Jesus had come to abolish the law and prophets then would be tantamount to an accusation that his mission was to raze Judaism to the ground and incite lawlessness, or as Talbert states, to begin "rescinding of the whole web of traditional observance." Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 60. Talbert claims that this use of the term is consonant with its use in Maccabees. Viljoen expresses the magnitude of the destruction described here in his observation that outside of this occurrence in the Beatitudes, *kataluō* is only used in Matthew in reference to the destruction of the Temple (Mt. 24:2, 26:61, 27:49). Francois P. Viljoen, "Jesus' Teaching on the Torah in the Sermon on the Mount," *Neotestamentica* 40, no. 1 (2006): 140 fn.5. See also Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 178–179; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 484; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 181; Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 137; Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 53; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 177; Carter, "Jesus' 'I Have Come' Statements in Matthew's Gospel," 51. This explains Jesus' imperative "Do not think" to begin his rebuttal. This construct was a rhetorical convention used at the time to combat false opinions. See, Hans Dieter Betz, "The Hermeneutical Principles of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-20)," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 42 (Mr 1983): 19; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 174; Charles, "The Greatest or the Least in the Kingdom," 147; Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 60; Davies and

occurrences in the gospel – many of them used at key points in Matthew's narrative - "fulfillment" is a key concept for the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7), Matthew's gospel as a whole and to the construction of a covenantal ecology.[48] Juxtaposed with the notion that he has come to raze or destroy (*kataluō*) Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus fulfills them as he restores corrupted relationships between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation, i.e., as he lives out and establishes a renewed covenantal ecology.[49] In the ensuing investigation of the Beatitudes I describe how Jesus' incarnate ministry fulfills a covenantal ecology. Specifically, I argue that Jesus' teachings in Matthew's Beatitudes describe and initiate the restoration of a covenantal ecology, which Jesus' disciples are then called to continue.

### *5.3.2. The Restoration of Human and Nonhuman Creation*

In Matthew 5: 3-16, Jesus speaks of a world in which the marginalized and oppressed (human and nonhuman) are restored. In this section, I argue this restoration begins as Jesus "fulfills" the "law and prophets" and renews a world corrupted by

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Allison, *Matthew*, 483. Betz points out that in Greek religion the term describes "a specifically theological or even dogmatic activity." Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 174.

[48] For examples, see Warren Carter, "Some Contemporary Scholarship on the Sermon on the Mount," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 4 (October 1996): 203–204. In addition to the works mentioned by Carter, see also, Gaston, "Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles," 33; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 10–12; Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 27.

[49] Some have argued that fulfillment occurs through his healing ministry of compassion and obedience to God's will. See Harvey Lange, "Greater Righteousness : Theological Reflections on Matthew 5:17-20," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 5, no. 2 (Ap 1978): 116. Charles H. Talbert, "Matthew and Character Formation," *Expository Times* 121, no. 2 (November 2009): 58. Mogens Müller, "Bundesideologie Im Matthäusevangelium. Die Vorstellung Vom Neuen Bund Als Grundlage Der Matthäischen Gesetzesverkündigung," *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 1 (January 2012): 38–39. Müller, "The Theological Interpretation of the Figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew," 173.Robert A. Hawkins, "Covenant Relations of the Sermon on the Mount," *Restoration Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1969): 3. One reason for this connection to Old Testament prophecy is, as Davies and Allison point out, the verb *plēroō* occurs 16 times in Matthew, 13 of which are in connection to prophets or prophecy. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 326–327, 467. Others argue that fulfillment occurs through Jesus' teachings, particularly those on the law in vv.17-48, as a "hermeneutical key" that unlocks the full meaning of the law. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 61; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 62; Viljoen, "Jesus' Teaching," 147, 149; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 487.

injustice. In the previous chapter, I argued that concern for those suffering from injustice- both human and nonhuman - was a fundamental aspect of a covenantal ecology. Jesus expresses this concern in Matthew 5:3-5, the beginning of the Matthean Beatitudes[50]:

> Blessed are the poor in spirit (*ptōxoi tō pneumati*), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
> Blessed are those who mourn (*penthountes)*, for they will be comforted.
> Blessed are the meek (*praeis*), for they will inherit the earth (*gēn*).”[51]

In what follows, I establish the identity of the *ptōxoi*, *penthountes*, and *praeis* and their relationship to the *gēn.* I do this in conversation with prevailing spiritualized versions of this text and argue that Jesus blesses these groups by addressing their spiritual and physical needs, thus restoring relationships between God, humanity and nonhuman creation and initiating the renewal of a covenantal ecology between them.

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[50] The *makarism* (Gk. *makarios*, blessed, happy, fortunate) is attested in both Greek and Hebrew writings that predate the gospel’s usage. Within the New Testament itself, the term *makarios* is used in over forty times, nine of which occur in the Beatitudes in Matthew. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 434. Meier lays out the basic form of a beatitude, which Matthew follows: “(1) an initial declaration that someone is happy; (2) an adjective, participle, or relative clause, usually in the third person, that describes the behavior or attitudes of the happy individual and so implicitly defines what makes for true happiness; (3) a promise, sometimes introduced by "for," that proclaims the rewards sure to attend such behavior and attitudes.” Meier, “Matthew 5,” 282. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 434. However, Greek and Jewish makarisms were used in similar, but not identical, ways. The Homeric, Greek makarism “was used to describe the immortals of Mount Olympus, but it gradually came to be used more commonly in secular ways.” Hare, *Matthew*, 35. Therefore, Greek makarisms came to describe the “happy” as those who “possessed the things that were thought to make for happiness.” Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 53. Makarisms found in Jewish Scripture could be used to describe the blessedness of God (e.g., Gen. 30:13) and human beings (e.g., Prov. 3:13). Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 41. However, the blessed in Jewish Beatitudes were those in right relationship with God and who exhibited noteworthy piety. Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 53; Hare, *Matthew*, 36. For more detailed discussion of the characteristics and development of Jewish and Greek makarisms, see Neil J. McEleney, “The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount/Plain,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (Ja 1981): 1–13; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 97–105; James W. Thompson, “The Background and Function of the Beatitudes in Matthew and Luke,” *Restoration Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1999): 109–116.

[51] Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 111. This is the only place in the New Testament “poor in spirit” is used, leading Davies and Allison to understand this as an addition by a redactor. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 442. There are two reasons the terms *ptōxoi* and *praeis* should be grouped together. First, these two groups are considered “virtual synonyms” given their common Hebrew root *nāwām*. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 51. See also, Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 81. Second, as Dale Allison argues, the structural similarities between 5:3 and 5:5 also point to grouping the “poor and spirit” and “meek” together. Allison notes how the groups can be interchanged, given the resonance between the notions of the eschatological “earth” and the “kingdom of heaven”. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 47.

Matthew 5:3-6 draws upon Isaiah 61:1-7, a text in the Septuagint where *ptōxos* and *penthountes* describe those in physical need of redemption from active political oppression. Ironically, Matthew has been spiritualized to the to the extent that the concrete relief promised in Isaiah has been occluded.[52] The "kingdom of heaven" (v.3) and the "land" (*gēn*; v.5), which Jesus claims belongs to the poor and spirit and the meek, are also spiritualized.[53] Even read outside of the context of Isaiah 61:1-7, the spiritualization of these terms is odd due to the dire situation faced by the *ptōxoi and the gēn* in first-century Palestine. The *ptōxoi* were a large socio-economic group who lacked "all or some of the goods necessary to achieve subsistence (food, clothing, dwelling)."[54]

The oppression of this class in Galilee cannot be reduced to individual causes, but two factors, both driven by manipulation of the land (*gēn*), were significant contributors. First, Ekkehard and Wolfgang Stegemann argue the oppression of the *ptōxoi* was caused, in part, by the concentration of farmland into the hands of the elite. The economy of the day was largely agrarian, and advances in technology made the use of human and animal

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[52]Scholars have described the *ptōxoi tō pneumati* in Matthew 5:3 as: "the broken hearted, the captives, those bound" and "the people with low self-esteem, those who are humble." The *penthountes* are described as "those brokenhearted over their situation" and as "an expression of the intense sense of loss, helplessness, and despair." Similarly he meek are described as "those who stand empty-handed before God in total dependence upon him." Respectively: Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 50; Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 32; Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 82. These descriptions all treat the terms as existential and spiritual disorder, but nowhere mention the physical oppression that leads to them.

[53] Robert Foster, for example, claims that Matthew uses kingdom of heaven language to "reaffirm to Jesus' disciples that their identity, affirmation, and goal were in heaven and not on earth." Robert Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven'? Matthew's Terminology Revisited," *New Testament Studies* 48, no. 4 (O 2002): 490. Douglas Hare claims, "'inherit the earth' should *not* be taken literally and is synonymous with 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'" Hare, *Matthew*, 39. Italics added. See also, Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 52; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 56; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 450; Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 51; Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 81; Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 36.

[54] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Fortress Press, 2001), 71.

power more efficiently, making for more productive land. However, those at the highest socio-economic levels were acquiring individual farms, and as "more and more small farmers lost their property; free farmers became dependent tenants."[55] As tenants, they did not benefit from these increased crop yields and instead struggled to survive surrounded by productive land. A second factor was the rebuilding of the town of Sepphoris, an area covered in Jesus' itinerant ministry in lower Galilee. The lifestyle of the urban wealthy in Sepphoris pressured local natural resources, especially water, putting "extra pressure on the traditional way of life of the peasant land-owners in the villages in its immediate vicinity," and driving many into "penury and brigandage."[56] The monopolization of land and the over-consumption of water by the wealthy caused those dependent upon them to lack basic necessities, creating a need – similar to those described in Isaiah 61 – for relief from physical oppression.

As Warren Carter warns, treating Matthew 5:3-5 in "other-worldly…and future-oriented dimensions" neglects the present and concrete concerns Jesus Christ addresses in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' blessings must be interpreted in light of "the oppressive context of empire with its use of political, military, economic, social, legal and religious means to secure the 'peace and security' of the elites at the expense of the suppressed" of the day.[57] Jesus' blessings of the poor in spirit and meek (*ptōxoi tō pneumati* and *praeis*)

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[55] Ibid., 43. See also, Ibid., 11, 21, 42, 85, 104. Stegemann points to various factors that led to the dire economic situation endured by many in first century Palestine, writing, "The vast majority of the rural populace in antiquity lived on the fine line between hunger and assurance of substance. The reasons for this are to be found in fields that, on average, were much too small, the catastrophic consequence of crop failures, and above all in the overtaxation [state and religious] and overindebtedness of small farmers." Ibid., 51.

[56] Freyne, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean*, 45–47.

[57] Carter, "Narrative/Literary Approaches to Matthean Theology," 15, 17. In the genealogy (1:1-17), he finds a focus on God's activity in Israel's history, and in 1:18-25, an understanding of Jesus as the

were for those experiencing spiritual or existential distress, but this distress was due to the looming, real-world "prospect of being reduced to conditions of impoverishment, hunger and mourning…"[58]

Matthew 5:3-5 also blesses those who mourn (*penthountes*). As I demonstrated in my treatment of Isa. 24:1-7 and Hos. 4:1-3 "mourning" (Hbr., *ʾābal; Grk., penthountes*) is not something restricted to only human beings. In many prophetic texts, the earth is described as "mourning," or "turned to barren wilderness because of the acts of its inhabitants."[59] This barrenness brought desolation for its inhabitants, human and non-human. Using Fréyne's example of the environmental pressures perpetuated by the urbanites of Sepphoris, particularly the stress placed on water, it is not difficult to imagine what this mourning would look like: dry agricultural land and wilderness and its inhabitants (human and nonhuman) suffering from that loss. Those who mourn (*penthountes*) would therefore include the earth (*gēn*), poor (*ptōxoi*) and meek (*praeis*).

The world that Jesus knew was one in which creation was oppressed by those in power, but his ministry and blessing of *ptōxoi, praeis* and *penthountes* marks an end to their marginalization and oppression and a beginning to the restoration of a covenantal ecology. Mark Allan Powell writes:

> dispossessed people are now regarded as blessed because they are going to receive what they have had coming to them all along. The reference to [land],

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embodiment of that activity that "resists Herod's oppressive, death-inducing, political system" and the *Pax Romana*. On the mount, then: "Through Jesus' words, the reign [of God] invades the everyday social and economic world." Ibid., 19–21. See also, Wolfgang Stegemann, "The Contextual Ethics of Jesus," in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2002), 52.

[58] Freyne, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean*, 45–47. It is good to remember here, as Stegemann points out that "The ethos of Jesus arose in a real-life context," with part of the context being the economic injustices present in first-century Palestine. Stegemann, "The Contextual Ethics of Jesus," 52.

[59] Hayes, *The Earth Mourns*, 2.

> furthermore, helps to identify just what the *praeis* are envisioned as lacking. This time, it is something more worldly than hope or joy. The *praeis* are those who have not been given their share of the earth. They have been denied access to the world's resources and have not had opportunity to enjoy the creation that God intended for all people.[60]

Life at the margins has disallowed many from proper access to the bounty of God's creation, while those in the center reap a greater share. The social and natural orders have been corrupted, alienating the *ptōxoi* and *praeis* from the earth, and creating *penthountes* throughout creation. Jesus Christ's blessing refutes this corruption, and is a declaration that it will cease in the already-present Kingdom of Heaven.[61]

Jonathan T. Pennington argues that the significance of Jesus' beatitudinal promises to the oppressed can only be fully appreciated within the Jewish understanding of land. The land is repeatedly the sign of God's fidelity to Israel, and now "this promise is made to all those who align themselves with Jesus."[62] The *ptōxoi* and *praeis* are blessed in the here and now not only with the promise of an ultimate reversal of injustice but by the ministry of Jesus Christ, i.e., the breaking in of the Kingdom of Heaven that is already at work setting a just order throughout creation. As injustice is addressed, disordered relationships between the social elite and the downtrodden are made right.

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[60] Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes : Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (Jl 1996): 467. See also, Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 128–129.

[61] Talbert argues that in the Gospel of Matthew, the kingdom of heaven is used in two ways: with "a passive connotation and future tense" (e.g., 5:20 8:11, 26:29, etc.) and "an active connotation and present tense" (e.g. 12:28). Therefore, Talbert argues "*kingdom of heaven* stands for both the ultimate blessing and for the activity of God that causes that blessing to come." Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 50–51. Davies and Allison interpret "is" as a futuristic or proleptic present "expressing vividness and confidence…But perhaps the present also hints at the fact that the kingdom is already in some sense present (see on 4.17) and therefore a blessing enjoyed even now." Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 446. See also, Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 79, 100; Hare, *Matthew*, 37; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 119; Robert L. Brawley, "Homeless in Galilee," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 67, no. 1 (2011): 5.

[62] Jonathan T. Pennington, "Heaven, Earth, and a New Genesis: Theological Cosmology in Matthew," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 30.

Finally, as the economic oppression and disorder perpetuated by environmental manipulation is undone, comfort is provided not only for the humans that mourn, but also for the rest of creation that mourns with them. Jesus' vision of the Kingdom, like that of a covenantal ecology, is one in which relationships between human beings, between humans and nonhuman creation, and finally between creation and Creator are brought to flourishing. In the Beatitudes, Jesus begins this transformation by acknowledging disorder exists throughout creation and beginning its transformation through his teaching.

### *5.3.3.The Call to "Rightness"*

The poor, meek, and mourning represent all of creation physically and spiritually suffering under an unjust order, but Jesus' ministry initiates their liberation and transformation, and he calls his followers to adopt and advance this "rightness"[63] (Hbr., *ṣedeq*; Grk., *dikaiosunē*) in their own lives (Mt 5:6, 20). As I argued in the preceding chapter, "rightness" pervades the cosmos and rightly orders all of creation, and it is this order to which his followers must conform.[64] When people live according to this

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[63] Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 42. The term "righteousness" in Matthew is a translation of the Greek *dikaiosunē*. As noted in the foregoing chapter, in the Hebrew Scriptures, the term translated as "righteousness" is *ṣedeq*. It is important to note that we are dealing with two different original terms, but equally important to note that terms have significant conceptual overlap and that the LXX normally substitutes *dikaiosunē* for *ṣedeq*. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 63. Unlike the Old Testament occurrences dealt with in the previous chapter, this instance of "righteousness" is not accompanied by the term "justice." However, given the creation-wide purview of this New Testament text, this more cosmic translation should not be eschewed.

[64] Like much Old Testament scholarship, the cosmic dimensions of "rightness" in the Beatitudes are often neglected, despite the fact cosmogony plays a significant role in the Sermon on the Mount. Betz argues, "cosmogony plays only a marginal role in the New Testament and…its ethics is not based on creation narratives as those in the Book of Genesis…As far as the earlier stages of New Testament thought are concerned, there is only one exception to the general rule of disinterest in creation theology. This exception is the so-called Sermon on the Mount." Hans Dieter Betz, "Cosmogony and Ethics in the Sermon on the Mount," in *Cosmogony and Ethical Order: New Studies in Comparative Ethics*, ed. Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Pr, 1985), 158. Betz focuses on Mt. 6:25-34, but argues that the for the Sermon on the Mount, "Ethics is learning to love the world in the way God loves his creation…" Ibid., 176.

rightness, they, like Jesus Christ, the covenant in flesh and representative of creation, also continue the rectification of relationships between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation.

The exact meaning of *dikaiosunē* in Matthew 5:6, 20 is uncertain, but I follow Charles Talbert who argues that *dikaiosunē* is "a relational term (i.e., covenant term). It meant faithfulness to a covenant relationship" in ancient Israel.[65] Therefore, I understand Jesus' commendation of *dikaiosunē* to his audience as an exhortation to covenant faithfulness in relationships with God and nonhuman creation. Talbert explains the dimensions of these relationships in Matthew 5-7:

> Matthew 5-7 is concerned with the vertical (5:3, 4, 5, 6; 5:33; 6:1-18; 6:24; 6:33; 7:7-11) as well as the horizontal (5:21-26; 5:27-30; 5:38-42; etc.) relations to life. The Sermon contains material focused on piety as well as that concerned about ethics. This concern for right relations in both horizontal and vertical dimensions of life is character of the Old Testament Law…prophecy…and wisdom. This dual focus in the Old Testament is understood in terms of covenant faithfulness…The Sermon on the Mount is about covenant faithfulness, involving both vertical and horizontal relations.[66]

These horizontal and vertical aspects emphasize an aspect of the covenant discussed in the previous chapter: covenant faithfulness is not only a matter of remaining faithful to

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[65] Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 63. In addition to *ṣedeq*, Talbert argues that *dikaiosunē* is used to translate a variety of covenant terms (e.g., *ḥesed, etc.*). As Mogens Muller points out, Matthew, a Jewish Christian, naturally incorporates Jewish covenant-ideas "into the center of his Christology. Müller, "Bundesideologie Im Matthäusevangelium. Die Vorstellung Vom Neuen Bund Als Grundlage Der Matthäischen Gesetzesverkündigung," 32. "jüdischen Bundesdenkens….mit dem Mittel seiner Christologie entwickelt" Some understand "righteousness" as human initiated and perpetuated ethical life in accord with God's will. For examples, see Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 37; Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 59; Ulrich Luz, "The Fulfillment of the Law in Matthew (Matt. 5:17-20)," in *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2005), 206. Others, understand righteousness as a gift of transformation inaugurated by the Incarnation. See Hare, *Matthew*, 39; Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 30. Still others understand it as a divinely initiated process that demanded human response if it is to continue. See, Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 130, 190; Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 85.

[66] Talbert , *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 31. Similarly, Chouinard points out that in the LXX, "the use of δικαιοσύνη accents God's saving action to restore things to their rightful order, thus restoring the *shalom* of God's people (Pss. 9:8; 11:8; 36:6;67:27; 111:3; 143:1,11)." Chouinard, "The Kingdom of God," 231–232.

God (the vertical), but to God's creation (the horizontal), as well. Those who hunger and thirst for "rightness" (v.6) are those who feel "the dire need of a right relationship with God and others"[67] and who desire God's "saving activity" in the establishment of God's justice in the Kingdom.[68]

The establishment of this "rightness" throughout creation demands a surpassing (*pleiōn*, 5:20) "rightness" on the part of those who follow Jesus. Heeding this call to surpassing righteousness:

> means living faithfully within a covenant relationship that encompasses both vertical and horizontal dimensions, and is only possible if such a life is divinely enabled. Left to our own resources, we cannot be faithful. So living justly is as much a matter of receiving as it is of giving.[69]

Surpassing "rightness" is enabled by God's covenantal fidelity and requires humans to orient their lives to both God and his creation in such a way that those relationships are strengthened. Expressions of surpassing "rightness" can be seen not only in the beatitudinal teachings, but in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who inaugurates a new relationship between the Creator and his creation by bringing the vertical and horizontal into proper alignment. By restoring the *ptōxoi*, *praeis* and *penthountes*, Jesus Christ enables and exhorts his followers to strive for the further restoration of these groups and others marginalized through political and environmental oppression. As I demonstrated in my treatment of the Davidic covenant and prophets, the absence of "rightness" leads to ecological collapses; however, when Jesus' disciples heed his call to live with "rightness"

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[67] Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 87. Given the cosmic dimensions of "rightness" and Talbert's emphasis on covenantal living, it is also correct to describe this as a "religious longing." Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 451.

[68] Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 52.

[69] Ibid., 65.

they echo the "rightness" that is constitutive of the cosmos, and thus restore a proper order between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation, i.e., they participate in and further restore a covenantal ecology.

### *5.3.4. Conclusion: The Beginning of a Covenantal Ecology's Restoration*

Stewardship environmental ethics attempt to cast Jesus as the Great Steward, but this Christology fails to account for the transformative effect of Jesus Christ's life and ministry. Jesus is not stewarding, preserving, or maintaining creation. As the Representative of creation and the covenant-in-flesh, Jesus Christ subverts unjust social orders and works for the good of the oppressed throughout creation - i.e., the "poor in spirit," "meek" and mourning - and exhorts his disciples to live according to this "rightness." He both "shows us how all creatures best *fit together*" and begins to rearrange the disordered parts.[70] In this mission, Jesus Christ fulfills the law and prophets, i.e., begins the restoration of a covenantal ecology, and calls his disciples to live out this "rightness." The pursuit of this rightness is the pursuit of a renewed covenantal ecology, and as I argue in the following section, the Christ-driven goal towards which creation moves is one marked by an even more intimate relationship between God, humanity and nonhuman creation.

## *5.4. The Completed Restoration: A New Heaven and New Earth Bound Together*

The final task of this chapter is to describe the fulfillment of the transformation Jesus began in his earthly ministry. Revelation 21:1-22:5, which N.T Wright considers the "greatest image of new creation, of cosmic renewal, in the whole Bible," presents the

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[70] Fred Bahnson, *Making Peace with the Land: God's Call to Reconcile with Creation* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2012), 73.

reader with an image of a properly ordered covenantal ecology.[71] I focus on Rev. 21:1-5, which describes the disappearance of the old order and the arrival of a "new heavens and new earth."[72] I begin with an examination of the meaning of a "new" heavens and earth, arguing that a fulfilled covenantal ecology is characterized by a *restored* nonhuman creation. Then, I argue that a fulfilled covenantal ecology is one in which God "dwells" intimately with creation. This new creation is one in which the relationships between God, humans, and nonhuman creation are finally set in proper order.

### *5.4.1. New Heavens and New Earth*

The new heavens and new earth imagery of Rev. 21:1-2 portrays a completion of the restoration of social and natural orders, or a renewal of a covenantal ecology, initiated by Jesus Christ. This imagery finds its basis in Isaiah 65:17-18 (cf. Isaiah 66:22) in which the Lord declares:

> For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
> the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
> for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.[73]

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[71] N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 104.

[72] The book of Revelation is replete with apocalyptic imagery, which Craig Koester describes as "a form of literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation of transcendent reality is given by an angel or otherworldly being to a human recipient. Usually the revelation unveils a supernatural world and points to salvation at the end of time." Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 27. See also, Stephen L. Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 19–83; J A. Du Rand, "'Your Kingdom Come "On Earth as it is in Heaven"': The Theological Motif of the Apocalypse of John," *Neotestamentica* 31, no. 1 (1997): 67–68.

[73] John's use of the Old Testament is extensive, but Isaiah's influence is especially significant for Rev. 21:1-5a. Rev. 21:1-2 mirrors Isaiah 65:17-18: in its use of new heaven/new earth imagery, the prominence of Jerusalem and the reference to former things. David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 33–34. For a list of passages from Isaiah used in Revelation 21:1-5a, see Ibid., 29–31. John's use Old Testament imagery is far-ranging. Fair sets the range of possibility anywhere between 400-1000 OT references. Ian A. Fair, *Conquering with Christ : A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2011), 29. Along with Revelation, II Peter 3:10-13, a

The author draws upon this Isaianic eschatological vision in order to communicate hope for the oppressed.[74] Isaiah describes the suffering of Israel at the hands of Babylon and Revelation describes the suffering of early Christian communities at the hands of Rome (symbolized by Babylon). Israel was liberated from exile and their suffering, and by using this imagery from Isaiah, the author argues the same will occur for Christians.[75] The author employs imagery from Isaiah, writing, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God…" (vv.1-2a). The use of "new" (*kainos*) to describe the heavens and earth along with the description of the "old" heavens and earth as having "passed away" *(apēlthan*, from the Greek *aperchomai*) have led to two different interpretations of the fate of the "old" created order.

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text written around the time of Revelation's composition draws upon the Old Testament idea of a new heaven and earth. Written to churches in central Asia, Revelation uses the apocalyptic to "to encourage the persecute believers to remain true and to promise them that God would vindicate them for their suffering." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 9, 12. See also, Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), xx, xxvii; Gale Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 1 (Mr 1997): 38. This backdrop of persecution is important to understand the often violent and condemnatory language found in both Revelation and II Peter. While religious persecution was not commonplace in Rome during this time, Christian refusal to worship the emperor and participate in the state cult marked them as "dangerous and unpatriotic." Ben Witherington, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 24. There is some disagreement on the dating of II Peter, but I find reasons for this date compelling, see Steven John Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 72–73; Richard Francis Wilson, *2 Peter* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2010), 262–267. See also, Steven John Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 72; *2 Peter* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2010), 269; John P. Meier, "Forming the Canon on the Edge of the Canon : 2 Peter 3:8-18," *Mid-Stream* 38, no. 1–2 (Ja-Ap 1999): 65–66. See also Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2007), 121.

[74] For arguments for Johannine authorship see Osborne, *Revelation*, 2–6; Fee, *Revelation*, xix.

[75] See Carol J. Dempsey, "Revelation 21:1-8," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 65, no. 4 (October 2011): 400; Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 16.

Some argue that the new replaces[76] the old, and the first heaven and earth as vanishing[77] or being "de-created."[78] In this line of argumentation *kainos* is interpreted to signal discontinuity between the "old" and "new" creation. James L. Resseguie, for example, argues:

> Of the two words in Greek for 'new' – *neos* and *kainos* – John uses *kainos* to describe the new creation. *Neos* implies newness in the sense of something refreshed or renewed; *kainos* suggests newness that is 'hitherto unknown.' The creation's newness is reflected in what is absent. Negative language describes a world that is radically different from this world.[79]

Resseguie argues that John's choice of *kainos* is an attempt to emphasize the discontinuity between the "old" and "new." When taken to the extreme of discontinuity, the "new" heavens and earth would then refer to a "a completely new universe made of new materials and not merely the renovation of the present heavens and earth."[80] The new creation absolutely replaces the old.

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[76] Leonard L. Thompson, *Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 181; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 251.

[77] David J. MacLeod, "The Seventh 'Last Thing': The New Heaven and the New Earth (Rev 21:1-8)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 628 (2000): 440.

[78] Sean M. McDonough, "Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 183.

[79] Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 252.

[80] MacLeod, "The Seventh 'Last Thing,'" 441–442. Interpretations of the only other use of "new" heavens and earth language in the New Testament, i.e., II Peter 3:10-13, have no doubt contributed to this opinion. Various translations (e.g., KJV, NASB, ESV) of II Peter 3:10-13 indicate that on the Day of the Lord, the earth and everything that is done on it will be "destroyed" or "burned up." These translations have led to an understanding of the new heavens and earth as necessarily destroying what precedes it. This belief in the inevitable destruction of creation has been codified into North American Pentecostal and evangelical belief in the twenty-first century. Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth?," 39. Robby Waddell, "Apocalyptic Sustainability: The Future of Pentecostal Ecology," in *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies* (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Pub, 2010), 99. However, There are four arguments against these types of cataclysmic interpretations of II Peter 3:10-13. First, as Gail Heide explains, the 'day of the Lord' is a convention that describes the judgment, but preservation, of creation. She writes, "The 'day of the Lord' is used to describe the time of God's judgment…The sun, moon and

Others stress the continuity between the "old" and "new" creation, arguing, "God is not making all things *anew*. He is making all things *as* new."[81] *Kainos*, while indicating newness, is not treated as indicating any kind of absolute differentiation between the "old" and "new." Similarly, *aperchomai,* often translated as to "go away, depart, leave" never *"*unambiguously means 'cease to exist'" (Cf. Rev. 20:11).[82] Heide, for example, argues that the use of this term must be understood from the point of view of John, the one who receives this revelation. Since John is the one who sees that the "old heavens and earth" *apēlthan*, this term "simply means that the first heaven and earth had gone

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stars will all go dark, and the earth will be judged with all its inhabitants (cf. Isa 13:10; 24:23; Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15-17; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zeph 1:14-18). . . ." Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth?," 46. Second, many scholars argue that the elements [*stoicheia*] that "will be dissolved with fire" and "melt in the heat" (vv.10, 12) are not the elements that make up material reality, as has been frequently posited. Instead, they argues that the *stoicheia* that will be burned up include ceremonial regulations, celestial bodies, or spiritual powers. See Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth?," 52; Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 163.: Pattemore, "How Green is your Bible?," 82; Douglas Karel Harink, *1 & 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 184. Third, the term *katakaēsetai* in v.10, which describes the fate of the earth as "destroyed" or "burned up," is regarded by the vast majority of scholars as a corruption of an earlier text. Many argue *heurethēsetai* (found, discovered, laid bare, or discovered) is the earliest term used to describe the future of creation. Using the original term, the *stoicheia* may be laid bare, but are not destroyed. Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth?," 53; J W Roberts, "A Note on the Meaning of II Peter 3:10d," *Restoration Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1962): 32; Albert M. Wolters, "Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 405, fn.4; Jonathan Moo, "Continuity, Discontinuity, and Hope: the Contribution of New Testament Eschatology to a Distinctively Christian Environmental Ethos," *Tyndale Bulletin* 61, no. 1 (2010): 33; Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, 184; Reese, *2 Peter and Jude*, 172; Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 163. Fourth, while v.11 claims everything will be dissolved (*luō*) on the day of the Lord, scholars argue that understood against the backdrop of the flood imagery found in v.6, this term refers to a purification that ultimately leads a rebirth of creation. Roselyne Dupont-Roc, "Le Motif de la Création selon 2 Pierre 3," *Revue Biblique* 101, no. 1 (Ja 1994): 105; Moo, "Nature in the New Creation," 469; Adams, "Does Awaiting 'New Heavens and a New Earth' (2 Pet 3.13) Mean Abandoning the Environment?," 170–173; Wolters, "Worldview and textual criticism in 2 Peter 3," 408; Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth?," 53.

[81] Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth?," 44. Italics added. See also, Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 105. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation," 469.

[82] Pattemore, "How Green Is Your Bible?," 80–81. Pattemore, argues that the "old' creation that "fled the stage in the previous scene" to have "now return renewed and revitalized."

from his sight."[83] For Heide, the old creation passes away because it is nowhere to be seen in its new, transformed and revivified state.

Neither of the two aforementioned positions (discontinuity and continuity) ultimately do justice to the complexity and degree of change expressed in this chapter and Isaiah 65.[84] Grant Osborne and Ian Fair attempt to hold on to both discontinuity and continuity by describing the move from "old" to "new" as a *qualitative*, and not *quantitative*, change. While a quantitative change would mean that the existing state of things had simply been improved upon, a qualitative change indicates the "new" is also of a different sort than the "old". Osborne argues that *kainos* indicates that there will be "a whole new reality, a new kind of existence in which all the negatives of the 'first' (Gen.1) world will be removed…"[85] However, taking cues from other New Testament texts describing bodily resurrection (e.g., Christ's post-resurrection appearances in John 20) he also notes that, "It is best to affirm some type of continuity within the wholly 'new' order."[86] Similarly, Ian Fair, placing v.1 in context of the book of Revelation argues that this qualitative newness is a "new system without Satan, evil suffering,

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[83] Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth?," 43.

[84] However, the first position, i.e., the idea that the old creation is destroyed, seems *particularly* at odds with God's actions to preserve creation in Revelation. The earth [*gēn*] is intentionally spared God's wrath (9:3-4), and instead, those who have abused the earth (11:17-18), and particularly those who have profited from Rome's exploitative economy (18: 2-3, 6-8), are judged. Pattemore, "How Green Is Your Bible?," 78.

[85] Osborne, *Revelation*, 729–730. Osborne has in mind here the negative effects of sin, so it seems that his Genesis 1 reference is misplaced, given that there is no indication that the negative effects of sin are experienced in that prelapsarian setting. In fact, John's vision includes not an undoing of the pre-lapsarian state of things, but a return to it. One finds in references to a river that runs through the New Jerusalem and trees of life flanking the river (Rev. 21:1-2; cf. Gen 2:9-10).

[86] Ibid., 730.

persecution, and death."[87] While neither understands *kainos* to indicate an entirely new creation replacing the old, they do understand the new to look dramatically different from the old.[88] This 'final state' is one in which the "old world order" filled with sin, decay, and suffering passes away, and creation is renewed and transformed.[89] Jesus' life and ministry began the transformation of corrupted social and natural orders as he blessed of the oppressed (both human and nonhuman). In the "new" heaven and earth described in Revelation, the fulfillment of those promised blessings is finally realized.

### *5.4.2. The Dwelling of the Lord in the New Jerusalem*

In addition to a restored heaven and earth, a properly ordered covenantal ecology is marked by the Creator's presence in creation. God dwells in intimate relationship with creation in the New Jerusalem. This new reality is described in v.3, where the voice of a divine being[90] states "[God] will dwell [*skēnē*] with them; they will be his peoples, and

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[87] Fair, *Conquering with Christ*, 357.

[88] While arriving at a similar conclusion, David Mathewson takes a slightly different approach, looking both at the greater context of Revelation and Isaiah. With an eye towards Isaiah 65:17-25, in which the new heavens and earth are described (the LXX translation also uses *kainē*) Mathewson claims that both texts are ambiguous in their understandings of the new heaven and earth. Narrowing his focus to the greater context of Revelation, Mathewson understands the new heaven and earth as the end to a series of escalating judgments, (16:19-19:5; 19:10-11; 20:1-3, 7-10; 20:14) in with John sees "the elimination of all that is opposed to the establishment of God's universal kingdom." Placing Rev. 21:1-5a within this pattern, he claims, dictates the "removal of the first heaven and earth" and "the old order." However, when his focus is narrowed only to Rev. 21:1-5a, Mathewson does not find the need for "removal." Noting the chiastic structure of 1-5a, with the New Jerusalem at its center, Mathewson understand them as "bracketed by references to new creation," and situating the "new Jerusalem within the context of the theme of renewal." Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 35–38. See also David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1114.

[89] Dempsey, "Revelation 21," 400.

[90] Some consider this the voice of an angel, e.g., Ibid., 401; Osborne, *Revelation*, 733. However, as Mathewson notes, this *specific* identification is not made in the text. Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 50.

God himself will be with them…"[91] This divine announcement is a variation of the covenant formula found in Lev.26: 11-12 and Ezek. 37:27.[92] This is significant because:

> The new covenant hopes of the immediate presence of God with his people… find their climax in the new covenant formula in Rev. 21:3. Like its Old Testament predecessor, the new covenant formula in Rev. 21:3 guarantees the eschatological presence of God with his people."[93]

The use of the covenant formula points to the immanent presence of God with creation, particularly in its use of the term for "dwell," *skēnē*. This is a noteworthy term for a covenantal ecology due to its usage in both Old and New Testaments.

*Skēnē* is used in various forms throughout the LXX for the Hebrew *šākînâ*, a term used to indicate the Lord's "dwelling" in Ez. 37:27 Ex: 40:35 and Ps. 37:3, as well as the Lord's dwelling in the tabernacle in Ex. 25: 8-9.[94] The tabernacle was the place where Moses could enter the presence of the Lord, a meeting necessary for the maintenance of the covenant, and which led to "communion between God and his people."[95] Later, the religious center of post-exilic Jerusalem, the temple, was considered "the place of God's

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[91] Resseguie notes that in this verse, one finds a three-fold repetition of God's presence, a literary move the emphasizes that God's descent to his creation. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 252.

[92] Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 51. See also Fee, *Revelation*, 293; Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 239. Probably the most significant departure from Lev.26: 11-12 and Ezek. 37:27 is the widening scope of God's people(s). *Anthropon* is a term used by John to refer to "humanity in general, particularly unredeemed humanity" (e.g., 8:11, 13:13; 16:21, etc.). Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 51. While there are some textual issues in the usage of the term *laoi* (some manuscripts use the singular *laos*), the plural would appear to be the original term used. Witherington, *Revelation*, 252. The implication of this language is that God's covenant applies to all people universally…not just to a specific group." Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1123. See also Reddish, *Revelation*, 402; Osborne, *Revelation*, 734.

[93] Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 54.

[94] Fair, *Conquering with Christ*, 359; Osborne, *Revelation*, 734.

[95] Osborne, *Revelation*, 734.

own dwelling."[96] Only the high priest entered the holy of holies to make an intercessory sacrifice and preserve the covenant. Interestingly, Rev. 21:22 indicates that the temple is no longer necessary, "for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb." God dwells outside of the tabernacle and temple in a more intimate relationship with creation. Neither Moses nor the chief priests serve as points of access by which the covenant with God is preserved; In Revelation 1:2 God fulfills that covenantal relationship be descending to his creation and dwelling there.

In the New Testament, s*kēnē* is used in the Gospel of John to refer to dwelling of the Incarnation: "He dwelt among us" (1:14), and it would seem that the author of Revelation is making a similar christological claim, though with an eschatological focus. This use of *skēnē* in Revelation finds itself preceded by a reference to the wedding of the Lamb and followed by a declaration of the cessation of "mourning and crying and pain." As I argued in my treatment of "mourning" in the Old Testament, it is a condition that results from human sinfulness, and is endured by humans, the earth (*gēn*) and all other the creatures. Therefore the cessation of mourning, crying and pain should be understood as "covenant blessings" for all of creation (Cf. Isaiah 25:8, 35:10, 43:18, 65:19, 61:2; 65:20-25).[97] The change initiated life and ministry of the incarnate God, was "a foretaste of the eschatological presence of God with God's people."[98] A fulfilled covenantal ecology is one in which God again dwells with his creation and definitively ends the

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[96] Fee, *Revelation*, 292.

[97] J A. Du Rand, "The New Jerusalem as Pinnacle of Salvation: Text (Rev 21:1-22:5) and Intertext," *Neotestamentica* 38, no. 2 (2004): 290. See also, Thompson, *Revelation*, 181; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 52c:1124.

[98] Reddish, *Revelation*, 403. See also, Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 55.

corruption and oppression that has distorted the relationships amongst creatures, and between them and himself.

The author situates the Lord's dwelling in the New Jerusalem, "the holy city, the symbol and evidence of the covenant."[99] The New Jerusalem is described as "coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (v.2 cf. Isa. 61:10)."[100] As the meeting point between Creator and creation, the New Jerusalem tears down any separation between the two and unifies them "into a larger reality."[101] This unity is expressed in nuptial terms similar to those in Hosea 2:13-16. In Hosea, the covenant that re-orders and pacifies relationships between species is the product of God's searching out Israel, speaking tenderly to her, and Israel's return to the Lord as "husband." Rev. 19:9 announces a wedding between the New Jerusalem (the bride; cf. 21:2), and the Lamb (the groom, cf. 21:9), which is a recurring title for Jesus Christ throughout Revelation.[102] The idea of the sacrificial lamb is native to the Jewish cult (Cf. Rev. 5:6, 9-10), but "John has transformed this image to speak not only of a lamb slain but of something else no early Jew who was not a Christian spoke of – a lamb once slain

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[99] José Comblin, "La Liturgie de la Nouvelle Jérusalem," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 29, no. 1 (Ja-Mr 1953): 10. The exact phrase "New Jerusalem" is only found twice in the Bible (Rev. 3:12, 21:2).Fair, *Conquering with Christ*, 357.

[100] Mangina, *Revelation*, 239. M Eugene Boring, "Revelation 19-21 : End without Closure," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 15 (1994): 74–75. For the Old Testament background of this idea, see Osborne, *Revelation*, 732–733. The language of descent is significant, for it "serves to emphasize divine initiative." Dempsey, "Revelation 21," 401. This is a truly novel movement, for, as Mathewson points out, the "coming down out of heaven" language has no comparable OT expression. Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 41, 43. The author again draws upon imagery from Isaiah. In Isaiah 2:1-5; 18:7, Jerusalem is described as center of the world in the eschaton. Isaiah 65:17-25 portrays a formerly-exiled people who trade mourning and weeping for joy and full lives in the renewed Jerusalem, a land that yields its produce and – like Isaiah 11: 1-8 – peace between human and nonhuman creatures. Like Isaiah's eschatological Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem of Revelation shares in the transformation wrought by God.

[101] Osborne, *Revelation*, 730. See also, MacLeod, "The seventh 'last thing'," 444; McDonough, "Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology," 188.

[102] Osborne, *Revelation*, 35.

but now glorified and powerful."[103] Through his death at the hands of the old order, Christ has returned, having conquered death and the vestiges of that order. Death could not separate him from the creation he represents in his own materiality, and now they live in the most intimate relationship. The removal of boundaries that separated the groom "suggests a recommitment of God to the holy city, and the holy city's recommitment to God…"[104] It is here in Revelation, in the transformed and renewed creation that "a covenantal sense of mutuality" between Creator and creation finds its fulfillment. [105] In the New Jerusalem, God's location is not confined to any structure. There is no intermediary between him and his peoples, and the intercessory sacrifice has already been made. Nothing remains between Creator and his creation, and so a covenantal ecology, i.e., a relationship, rooted in covenant, in which God, humanity and nonhuman creation stand in proper relationship to one another, is fulfilled.

### *5.4.3. Conclusion: A Renewed Covenantal Ecology in a New Creation*

As I have demonstrated in my treatment of Revelation 21:1-5, a fulfilled covenantal ecology is comprised of a new heavens and earth that does not replace, but radically transforms the created order. In the New Jerusalem, God dwells in this new

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[103] Witherington, *Revelation*, 30. The second most prevalent title, "Lord," also taps into this understanding of Christ as the victorious sacrifice. Ibid., 28. J.A. Du Rand notes that in Revelation Christ's sacrifice is understood through the prism of conquering. He writes, "The *One who sits on the throne* [Rev. 5:6, 7:17] 'comes down' to earth, to put it in that way, through the slaughtering of the Lamb. The sacrifice of the Lamb is God's way to conquer and to destroy evil on earth. In other words, the *One who sits on the throne* is present on earth as the Lamb who conquers by his death. The Lamb's death is the crucial key in God's programme of conquering evil and establishing his kingship on earth." Du Rand, "Your Kingdom Come 'On Earth as It Is in Heaven,'" 72.

[104] Dempsey, "Revelation 21," 401. Similarly, Sebastian R. Smolarz argues that this wedding metaphor communicates "the intimacy of [God's] covenant relationship with his people." Sebastian Ryszard Smolarz, *Covenant and the Metaphor of Divine Marriage in Biblical Thought: A Study with Special Reference to the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 263. See also, McDonough, "Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology," 188.

[105] Mangina, *Revelation*, 239. See also, Osborne, *Revelation*, 733–734.

creation, having removed anything that might separate the Creator from creation. With the eschatological imagery of Isaiah as its basis, The New Jerusalem, in which heaven and earth are unified, brings about the end of mourning for a created order oppressed by human sinfulness and a new, intimate relationship between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. The author of Revelation has given the Christians of his own day and beyond a vision of a restored and renewed covenantal ecology in which Christ dwells in creation.

### *5.5. Conclusion: Jesus Christ, the Fulfiller of a Covenantal Ecology*

Rev. 21:1-5a concludes with God's announcement that he is "making all things new" (cf. Isa. 35:10; 43:19; 65:6-8, 17).[106] This marks the first time since Rev. 1:8 that God's direct speech is recorded; a repeated *kainos* (its fourth occurrence in this short section) "further emphasizes the newness" that pervades the text.[107] Yet, this sense of newness pervades *all* of the New Testament texts examined in this chapter. In the New Testament, the locus of covenantal examination shifts from specific Old Testament covenants (e.g., Abrahamic, Mosaic, and David covenants, etc.) to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament covenants were always bound up with creation, and the life and ministry of Jesus Christ is no different.

In my treatment of texts surrounding the Last Supper, I argued that Jesus Christ is the covenant-in-flesh and Representative of creation. In these dual roles, Jesus Christ allows both Creator and creature to engage with one another in a covenantal ecology by

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[106] While the text does not explicitly identify the speaker as God, scholars agree that the voice "from the throne" is that of God. Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 60, fn.118. For discussion of the Isaian allusions, see Osborne, *Revelation*, 737; Fee, *Revelation*, 293; Witherington, *Revelation*, 255.

[107] Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 61. Mangina, *Revelation*, 238.

uniting them both in his material existence and through a ministry dedicated to challenging and transforming unjust social orders.

Matthew 5:3-20 casts this transformative ministry in terms of fulfilling the law and prophets, part of which entails restoring corrupted relationships between God, humanity, and nonhuman creation. A properly ordered covenantal ecology demands a restoration of the oppressed, i.e., the poor in spirit, meek, and mourning, and so Jesus' ministry liberates a created order suffering the oppression of this old order by addressing the spiritual and physical needs of creation. Jesus Christ calls his disciples to this same ministry in his exhortation to pursue a greater "rightness." Taking part in the same cosmic rightness advocated by Jesus Christ casts human beings, not as stewards over, but as faithful participants within, a covenantal ecology.

Revelation 21:1-5a describes the culmination of Jesus' ministry and a covenantal ecology that is described throughout the Christian Scriptures. As Carol Dempsey writes, "This new heaven and new earth—hinted at in the prophets, lived out by Jesus, and anticipated with enthusiasm in the book of Revelation—is the vision toward which all of life is to be oriented."[108] The eschatological vision presented in Revelation is one that culminates in a new heaven and earth, and which (although not absolute replacements of the created order) is free from the sin and oppression that once characterized creation. Like the tabernacle and the Incarnation, God dwells amongst God's creatures, destroying the barriers that separate them, and in doing so ends the creation-wide pain and mourning that marks the previous oppressive order. In a new heaven and earth, complete with a river and trees of life flanking the river (Rev. 21:1-2; cf. Gen 2:9-10), the "Apocalypse

[108] Dempsey, "Revelation 21," 400.

recapitulates Genesis."[109] While not a re-creation of the garden of Eden, this transformed creation serves as a fulfilled covenantal ecology in which the broken relationships between human and nonhuman creation are reconciled and both live in intimate relationship with the Creator.

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[109] Mangina, *Revelation*, 237–238. See also, Jonathan Moo, "The Sea That is No More: Rev 21:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John," *Novum Testamentum* 51, no. 2 (2009): 165–166. Witherington, *Revelation*, 254.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Beyond Stewardship to a Covenantal Ecology

### *6.1. Summary*

The church, though not possessing the same degree of influence it did in the previous century, can serve an important role in advancing environmentally conscious behaviors.[1] Martha Kirkpatrick describes a continuing transition happening in the church:

> For the last forty years, environmental concerns have involved scientists, engineers, lawyers, architects, urban planners, writers, poets, artists, and ethicists as well as government at all levels, businesses, nonprofits, hospitals, and schools. In short, it has involved practically everyone, except the churches. For too long, churches have failed to take account of our destruction of the environment and recognize it as the profound issue of faith that it is. Happily, this is finally changing, and churches across different faith traditions are getting involved. Faith communities are recognizing that, even more than a problem for public health, public policy, a sustainable economy, or even ethics, the state of our planet reflects a crisis of spirit.[2]

While exceptions exist, the church has been slow to recognize, implement, and advocate for the care of creation. However, as Kirkpatrick points out, there is a growing recognition amongst various faith communities that we are responsible to both our human and nonhuman neighbors and, therefore, living in a way that ensures creation's flourishing is no less important than working towards public health or a non-exploitative

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[1] Recalling Michael Northcott's observation, churches are "the largest single form of voluntary organization" in Western civilization, and an "enormous potential resource for environmental fidelity." Northcott, "Ecology and Christian Ethics" in Brandt, *God's Stewards*, 45–46.

[2] Kirkpatrick, "For God so Loved the World," 192.

economic system.[3] In short, many churches now recognize environmental degradation as but one symptom of a greater spiritual malaise, and thus an important aspect of the church's work and comprehensive ethical vision.

Creation care is often described in terms of stewardship, i.e., managing God's creation in his stead as his stewards. As the CEENA research revealed, there are a number of denominations and church conferences that articulate stewardship as the theological rationale for activities such as environmental education and advocacy, planting organic gardens, and carbon footprint assessments for congregations. While these are important facets of creation care, stewardship is marked by hermeneutical and theological deficiencies that attenuate the church's response to the modern environmental crisis. These deficiencies are, in large, the result of a modern cosmic imaginary, which, when coupled with a biblical anthropology that posits humans as having "dominion" over other creatures and "subduing" the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28), creates a world in which nonhuman creation becomes inert "nature" to be manipulated and utilized by humans. These hermeneutical and cosmological commitments engender four significant theological distortions. First, God is portrayed as a distant Owner of creation, who has removed himself from the created sphere. Second, the management of creation is then attributed to human managers placed over creation, who represent the Owner's interests by utilizing nonhuman creation to their benefit. Third, nonhuman creation becomes a depository of natural resources that is deemed "good" only insofar as humans utilize it. Fourth, Jesus Christ becomes the "Great Steward" in stewardship ethics: a move that fails

[3] As Susan Power Bratton notes, this ethical integration is significant. Christians have historically been wont to focus their attention on issues that seem beyond the reach of civil regulation, such as issues surrounding sexuality, and leave the regulation of pollution up to civil authorities. Susan Power Bratton, "Penning the Goring Bull : Evaluating Five Potential Christian Ethical Responses to Environmental Pollution.," in *Ecology and Religion* (Quincy, Ill: Franciscan Pr, 1998), 130.

to account for his role in ending oppressive first century practices and the effect of his life and ministry in the transformation of creation. These distorted presentations of God, Jesus Christ, humanity, and nonhuman creation produce an environmental ethic less about caring for creation and more about insuring that humanity is exercising dominion so as to stay in good favor with this distant Owner.

The church must move beyond the metaphor of stewardship and its theological deficiencies. In this dissertation, I have proposed an alternative metaphor rooted in a scriptural and theological account of covenant. Drawing upon Robert Murray, Michael Northcott, Karl Barth, and the Christian Scriptures, I have constructed a covenantal ecology - i.e., a relationship, rooted in covenant, in which God, humanity, and nonhuman creation stand in proper relationship to one another - as a corrective to four of stewardship's theological deficiencies.

First, in a covenantal ecology, God is ever-present and active in his creation. In the Noachic covenant, for example, God both establishes and maintains a covenantal relationship with humans, nonhuman creatures, and the earth itself. In the Abrahamic covenant, God works through the created order to accomplish his promises of land and progeny to Abraham. God-in-the-flesh, Jesus Christ, initiates the fulfillment of that covenant by overturning unjust social and created orders. The eschatological visions of Isaiah, Hosea, and Revelation portray God as a Creator who, faithful to his covenant promises, renews and revitalizes all of creation, never abandoning it. The God at work in a covenantal ecology is not the distant Owner of stewardship, but the God of Scripture who initiates and maintains the covenant with creation.

Second, following the challenges to modern anthropology issued by Barth and Northcott, a covenantal ecology situates human beings, not as lords over, but as participants within, the created order. Human beings are intricately bound up within their natural contexts and can thus have a dramatic influence upon the natural world even when their behavior is not directly or intentionally directed at nonhuman creation. The prophets Hosea and Isaiah demonstrate in stark imagery how humanity's unfaithfulness to God's covenant destroys nonhuman creation. However, texts pertaining to the Davidic covenant show how the pursuit of cosmic *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq,* i.e., right order and rightness, lead relationships within a covenantal ecology towards flourishing. In a covenantal ecology, humans are called not to flawless management of nonhuman creation, but to faithfulness in their relationships with God and neighbor, partners within this same covenantal ecology.

Third, a covenantal ecology establishes *all* of creation as a participant in God's cosmic covenant. As a covenant partner in a covenantal ecology, nonhuman creation is not dependent upon human beings to assign value to nonhuman creation based on its usefulness to human flourishing. The Noachic covenant is the clearest example of this inclusion with the covenant being extended to all living creatures and the earth. However, one can also see this in sabbatical laws that provide relief for humans, nonhuman creatures, and the land. God's faithfulness to nonhuman creation is also a constitutive part of the prophets Hosea and Isaiah, as well as the eschatological vision of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation. While a stewardship environmental ethics depends on human managers to assign an arbitrary value to creation, a covenantal ecology

understands God's inclusion of creation in the covenant as the indication of its true import.

Fourth, Jesus Christ advances *ṣedeq* and calls his disciples to its pursuit, and as such should not be thought of as the Great Steward, but as the one who fulfills a covenantal ecology and renews creation. As I argued through an interpretation of Eucharistic texts, Jesus Christ is the covenant in flesh and the representative of creation. As covenant and creation converge in his person and work, Creator and creation experience each other in new ways. In Matthew 5:3-20, Jesus challenges powers that exploit human and nonhuman creation, and his ministry begins the process of reconciliation between God, humans and nonhuman creation. This transformation culminates in God's dwelling in the New Jerusalem with restored relationship between God, humanity and nonhuman creation, i.e., a fulfilled covenantal ecology. There, the mourning of creation that was originally challenged by Jesus comes to an end. Jesus Christ is not a "Great Steward" and challenges any person who might attempt to assume any such role; as the covenant in flesh and representative of creation, he instead works towards a transformation of the entire creation.

### *6.2. Moving Forward: The Implications of a Covenantal Ecology for the Church*

My development of a covenantal ecology not only has implications for stewardship environmental ethics, but for the broader discussion and implementation of creation care within the church. I wish to offer four suggestions for the construction and implementation of environmental theology and ethics in the twenty-first century church. First, the church must allow the breadth of the Christian Scriptures to inform the current environmental discussion. The commitment by stewardship proponents to discussing

environmental ethics through scriptural imagery and vocabulary allows for its relatively easy incorporation within the ecclesial context. While the "dominion" of the first Genesis creation account is one way in which Scripture describes humanity's relationship to nonhuman creation, stewardship proponents neglect an even richer description of that relationship. Outside of the texts treated in this dissertation, there exist numerous others that will help the church come to a richer description of the relationship between God, humanity and nonhuman creation.

Not only do the Scriptures provide a common point of reference around which Christians can gather, but they provide a common grammar that allows them to engage in informed discussion. Having been written in agrarian societies more ecologically-aware than much of today's United States, Scripture also provides an environmental perspective that informs and challenges assumptions native to the modern cosmic imaginary. However, as Holmes Rolston points out, even more important than the scriptural presentation of "ecological sciences" is their insight into "human ecology." With the knowledge that humans can, and often do, dramatically harm nonhuman creation, technological and scientific solutions must be accompanied with the commitment to "find other ways to ensure fair access to resources" for all creatures.[4] The natural and cultural observations contained within the Christian Scriptures can thus provide fresh insight into the underlying causes of environmental degradation and the grammar with which to express it.

Second, the strategy of "reviving or extracting ecologically sound beliefs" from the Christian tradition in environmental theology and ethics must continually be

[4] Holmes Rolston, "Environmental Ethics and Religion/Science," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 920.

pursued.[5] In this dissertation, Karl Barth, Robert Murray, and Michael Northcott have served as resources from the Christian tradition. However, other recent projects have creatively and profitably looked to Maximus Confessor, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin in the attempt to construct an ethic that compels creation care.[6] As Erin Lothes Biviano describes, Christians were more likely to commit to creation care when they were also committed to "reinterpreting core values to express the tradition's longstanding values appropriately in a changing world."[7] Although writing in historical and cultural contexts not shaped by the modern environmental crisis, theological forbearers become conversation partners that challenge our assumptions about creation and provide conceptual and linguistic tools that can help the church convey the importance of creation care.

Third, the church must bring the discussion of creation care into conversation with Christology. Scripture's testimony concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ provides the church with a unique opportunity to discuss the relationship between Creator and creation and the ethic demanded by that connection. Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, calls his disciples to pursue the cosmic rightness that regulates the relationships in a covenantal ecology. As Willis Jenkins points out, through Jesus' ministry, "Humans become members and partners in the covenant…by encountering God's good favor

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[5] Susan Power Bratton, "Ecology and Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 217.

[6] Radu Bordeianu, "Maximus and Ecology: The Relevance of Maximus the Confessor's Theology of Creation for the Present Ecological Crisis," *Downside Review* 127, no. 447 (April 1, 2009): 103–126; Ryan Patrick McLaughlin, "Thomas Aquinas' Eco-Theological Ethics of Anthropocentric Conservation," *Horizons* 39, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 69–97; Belden C Lane, *Ravished by Beauty: The Surprising Legacy of Reformed Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[7] Lothes Biviano, "Worldviews on Fire," 497.

toward creation and responding to it."[8] It is in the encounter with and recognition of God's benevolence towards creation in the incarnate Jesus Christ that "Christ's act becomes a relational sphere for Christian practices."[9] In relationship with Jesus Christ, humanity can thus establish practices in relationship with nonhuman creation modeled after and inspired by his person and work.

Fourth, and finally, any environmental theology or ethics the church pursues must not try to solve environmental degradation with simple (or even complex) technological solutions. As David W. Orr states, there is "no clever shortcut…no magic bullets, and no such thing as cheap grace" in dealing with environmental degradation.[10] If the church is to vigorously address environmental degradation, it must address the larger spiritual decay that causes societies to consume resources at an unprecedented pace. As the prophets demonstrate, human existence is such that all of our decisions and actions have consequences not only for our relationships with one another, but for our relationships and nonhuman creation. Humans are not lords commissioned by God to control creation, but participants simultaneously responsible to God and nonhuman creation and dependent upon "the patterns and processes of interdependence of life in the world."[11] Therefore, if the church is to significantly contribute to the healing and wholeness of creation, it must, integrally, advocate for healing and wholeness in human relationships with God and in the individual Christian.

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[8] Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 173.

[9] Ibid., 172.

[10] Orr, *The Nature of Design*, 23–24.

[11] James M. Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 103. See also Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection*, 223–225.

A covenantal ecology, or relationship in which God, humanity and nonhuman creation are bound together through God's covenantal initiative, provides a theologically robust response with which the church might confront the threat of looming environmental perils and continually refine its understanding of the Creator's relationship to creation. Unlike the stewardship environmental ethic, it refutes a modern cosmic imaginary that establishes humans as lords "responsible" for a godless creation and, in its place, reclaims a world in which humans and nonhuman creation are bound together as partners in covenant with their ever-present Creator.

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