

**Cosmic Christ: Creation Cosmology for the 21st Century from a
Feminist Perspective**

**Thesis submitted in accordance
with the requirements of the
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for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy**

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Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for an award of this university or any other institution.

Signed.....

**This thesis is dedicated
to my wonderful mother
Audrey Jackson
who sadly passed
away in 2008**

Christine Behan
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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that largely due to the rise of scientific cosmologies, we have lost the sense of the mystical and the sacred within creation. Not only that, we have moved away from the sense of a cosmologically based Christology that places Christ at the heart of creation as co-creator with God and who is referred to as the Cosmic Christ.

The scientific cosmology of Isaac Newton informed humanity that it exists in a static, clock-work like universe, where God has become more distant and abstract, placing him outside of creation. This research therefore examines the idea of what might be described as a ‘missing link’ that is, the notion of a *living divine* cosmology. Working from within the framework of a living cosmology, Christ remains active alongside God within creation. The concept of unification between God, Christ, humanity and nature (inclusive of all creatures) and the inter-relatedness and connection that exists between them is examined throughout the work.

Methodologically, as the thesis is approached from a feminist perspective, I have engaged with women’s experience as a focus and from the point of view of the two mystics used I have employed textual analysis; this applies in particular to Hildegard of Bingen which leads into a field of hermeneutics in both cases.

The thesis is divided into five main chapters, identifying three main themes: Cosmic Christ, apocalyptic and the sacred feminine.

It addresses the notion of apocalyptic and the global ecological crisis in contemporary times where I examine the idea that humanity’s behaviour is destroying creation. I consider the implications of the Christian ecological roots of the crisis and how we may move forward by looking at the writings of eco-feminists.

By examining the visionary writings of twelfth century prophet and mystic Hildegard of Bingen, who believed in a living cosmology and consulting the writings of Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest whose work is also cosmological, we discover crucial insights into how they understood humanity, creation and the cosmos.

The synthesised components of this thesis work well together in drawing out from a feminist viewpoint what I believe to be a plausible, comprehensive and explicit blueprint for a modern day creation cosmology; one that emerges from a sense of the apocalyptic and addresses imbalance through recovering the sacred feminine and has the Cosmic Christ at its heart. In placing the Cosmic Christ at the centre, this cosmology is living and loving and sacred.

Total Words Used: 106,588 (Permission granted to extend the word length)

Contents

	<i>page</i>
<i>Declaration</i>	2
<i>Dedication</i>	3
<i>Abstract</i>	4
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	6
Introduction	7
Chapter One:	
The Ecological Crisis and its Religious Significance in the 21 st Century The Notion of Apocalyptic in Modern Times	42
Chapter Two:	
Christianity and the Roots of the Ecological Crisis Identifying the Problems and the Link to Ecofeminism Women, Nature and the Patriarchal Stamp	75
Chapter Three:	
Hildegard of Bingen: The Move towards a Cosmology For the Modern day	179
Chapter Four:	
Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and his Cosmology	238
Chapter Five:	
Crisis and the Way Forward in Hildegard of Bingen and Teilhard de Chardin	282
Conclusion	303
Bibliography	315

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Introduction

This thesis argues that due to the rise of science we have lost the sense of a cosmologically based Christology, a cosmology that places Christ right at the centre of creation establishing his place as co-creator with God. My aim is to formulate a blueprint that will present a modern day *living* cosmology that fully embraces the divine. A living cosmology is one that expresses that the cosmos is fully *alive*. It is a cosmology that depicts harmony and balance between humanity and creation and acknowledgement of the divine and the sacred as being fully present and active within the creative process. It is alive through its particles, atoms, stars, sun, moon, and the fact that there is an evolutionary aspect to the entire cosmos because it is constantly in process of moving and changing. Humanity is embroiled in the whole process.

Swimme argues that the challenge of conscious self-awareness is ‘unlike anything that has occurred for millions of years.’¹ He proceeds to state the point that humanity is finding itself in the midst of a vast transition. He describes this like being captured in the dark of night on an unclear path that is unknowing upon which humanity is groping forward. We find ourselves caught up in a global ecological crisis with its numerous issues and complexities. The paths we take relating to this crisis will help to determine the chances of survival for both the planet and humanity. We are faced with two difficult challenges here in light of Swimme’s suggestions. Firstly, we have to become *conscious* of what exactly is happening to the planet and most importantly, we have to become *conscious* of ourselves. One cannot really happen without the other. This means that we have reached a point in earth history that is pivotal to both human

¹Brian Swimme & Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 111.

and planetary survival. We will not be able to truly see the way forward until we fully wake up to the situation. In order to achieve this, we must fully wake up to *ourselves*.²

In light of this, there are two trends of thought in theology that must be identified and briefly summarised at this point in relation to a living cosmology and these are: Quantum Theology and Paradoxology. These represent two different ways of viewing God, divinity and creation but which equally have common ground and a direct relational bearing in terms of expressing a cosmology.

In *Quantum Theology*, O'Murchu suggests that it is only in the last twenty years that theology has given any serious thought to evolution. Did God have to create and to what degree does God's creation inhibit or enhance human freedom?³ Questions such as these occur frequently in the story of orthodox theology. However, in current times, they assume a fresh significance, because these questions arise within an entire and new cosmological context. The context is new in that its invitation to seek meaning comes from the *internal* rather than the *external*. Even those theologians who adopt an evolutionary perspective tend to view God as an *external* agent directing the unfolding of evolution, alternatively process theologians such as Whitehead and Cobb, claim that God *co-creates* in conjunction with the evolutionary process.

This conveniently leads us to the meaning of paradoxology and Winter's position. Paradox, says Winter is purely and simply what is not supposed to happen. It is precisely what you get when you are expecting something else. In the physical world or the world of the spirit, it is the persistent manifestations of a principle we would much rather ignore: God's ways are not our ways. Doxology means praise, expressed in words or action. Christian doxology is ordinarily Trinitarian. Long before this evolution,

² Swimme, p. 113.

³ Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), p. 114.

however, praise to God our creator permeated all of life, as we have witnessed in the biblical psalms.⁴ Spirituality in a quantum universe introduces us to paradox and re-envisions praise. It speaks of life as liturgy. All that is, by its very existence, is embodied praise. It is, then, a universe in the grip of praise.⁵

Quantum theology is a huge leap forward in theological discourse because the concept invites us to consider evolution from within the framework of a full cosmological setting, presenting God as co-creator and as an internal rather than external being. Whilst these are common components within the cosmology I propose, I now wish to discuss the position I am taking in regard to my own cosmology.

The living creation cosmology that I present and where I believe the former ends, embraces the notion of the *living Christ*. Certainly it is pertinent to acknowledge how new cosmologies scientifically speaking, mean that cosmic theologies have developed which use quantum science as a springboard. O'Murchu and Winter are two good examples of this. So it is therefore important to clarify the way in which cosmic and creation are used in this thesis and that is, that there is no distinction made between the two. This is apparent in the visionary works of Hildegard of Bingen and the 'divine milieu' to which Teilhard de Chardin refers and whose works are examined in subsequent chapters.⁶ It is the drawing together and examination of these particular theologians that assist in underpinning this thesis and in presenting the notion of a cosmic creational picture where these terms are intertwined. It is significant for the thesis then, that both Hildegard and Teilhard believed that cosmos and creation are fused and merged together, resulting in complete unification and therefore there is *communion* between cosmos and creation. Here, God, Christ, humanity and creation become fully integrated with the cosmos so that they are *one*. This presents us with

⁴ Mirium Therese Winter, *Paradoxology* (New York: Orbis, 2009), p. 23.

⁵ Winter, p. 10.

⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

complete interrelatedness where there is *no* separation. It is this negative notion of separation that has caused humanity to believe that it is distanced from God. A God who is placed *outside* of creation and it is to this extent that humanity also believes it is separated from each other. This thesis in using the terms cosmic and creation as a blending together of oneness, will demonstrate that neither is the case. We shall become more aware of this as we progress through the thesis to examine the idea of duality.

In this way then, cosmos and creation are completely woven together in order to represent *wholeness* and as such, the terms *cosmic* and *creation* assume a holistic approach. When we place God at the centre of the universe, he draws all things to him and everything becomes fully immersed in God's love. It is to this effect then, that the idea of a cosmic creation is able to be completely sacred, mystical, divine and physical.

It can further be stated that this creation cosmology is one that has life pulsating throughout and contains the Christ energy. It is a fully divine, *Christic* cosmology. This cosmology places Christ at the heart of it with the intention of restoring a sense of the mystical the sacred and the divine which I argue humanity and the earth have lost. It is a cosmology where we are called to fully express Christ-like qualities such as love, compassion and forgiveness so that such qualities fill the human being and radiate out across creation and into the cosmos, so that we are fully embraced in a living cosmic, Christic Love. This is a cosmology that seeks to rediscover in the whole evolving and suffering earth, 'the universal Christ', the human and living Jesus, in the depths of the cosmos.⁷ In effect, we become the *reflection* of Christ and the embodiment of a Love that is fully and wholly divine. Therefore the 'missing' link as I see it is a creation cosmology for the 21st century *inclusive* of Christ, vibrantly alive and assisting humanity towards full recognition of its own divinity. It is here where I believe the

⁷ Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006), p. 35.

originality of my thesis lies. It is a cosmology that is arrived at by approaching it from a feminist perspective. It is also ecologically based.

The idea of the Cosmic Christ is paramount to this living cosmology because I see Christ as being a true and living spiritual energy, having been an incarnate being who has remained active within the cosmos, and who is a living example of what the individual might aspire to become in terms of their own humanity. This is more crucial now to humanity than ever and is a *hugely* important aspect of the thesis. Whilst recognising the divine nature of Christ, we must recognise his humanity, too. We cannot have a living cosmology that is dominated solely by the divinity of Christ as this would create a metaphysical dilemma. This is because we need to appreciate Christ in his *fullness*.

It is my belief that we are all divine, existing in a physical body. It is my intention to show how we need to change our consciousness so that we become aware of our own divinity and are able to fully express that divinity whilst being embodied. Jesus provides the key to this. This requires different modes of behaviour and a breaking away from the constructs, conditions and patterns that we have become so familiar with down the centuries and that have become inherent in our being.

My cosmology will express the need for a different model of consciousness. I will be arguing that humanity will be required to admit and put right in the most productive ways possible, the damage that has been done to creation. The distinct lack of balance and harmony will become apparent as the reader will see from chapter one which examines the ecological crisis. Environmentally, this is a tough task, but the process is already in place. More needs to be done. The masculine and feminine balance of this planet is mismatched in the way that the masculine energies are dominant and the feminine energies are under par due to the on-going patriarchy.

We need to reclaim the heart of humanity and of creation, we can do this through Christ, but first we need to find out how it became lost in the first place. To this effect I will be consulting the world of science, feminist theology, eco-feminist theology and the work of two prominent mystics to show why I believe this to be the case. The inclusion of Christ is paramount and strongly relates to his incarnational mission that was to demonstrate to humanity in leading by example, the important 'Christ'-like qualities of love, compassion and forgiveness which if extended to each other, would assist in promoting harmony and balance within creation.

There is no avoiding the fact that humanity has played its part in the causation of imbalance throughout creation. Humanity has seemingly subjected itself to living in fear and this is a symptom of separation; separation from each other, the divine, creation and the cosmos. The entire purpose of this research is to set about looking at how cosmic balance and harmony can become a *reality* through identifying and collectively drawing together and expounding the reasons as I see them as to why such disharmony and imbalance has occurred within creation, continuing to cause disruption and disharmony. Once these factors have been identified and examined, a more positive picture can emerge as to how humanity can move forward and progress not only in its own evolution, but in the evolution of creation. But we must look at how, collectively, we have caused the problems. We need to go beyond the physical and start to look for and understand the 'mystery' within creation. The wake-up call seems to have arrived and an awakening is now imperative. It seems that we have become separated from our intended state of being and allowed the evil side of human nature to become more dominant: The constant battle between masculine and feminine which is at the heart of the disruption invites a re-dressing of the balance. The overarching aim of this research then, is the promotion of equality throughout creation because lack of it affects

everything. The current state of affairs in the world, show us that our problems are serious. Humanity is once again in crisis, both socially and ecologically.

With this in mind this is a cosmology that seeks to show the numerous problems humanity and earth are facing and the steps that can be taken to change things. In order to achieve this, I will be introducing three main themes that will form a firm foundation for the thesis that will contribute towards the formation of this blue print: the Cosmic Christ, the apocalyptic and the sacred feminine. Collectively the examination of these themes will aim to show the pressing issues humanity faces in the 21st century and to some extent the impact that history, secular and Christian, has had in the issues we face today regarding survival of the planet. This is a serious matter that cannot be reiterated enough. Due to the feminist emphasis throughout, I consider it appropriate to locate this thesis within the scope of eco-feminist theology and feminist liberation Christology. Justice is a prominent feature in liberation theologies and as Isherwood reminds us, it was of great concern to Jesus in light of the eschatological expectation at that time. Jesus ensured that his message was clear that God's reign would become established when his will for justice, starting with the poor, was pursued. Jesus' adult life was consumed with his desire for inclusiveness, the healing of the sick and initiating a transformation in people's lives and understandings.⁸ Justice is a key component of liberation theology and it is also something that Hildegard of Bingen felt strongly about. Social justice is of paramount importance in my cosmology because it is an essential aspect of re-balancing the scales. Lack of justice serves only to keep people oppressed, repressed, exploited and excluded. I agree with Lisa Isherwood when she states that when God created the world and saw that it was good, he was proclaiming a divine affirmation of creation that 'underpins all movements for justice'.⁹

⁸ Lisa Isherwood, *Liberating Christ* (Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), p. 19.

⁹ Isherwood, p. 20.

In the case of womanist Christology, the female experience of being excluded is harsh and this is especially applicable to black women, who can identify with the pains of Jesus, knowing that he feels their pain too. He identifies with them. Not only are they struggling from exploitation and oppression, but in being black, as Isherwood argues, they are in 'double jeopardy' as 'oppressed members of an oppressed group'. She argues further that they may be in triple jeopardy if they are also poor.¹⁰ Black women see Jesus almost as their 'hero'. He understands. Liberation means freedom and a way out.

One of the most important aspects of womanist Christology is a vision of wholeness not just for the individual but for the community. At the heart of this is the knowledge that everyone has been created equally by God and are valued. Douglas argues that Christ is active in the black community and his calls out to the community to expiate anything that can be described as oppressive or divisive.¹¹ The community in whatever context that may be is vital to a smooth functioning of creation. I do not mention community per se in my cosmology, however, I recognise that the world is a global community and I argue that on a global scale, things need to change. I agree with both Isherwood and Douglas in that no experience can be dismissed. Collectively, the suffering continues, whether it is to be found in the slums of South America or the lone woman battling on all fronts to overcome the 'triple jeopardy' contained within her own experience that Isherwood argues. All these reasons are why I place my cosmology in human experience that causes another pain and suffering, especially and specifically in the case of women.

In this first chapter then, my aim is to examine the notion that we are once again living in what might be termed as apocalyptic times, where God's covenant has been broken, and how we are witnessing on a world-wide scale, unease, distress,

¹⁰ Isherwood, p. 31.

¹¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (New York: Orbis, 1994), p. 31.

disharmony, un-balance, dysfunction, oppression, exploitation and destruction. This is my primary reason for choosing the ecological crisis with its many critical issues to highlight the plight humanity and earth find themselves facing. As already indicated, the approach I will be taking is a feminist one.

We also have to consider the role that dualisms arising from philosophical thought, technological developments and Christianity might have jointly played in assisting to create a sense of separation between humanity, God, Christ and creation and these areas are to be examined in this chapter. The notion of dualistic thought is significant because it has no place in a cosmologically based Christology. The main reason for this is that everything in a living cosmology is understood as being not just interconnected, but *one*. There is no separation between God, Christ, humanity and creation to be understood in this context. Every aspect of creation, God, Christ and the cosmos merges into this aspect of 'oneness.'

Continuing with the feminine aspect, recognising Mary as a key figure in the cosmic drama of redemption alongside her son is also integral. I will contend that apart from the birth narrative in Luke, Mary is a distant and almost non-existent figure in the remainder of the gospels. It is my intention to postulate that she played a much more significant role in the life of Jesus after his birth than is portrayed in the gospels. To demonstrate this, I will be exploring the texts concerning the relationship between Mary and Jesus in the *Lost Books of the Bible* The books to which I refer are the gospel of the *Birth of Mary* and the first gospel of the *Infancy of Jesus Christ* both of these are apocryphal works.

Finally, I will examine the question of how we can begin to move forward and some of the issues we must take into consideration.

As this thesis is concerned with the 'missing link' in cosmology, that is, a cosmology that is divine and places the Cosmic Christ at the centre, a quest is needed for renewal and recovery.

The recognition of inter-connectedness between God, Christ, humanity and creation is a key factor towards the restoration of the earth and in turn, the cosmos. That, then, is an overview of the research concerns of the thesis. My approach will take place in the following way. Firstly I consider some key aspects of the contemporary ecological crisis to present the necessary background and to support my claim that this is a pressing current issue.

In drawing upon the work of Hildegard of Bingen, we will come to see how, in some ways, humanity has contributed to the crisis we see happening today. Despite writing in the twelfth century, her visions were 'ecologically' based as they were to a large extent nature based. Her *constant* message throughout her cosmology comprised of warnings, the major one being that humanity must 'wake-up' to the damage it is doing to the cosmos as a whole. It is also apparent that she feels humanity is in the process of destroying the work of the one she cares about the most; Christ- the instrumental Word.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was a visionary, prophet and mystic and can be regarded as one of the most fascinating spiritual figures of the twelfth century. As the main focal point of this thesis is the presentation of a living cosmological Christology, consideration of the writings of Hildegard of Bingen provides a significant contribution to this work as a whole. It allows the research to examine seriously not only the complexity of the visions themselves but to recognise their important role in forming a cosmology.

It was through the concept of the Living Light that Hildegard claimed to receive her visions. A living cosmology reflects the physical and metaphysical work of Jesus as

the Cosmic Christ and this forms a horizon that places emphasis upon both Jesus' and humanity's physicality. It is the human connection to the continuing living presence of Jesus as the Christ that forms a foundation for a living cosmology. A living cosmology reflects the physical and metaphysical work of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ and this forms a horizon that places emphasis upon both Jesus' and humanity's physicality. It is the human connection to the continuing living presence of Jesus as the Christ that forms a foundation for a living cosmology.

Although Hildegard makes a very strong point, there is a difference in terms of what is happening ecologically in our own time. It would be difficult to deny that there is a reflection between the twelfth century and the twenty-first century in terms of lack of stewardship. However, the ecological problems we face today cannot be directly mapped onto Hildegard's thinking at that time. The ecological aspect tends to be approached from a scientific viewpoint today as opposed to a theological one. In Hildegard's thought, the divine enters into everything.

The major question in this work is: how can we arrive at a cosmologically based Christology that truly represents a *living* cosmology today? The information that Hildegard gained from her visions was that an imbalance exists within the cosmos and this has, she believed, been caused by the failings of humanity. This produces a sense of the apocalyptic through a repeated breaking of God's covenant, as far as Hildegard is concerned. The imbalance that emerges thus produces a negative effect. She argued that unless humanity wakes up and shows willingness to restore cosmic balance, this apocalyptic situation will not be rectified and for the earth and humanity collectively, it could be disastrous. The starting point for Hildegard in terms of her visions is the fall of humanity from paradise. In *Scivias* she has much to comment on in reference to the Genesis creation accounts and the influence of the devil.

From within her own framework then, Hildegard demonstrates through her visions and interpretations where she thinks the problems exist and where the solutions lie. Clearly Hildegard's context and the current one are not the same; however, it is the argument of this chapter that a number of her ideas continue to have validity in the present day.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine selected visions of Hildegard with a view to identifying ideas and imagery which could continue to be fruitful as attention is turned to the twenty-first century context, specifically the ecological crisis. Hildegard's work was ultimately concerned with what she termed as 'viriditas' and 'fecundity', in other words, the recapturing of the greening power and richness of creation that Hildegard claimed to have been put in place by Christ as the instrumental Word of God. She was keen to see a state of balance restored in all its glory to humankind and the rest of creation. This is where it holds considerable relevance for today if we are to envision a more holistic approach to the way we live.

Hildegard was writing from within a very different cultural setting than that of today and as such there are certain issues that need to be addressed in order to ascertain how her writings have value for a 21st century cosmology; these are identified in the section on methodology. The goal therefore is to examine the symbolism and imagery to discover what relevance the drawings and accompanying texts hold today. To this end, I examine in particular the work of Gadamer and Thiselton to identify a model of how the so-called 'hermeneutical gap' between Hildegard's time and our own can be addressed within the parameters of this thesis; ultimately this involves a 'fusion of horizons' that will enable a contemporary cosmology to emerge.¹²

Hildegard enters into the visions as an active participant only very sparingly. She is presented with the vision and illustrates what she sees. Her interpretation of what

¹² Werner G. Jean Rond, *Theological Hermeneutics* (SCM Press: London, 1991.), p. 111.

she sees is, she claims, communicated to her by God, whereupon a scribe would usually record what Hildegard describes. For the most part then, what she saw and heard and the interpretation of it, took place in the way one might describe a scene that one witnessed but did not otherwise influence.¹⁷

The work of Hildegard of Bingen was largely neglected for almost 900 years; her relational world-view and theology were rediscovered in the twentieth century. Until Bear and Company published *Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen* in 1982, which was their first publication on Hildegard, she was never translated into English except for a few pages printed in a book in 1915.¹⁸ As a result, there has been some restriction in gaining access to some of her work. This is partly due to barriers in terms of language. Her original works were written in Latin with subsequent translations having been made into German and English. Benedictine nuns who occupy both convents opened by Hildegard (St Rupertsberg and Eibingen in Germany) have been influential in researching, translating, and publishing her work. Scholarly and popular books in English are slowly but surely catching up with her popularity in the German-speaking world.

In terms of this chapter it is the work of Matthew Fox that provides the most contemporary source available in English. I have purposely used his edition of *Liber divinorum operum* (Book of Divine Works) partly because it appears to be the most widely used but most importantly because this English version presenting Hildegard's account of her ten great visions is based on Heinrich Schipperge's German translation from Hildegard's medieval Latin text. This version, entitled *Welt und Mensch: Das Buch "De operatione Dei,"* was published in 1965 by the Otto Muller Verlag of Salzburg. Schipperge's version forms the basis of this translation because of its seemingly

¹⁷ Jantzen, p. 165.

¹⁸ *Book of Divine Works* ed. by Matthew Fox (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), p. xi. Heinrich Schipperges, *Welt und Mensch: Das Buch "De Operatione Dei"* (Salzburg: Otto Muller Verlag, 1965).

accurate interpretation of the difficult original text.¹⁹ It is primarily based on Codex 241, a manuscript held in the library of the University of Ghent entitled *De Operatione Dei* (On God's Work) It is believed that the codex was prepared under Hildegard's supervision at her establishment on Mount St. Rupert (Rupertsberg) in the Rhineland between 1170 and 1173. Scholars have detected the handwriting of two copyists on the manuscript, which for a time, had been in the possession of St. Eucharius's Monastery in Trier before it reached the University of Ghent. Schipperges also made use of the following other versions of the work: a thirteenth-century copy of Codex 241 found in the Wiesbadener Riesencodex (giant codex at Wiesbaden); (2), Codex 683 of the Bibliotheque Municipale at Troyes, which was once the Abbey of Clairvaux; and 93) Codex 1942 of the Biblioteca Governativa at Lucca, which contains the glorious illustrations on which Fox's book are based. All these versions are entitled *Liber divinorum operum* (the Book of Divine Works).²⁰ Also pertinent to the thesis is Hildegard's visionary work entitled *Scivias*. Of the ten known medieval manuscripts, three are notable because they were produced in the Rupertsberg Scriptorium and they are: the illustrated manuscript Wiesbaden, Hessische Landesbibliothek, Hs 1, composed circa 1165; this has been missing since 1945. However, a handmade facsimilie, produced between 1927 and 1933 can be found in the Bibliothek der Abtei Saint Hildegard, Eibingen. There exists a second twelfth century manuscript and this can be located in Vatican City, Bibl. Apost. Vat., Cod.Pal. lat. 311. The final manuscript which contains the work for which Hildegard claimed unmediated divine inspiration, was prepared in the decade following her death and is referred to as the "giant codex," Wiesbaden, Hessische Landesbibliothek, Hs 2.

¹⁹ Fox, p. xxiii.

²⁰ Ibid, p. xxiii. The Codex is available to look at online at: www.hib-wiesbaden.de/index.php?p=202

There exists a standard edition of *Scivias* called *Hildegard's Scivias* edited by Adelgundis Fuhrkotter and Angela Carlevens, vol 43 and 43A of *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediavelis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978). Further, in the English language, standard editions include excerpts that have been translated in the first instance by Bruce Hozeski: these are: *Scivias: By Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe: Bear, 1986) and *Scivias: Hildegard of Bingen* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990) and in the second instance by Columba Hart and Jane Bishop. In order for these two authors to compile *Scivias*, they referred to Albert Derolez and Peter Dronke, editors of *Liber Divinorum operum; Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio mediavelis. (CCCM)*. I have cited both of these in this chapter because again, like Fox, they appear to be the most widely used and most credible translations.²¹

Führkotter's translation of Hildegard's *Vita*, informs us that Hildegard was born in Bockelheim in 1098 during a time of conflict, change, and religious restlessness. It was a time of population growth and expansion, dramatic weather changes and as a result, poor harvests. Recovering from the barbarian-invasions, nation-states formed, agricultural productivity increased, commerce flourished, trade routes linked all of Europe and cities were growing in wealth and importance. There was a new era of learning taking place beside the monastic culture of teaching the desire for God. Urban cathedral schools, many of which later became universities, prepared clerics whose goal was the acquisition of knowledge. Newly recovered writings of Aristotle were translated from Arabic into Latin, and crusaders left for Jerusalem. Churches and cathedrals sprang up, most of which formed a dedication to Mary.²² Popes and emperors were involved in bitter controversies that produced decades of localized civil wars, each

²¹ *Scivias* trans. by Mother Columba Hart & Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 537. Taken from *Hildegard's Scivias* edited by Adelgundis Fuhrkotter and Angela Carlevens, vol 43 and 43A of *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediavelis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978).

²² Renate Craine, *Hildegard: Prophet of the Cosmic Christ* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997) p. 22. Adelgundis Fuhrkotter, trans. *Das Leben der hl. Hildegard von Bingen Vita S. Hildegardis* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1980).

claiming to be the true representative of God for the world. Each claimed to have the right to invest bishops with both temporal and spiritual powers. What places Hildegard's century apart from our own age of conflict is a social and religious structure within which every person knew his or her place in life as having been preordained by God.²³

It is possible that due to the religious unrest of the time that people were keen to seek advice on spiritual matters and it was Hildegard they turned to. To her contemporaries, Hildegard was "the sibyl of the Rhine".²⁴ This seems an appropriate term for her as sibyl refers to any woman of antiquity reputed to possess power of prophecy or divination and Bingen was a town in West Germany, on the Rhine River.²⁵ Hildegard was someone from whom they would often seek advice and comfort from marriage problems to problems of the soul. Her books whilst receiving a modest circulation resulted in widespread notoriety on account of the high esteem in which she was held. By later medieval generations, she was remembered primarily as an apocalyptic prophet. Her puzzling yet feisty works about the Anti-Christ and the final stages of world history were collected by a Cistercian monk in 1220 and continued in circulation until the Reformation.

The second mystic whose work provides an invaluable contribution to a living cosmology is Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a scientist and theologian, who stands among very few leaders of thought in the last century in integrating pure scientific research with a religious vocation. During his career, he made it his mission to reconstruct the most basic Christian doctrines from the perspective of science whilst at the same time reconstructing science from the perspective of faith, with the aim of integrating both the scientific and the religious. He would achieve this by overthrowing

²³ Ibid, p. 23.

²⁴ Columba Hart & Bishop, p. 10.

²⁵ *Brittanica Concise Encyclopedia*, ed. by Hugh Chisholm, 11th edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

all the barriers that had existed between science and religion over the previous one hundred years. Teilhard took lessons learned from the study of nature as the foundation on which to reconstruct the Christian faith. He somewhat ambitiously intended to remake all the dogmas of his own Catholic Church and at the same time remake the world of modern science on the model suggested by his personal experience of God.²⁶

At the height of his career in palaeontology he wrote what he referred to as a “little book on piety.”²⁷ The book was designed to convey the sincerity and the orthodoxy of his faith to his superiors in Rome. It is in this book that Teilhard speaks of *The Divine Milieu* in which the title becomes the theme: the whole material world as the setting for a profound and mystical vision of God. Teilhard saw the divine in all things, with acceptance of the idea of Christ at the heart of a living cosmology.

Having examined the cosmic visions of Hildegard of Bingen in a previous chapter, I decided to use the cosmology of Teilhard de Chardin to work as a dialogue partner with Hildegard. This provides the thesis with a contemporary source that has in common with this medieval mystic, the need for a divine cosmology with Christ at the centre. This is the underlying theme of their work and this is what they saw it accumulating towards; recognition of the living Christ, his cosmic nature, a holistic way of being and the path back to God. The living cosmology of both further recognises the interrelatedness, interconnection and unity between all living things.

The interconnectedness of the natural world was especially important to Teilhard who was deeply passionate about nature from a very early age and with this in mind, I wish to now progress on to some biographical detail about him to inform the reader of seeds that were sown in his formative years which eventually helped to shape his cosmology.

²⁶ Henderson, para 1 of 13.

²⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 112.

Cuénot states that at the age of five or six, Teilhard found a passion for iron but it came as a severe blow to him when he discovered that the piece of iron he so treasured and which he thought to be incorruptible and everlasting had turned rusty. At an even earlier age he had also discovered when his hair caught fire and a lock snipped and burnt, completely disappearing, that he himself was made of corruptible material. Experiences that we have as children can often affect our outlook and beliefs in later life, even producing a permanent effect on the personality. So it would have been understandable if Teilhard had, after this experience, turned in revulsion from the world of perishable nature, seeking happiness in spiritual pursuits instead with their promise of real permanence. However, according to Cuénot, Teilhard's mother had always taught him Christ the Son of Man and Son of God, Christ the redeemer, Christ crucified: the incarnation to Teilhard really meant what it said. God came into the world, took on the corruptible attributes of the world and completely redeemed it.²⁹ This was an important teaching to Teilhard.³⁰

While studying theology at Hastings Teilhard recalls 'that there gradually grew in me, as a *presence* much more than as an abstract notion, the consciousness of a deep-running, ontological, total current which embraced the whole Universe in which I moved; and this consciousness continued to grow until it filled the whole horizon of my inner being.' He recorded this in *Heart of the Matter*. He goes on to say that 'a fire had been kindled in some ways' due to a book he had read called *Creative Evolution* which seemed to have a profound effect on him.³²

Teilhard states:

You can well imagine, accordingly, how strong was my inner feeling of release and expansion when I took my first still hesitant steps into an 'evolutionary' Universe, and saw that the dualism in which I had hitherto been enclosed was disappearing like the mist before the rising sun. Matter and Spirit: these were no longer two things, but two *states*

²⁹ Towers, p. 3.

³⁰ Towers, p. 4.

³² Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of the Matter* (London: Collins, 1978), p. 25.

or two aspects of one and the same cosmic Stuff, according to whether it was looked at or carried further in the direction in which (as Bergson would have put it) it is becoming itself or in the direction in which it is disintegrating.³³

The entire universe merges together. There is no longer any separation or dualism involved. When referring to his inner spirituality, he says that the direct leap he took from the old static dualism, which he describes as 'paralysing', to emerge into a Universe which was in a state not merely of evolution but of *directed evolution*, produced a deep change in him.³⁴

The static cosmos had become a moving cosmos, according to Teilhard, and is characterised by a *genesis* and the progression towards an end. He stated that the divine is active within the history of the universe and as such, there is a connection between the divine and the human being whereby activity on the part of the human can become spiritualised, emerging as a sacred energy. As a result, Teilhard believed that humankind had awoken, 'apparently once and for all to the consciousness of his planetary responsibilities and planetary future.'³⁵ He stated:

Hitherto, men have been living at once dispersed and closed in on themselves, like passengers who have met by chance in the hold of a ship without the least idea of its mobile nature or of the fact that it is moving. Living, therefore, on the earth that grouped them together, they could think of nothing better to do than quarrel among themselves or try to amuse themselves. And now, by chance, or rather by the normal effect of the passage of time, our eyes have just been opened. The boldest of us have made their way to the deck, and seen the ship that carried us.³⁶

Unfortunately, writing in such a style displeased the religious authorities in Rome, for Teilhard affirmed the material world as a source of mystical illumination. Even though Teilhard did not criticise in a direct way any specific doctrines of the Church in his book on piety, it was seen to represent an assault upon the basic supports of traditional theology. He was just as provocative when he was attempting to reassure as he was

³³ Ibid, p. 26.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 28.

³⁵ Emile Rideau, *Teilhard de Chardin: A Guide to His Thought* (London: Collins, 1967), p. 32. This was written by Teilhard in *La Route de l'Ouest*, 1932 which was unpublished.

³⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Activation of Energy* (London: Collins, 1970), p. 19.

when he was trying to stir a debate: he tried to present his little book on piety in a way that aimed to demonstrate the modesty of his position but in reality contained a theological time bomb. He wrote:

This little book does no more than recapitulate the eternal lesson of the Church in the words of a man who, because he believes himself to feel deeply in tune with his own times, has sought to teach how to see God everywhere, to see him in all that is most hidden, most solid, and most ultimate in the world. These pages put forward no more than a practical attitude-or, more exactly perhaps, a way of teaching how to see.³⁸

As a scientist and an individual thinker, he suggests that the primary source of religious truth is to be found in the material world as opposed to the magisterium of the Church. In reality, he says, it will be science which shows theology how to see.³⁹

Teilhard was bold in the pursuit of what he saw as truth. He tried to demonstrate that the material world, the world of rocks, trees, plants and animals rather than being the subject of neutral scientific investigation was in fact the well from which would spring a new vision of the holy. But the Vatican was worried. He had raised the material world to a level of importance it had seldom held for theologians.⁴⁰

It can arguably be said that he was consumed states White, by his idea, to bring the whole of human knowing into one grand vision. White describes him as 'an ardent humanist, globalist, and dogmatic evolutionist. A prophet visionary of evolving globalisation and a future unified global order'.⁴¹

Such an idea is evident by the way in which the Church sought to ensure that the work of Teilhard remained as unavailable as possible. As a result, Teilhard was first silenced by the Jesuit order of 1926 which remained effective up until his death in 1955. In 1933, he was forced to give up his teaching post in Paris. Rome forbade him to teach

³⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 99.

³⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 99.

⁴⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 18.

⁴¹ Stephen R. White, 'Reconstructionism and Interdisciplinary Global Education: Curricula Construction in a Teilhardian Context', (2002) www.lesnappstate.edu/Les_perspective/Mar_02/Stephen%20White's%20Article_March02.htm [accessed 19 March 2011] para. 12 of 58.

or write on philosophical themes: in 1957 the Holy Office decreed that the writings of Teilhard de Chardin were not to be kept in libraries nor were they to be sold in bookshops belonging to the Catholic Church. They were not to be translated into other languages.⁴² In 1962, a decree of the Holy Office dated 30th June, under the authority of Pope John XX III warned that, ‘...it is obvious that in philosophical and theological matters, the said works [de Chardin’s] are replete with ambiguities or rather with serious errors which offend Catholic doctrine. That is why...the Rev Fathers of the Holy Office urge all Ordinaries, Superiors, and Rectors, to...effectively protect, especially the minds of the young, against the dangers of the works of Fr. Teilhard de Chardin and his followers’.⁴³ Towers argues that for a man whose range of thought encompassed such a wide field but yet saw his position as being Catholic, he was inevitably a target for criticism from many in the ecclesiastical world.⁴⁴ Teilhard whilst remaining obedient to Rome, (albeit enforced obedience) confided to Auguste Valensin (who had advised him to sign the confession of obedience to the Jesuits), that his attitude toward the Church had changed. Teilhard stated:

*In some way, I no longer have confidence in the outward manifestations of the Church. I believe it is by it that the divine influence will continue to reach me. But I no longer believe very much in the immediate, tangible, critical value of official decisions and directions. There are some who feel happy in the visible Church; as for me, it seems I will be happy to die to be rid of it, that is to say, to find our saviour outside of it. I speak to you thus naively-without bitterness it seems to me-because it is true, and because I cannot see things otherwise.*⁴⁵

To conclude, in the first part of this introduction, I have stated due the rise of scientific cosmologies we have lost the sense of a cosmologically based Christology and I believe that the missing link is a living cosmological Christology. I have outlined the problems I will be addressing throughout the thesis directly relating to this. I have stated that there needs to be in place a blueprint that will allow the expression of a different model of

⁴² Flanagan, para 7 Of 15.

⁴³ Palace of the Holy Office, Rome, June 30th 1962. Published in L’Osservatore Romano, 1st July, 1962.

⁴⁴ Bernard Towers, *Teilhard de Chardin* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), p. 41.

⁴⁵ *Lettres Intimes de Teilhard de Chardin*, ed. by Auguste Valensin Bruno de Solages and Henri de Lubac 1919-1955 (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1972).

consciousness to emerge and that it is my intention to set about putting this into place with the assistance of Hildegard of Bingen, Teilhard de Chardin and various prominent feminist theologians. I have identified three main themes: the Cosmic Christ, apocalyptic and the sacred feminine which directly relate to the thesis and will be explored in depth. I have also stated that this thesis will be approached from a feminist perspective.

In terms of the methodology that will be applied to this task I propose the following: The thesis comprises three major sections: The ecological crisis, Hildegard of Bingen and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The decision to follow this particular route was made for two reasons: The first major section deals with pressing ecological issues and so I have drawn upon the work of eco-feminists to support my argument that women and nature are inextricably connected and that both have been violated to a great extent because of 'man's' desire to 'rule'.

Vandana Shiva provides the methodological springboard in terms of looking at women's experience. Shiva in *Staying Alive* places the emphasis on the struggles of women in India who have suffered from the effects that Western patriarchy has produced in terms of science and the so called 'development' that threatens survival. She therefore questions and challenges science and development from the perspective of third world women whom she argues, are *not* inclusive, highlighting the dominant patriarchal ideology which poses an immense threat towards nature and humanity as a whole. Ecological destruction and the marginalisation of women have emerged from development programmes and projects based on scientific and economic paradigms.

Shiva makes the point that in the case of Western patriarchy there exists the problem of duality between man and woman, whereas, in Indian cosmology, person and nature are a duality in unity, thereby fully complementing each other. It is, states Shiva, this harmony between male and female principles that forms the foundation of ecology

(both thought and action), in India. She explains that Indian cosmology contains a dynamic energy known as Shakti. That is, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos that works with the masculine principle known as Purusha.

The Latin American theologian Ivone Gebara, is crucial in laying the methodological foundations for the second chapter on eco-feminism and women and the patriarchal stamp. Gebara admits to having great concerns over the ecological crisis which, like many other people, has magnified over recent years. She states that the extent to which society and culture form part of the ecological system, and consequently how much economic, political, social, educational and religious issues are all related to ecology and to the stability of the ecosystem. On a practical level however, Gebara states that she feels somewhat constrained by the struggle for survival in which so many people in Latin America are involved on a daily basis. The invitation is constantly there states Gebara, to take whatever steps are necessary: to be converted, in a way, to the concreteness of daily life, to the reality of immediate need. Therefore, Gebara states that ecological problems urge her to search for a more inclusive style of thought, in order that, bit by bit, people are able to feel the real connection between the issues of unemployment, work, hunger and pollution on the one hand and the patriarchal image of God on the other. Like most Latin Americans, she has inherited through her education an eminently anthropocentric, or human-centered, cultural tradition. Socially and educationally conditioned patterns make it very difficult, therefore to develop alternative behaviours and educational processes that ultimately lead to greater solidarity and communion.

Based on her own experience, Gebara argues that ecological and feminist proposals that do not arise from the concrete needs of the many varied popular groups have little coherence. Further, solutions put forward by the established powers are not

always likely to be accepted, because they fail to address the most urgent needs of the people.⁴⁶

In many parts of Latin America, the feminist movement is growing. Often the word “feminist” is not referred to, but the fact remains that women are starting to be concerned about what is happening generally to society and to themselves in particular. Many groups look for a more ‘open’ attitude on the part of civic and political organisations. Gebara sees this as already constituting a break with the hierarchies supported by patriarchy and a move, on the part of women, away from political silence. Additionally, ecological movements seem to be growing in popular circles, taking forms that probably would not be recognised by First World ecologists. The first thing such movements discuss is not how to save the earth and its rain forests and rivers, but how to live on the land; how to love it and how to build a house on it.⁴⁷ It is difficult to save the earth when your relationship with it is marked by conflict. In the world of the poor, the ecology issue first of all surfaces in the form of demands for land reform in the countryside and the redistribution of urban lots in the city. All this, argues Gebara, makes clear who is most responsible for the catastrophic destruction of the ecosystem. The impoverished do not destroy natural springs or watersheds; these have long since been removed from them. The poor do not use powerful electric saws to cut hundred year old trees down, because they do not own chain saws. In the struggle for land and for a dignified life, the women of Latin America and their children have moved up to the front lines because in a certain sense they are the ones who, on a daily basis, maintain the fragile balance of family life.

These popular movements are to surely be regarded as being significant, because they challenge us to the fact that life is an interdependent process; that the survival of

⁴⁶ Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 1.

⁴⁷ Gebara, pp. 4-5.

one group depends on that of another, and that on them depend the survival of the earth and of all living beings.

To further the process of seeking a new world order that represents harmony both with the planet and the cosmos, eco-feminists are endeavouring to discern signs of hope. They do not invent new theories for the poor, much less their liberation. What they try to do is understand what is happening, and on the premise of such understanding, dialogue with others who are willing to do so.⁴⁸

I must state at this point that this thesis will place much emphasis on Latin America. I particularly wanted to highlight this nation at certain points in the research because to me, it epitomises the struggles and conflicts that we are also seeing world-wide.

It must be said that the Latin American theology of the last thirty years or more has shown little interest in feminist or ecological issues. Gebara stipulates here that she is not making an absolute statement because between 1997 and 1999, some significant writings have appeared.⁴⁹ Gebara does not state this with the intention of criticizing her colleagues; it is, she says, a statement of fact. She proceeds to state that the Latin American context during of the 1970's and 80's, during which liberation theology developed, simply did not allow for these topics to emerge.

The Latin American theological tradition was at that time heavily influenced by nineteenth-century rationalism and by the struggle to transform economic structures, but it failed to relate the oppression of the poor to the broader issue of the destruction of earth-systems. In the same way, it failed to identify the direct or indirect legitimization that patriarchal religions imparted upon the mechanistic domination of the world and the manipulation of human beings. However, Gebara states that in 1999 at the time of

⁴⁸ Gebara, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Leonardo Boff, *Ecologia, mundialização, espiritualidade* (São Paulo: Ed. Atica, 1995); Frei Betto, *A obra do artista: Uma visão holística do Universo* (São Paulo: Ed. Atica, 1995).

publication of *Longing for Running Water*, many voices had been raised throughout the churches, both in defence of the poor and in protest against genetic manipulation and similar practices.

Meanwhile, we fail to see that we often formulate our protests from within this same hierarchical power system, without changing our comprehension of the human person, of God, and of Jesus. We continue to accept the traditional monotheism and anthropocentrism that have characterized and structured Christian tradition.⁵⁰

The eco-feminist movement does not investigate the connection between the domination of women and of nature solely from the perspective of cultural ideology and social structures; it seeks to introduce new ways of thinking that are more at the service of eco-justice.

The initial questions that need to be asked are: In what ways do the feminist and ecological issues change our understanding of our own reality? Are they merely new topics to be reflected on and integrated into our traditional ways of thinking, or will dealing with them lead us to work at modifying the very models we use to think about the world?

These initial questions point to the central importance of these issues in developing a new way of understanding the world-and the human within it, that is slowly taking collective shape among us.⁵¹

When we talk about our understanding of reality, we are speaking of our understanding of the phenomena that touches us-of our life experiences and our ways of knowing them. Because of this, we find ourselves in the realm of epistemology: of knowing our knowing. Gebara states that on a personal level, when she asks how ecology or feminism changes her consciousness, she is attempting to introduce ecology and feminism as two issues that were not included in traditional epistemologies. We

⁵⁰ Gebara, p. 8.

⁵¹ Gebara, p. 21.

have tried to comprehend the numerous dimensions of life without recognising, as key reference points and as realities without which knowing itself is impossible, the presence of women and of the various elements that formulate the earth and the ecosystem. Women and the ecosystem were there, present but unacknowledged, but they were not regarded as constitutive elements in the process of making our knowing explicit. In other words, states Gebara, what we called “knowing” was in fact an awareness limited to a particular perspective on reality, itself determined by a specific group responsible for formulating this perspective. We could argue then, that these conditions were profoundly androcentric-centered on male interests and points of view- and anthropocentric-centered on human values and experiences alone.

At this point we leave Shiva and Gebara to move onto the methodology to be employed in undertaking examination of Hildegard and Teilhard’s cosmology. In the case of Hildegard and Teilhard, their work involves textual examination leading into a field of hermeneutics.

In order to begin the task of constructing a cosmology in creative dialogue with Hildegard, there are a number of issues that must be addressed in using her work. One set of key issues relate to language, translation, and writing style. This also applies to Teilhard’s writings. There is also the important issue of reader-response which addresses the series of thought processes the reader might experience when reading the texts. The final aim in using the texts is to arrive at a cosmology that makes sense and has meaning in the present day, with the intention of creating a ‘fusion of horizons.’ This involves drawing key aspects from the texts that can be seen as usefully informing a cosmology and placing them together to expand the meaning, thus allowing the reader the understanding of how the aspect in question can be applicable today.

Methodologically, I decided to consult the work of Gadamer and Thiselton in order to form a structural model that would allow me to build upon and advance

Hildegard's visionary texts in the most fruitful way possible, where the content and message of her visions could be regarded as viable, substantial and meaningful in a 21st century context. In respect of these two mystics, their contribution to this thesis is dialogic and inductive.

By way of introduction, Gadamer's approach is focussed upon what he terms as a 'horizon of expansion,' whilst Thiselton's approach uses a 'horizon of expectation.' Both terms will be more fully explained shortly. It is fair to say that both theorists make a valuable contribution towards reaching a better understanding of the processes involved in reading texts that are centuries old and in arriving at something that can reach audiences today. In using their methods, we shall see that in reading, we are not confined to the historical context in which either Hildegard or Teilhard wrote. Although it has to be said that with regard to Teilhard obviously his work is much more recent. But it can still be noted that his referral to his mystical experiences during the Second World War would have little if any meaning to a reader who has not lived through it. But there is no immovable boundary present. Gadamer argues that it is thus possible to move the text along from a historical point of view to a contemporary one, without demeaning the value of the historicity or meaning of the texts in question. And this applies to both Hildegard *and* Teilhard. Going beyond the text is important; moving it along is a case of creating a vision that corresponds to today. In this respect, Hildegard's work serves as a catalyst. Whilst Gadamer and Thiselton present varying opinions, they are able to produce an inter-active dialogue that allows a shift towards understanding how a creation-centered cosmology dating back to the twelfth century can have an impact now. That said it is not without the unravelling of numerous complicated texts. But both Gadamer and Thiselton remain concerned with how the reader will perceive and respond to the text. As their focus is placed on interpretation, unless the literary devices involved, that is, the use of metaphorical, allegorical and symbolic imagery in

Hildegard's work, can be successfully identified and dealt with, it would be virtually impossible to move the text on. Therefore, forming an understanding of the complex issue of their use remains a vital part of the process in arriving at a successful interpretation. It must be understood that such devices do not present obstacles as such because they add richness to the visions, however, such extensive use of these devices does require careful examination in order to 'break through' the text and establish what the vision represents.

With regard to Teilhard, although his approach takes a very different form to that of Hildegard, it is nonetheless cosmological. It presents its own complexities in that Teilhard's work is not always easy to comprehend. The use of language in some of the translations may have contributed to this. He also includes numerous terms throughout his work such as orthogenesis and cosmogenesis for example which like Hildegard, he believes are pertinent and necessary terms of usage. However, in interpreting his works and ideas, there is continuity between Teilhard and Hildegard. Although expressed very differently, their ideas work well within the scope of creation cosmology. Teilhard's own cosmology places the emphasis on the physicality of the cosmos and upon the reality of interconnectedness and interrelatedness between God, Christ, humanity and creation. He does not see an abstract connection in any way as Newtonian physics has expounded. He realises the wholeness of creation and sees it as being holistic, as does Hildegard. In the same way as Hildegard, I believe Teilhard's ideas were ahead of their time. And, given the crisis we currently face on earth, both presented a 'wake-up' call to humanity. Both attempt to offer a deeper and more meaningful view of the cosmos. And both wanted to express themselves in such a passionate, skilful and intelligent way that would allow them to penetrate human minds into accepting that there is so much more to the earth and to creation if only we would open our hearts and minds. They were equally genuine in their quest.

There is a strong feminist connection in the section on Teilhard, where his work, the work of feminists and the area of Process thought combine to further the cosmological and contemporary aspect. Teilhard uses some of his own experiences to explain or describe his concepts and understandings and where they originated from, in certain cases. The function of hermeneutics then, is paramount because in using his work alongside Hildegard to create a creation cosmology that has meaning today, his ideas must be able to significantly correspond. Both mystics have had to break through the time barrier, in effect. Some of the questions raised relating to Hildegard, are equally pertinent to Teilhard for example, the extent of background to be included or the fact that his texts were translated. Some major methodological issues however, lay with Hildegard's work, which will now be addressed.

By their very nature examination of this visionary's illustrations provides an arduous task. They take the form of very detailed, difficult and extremely skilled drawings. Moving past the imagery, allegory, symbolism and indeed metaphorical usage, presents further challenges. Much initial preparation is required then, before I can even proceed to begin to gain a proper overview of Hildegard's cosmology. The task then becomes a further challenge in examining the meaning and relevance of the texts so that we can eventually draw together a fusion of horizons that will assist in presenting Hildegard's cosmology in a 21st century context.

I wish to examine Gadamer and Thiselton's theories at this point to assist in forming a theoretical framework.

For Gadamer, we as human beings attempt to comprehend knowledge from within horizons that are already bounded by our finite situatedness within the flow of history. This suggests that we are trying to make sense from where we are at this precise historical moment; in other words from what we already know. This creates a static situation. However, the possibility is there for such finite and historically conditioned

horizons to be expanded.⁵² Consequently we do not need to remain where we are; there is an opportunity to advance further with the text in question. That is why despite the fact that a horizon may be defined as a limitation, it is also capable of movement and therefore expansion as previously mentioned, where we can find a dual element of both strangeness and familiarity in the processes of seeking to understand the texts.⁵³ For example, Vision Two: 18 in the *Book of Divine Works* refers to:

If we human beings rise up in spiritual tension and, mindful of our evil deeds, attain a state of repentance, at the same time the fear of God, which is like a leopard, arises above the crown of the head of the image in the symbol of pure ether-that is the symbol of repentance.

The element of strangeness enters the text in that it is creating a comparison between the fear of God and likenening it to that of a leopard, resulting in an odd visual image where the state of repentance appears as an ethereal cloud above the head. The only familiarity we have is the awareness of our own repentance and even that is not certain. The chosen extract is part of an extensive vision given to Hildegard and as such requires deeper examination to see how its meaning can be expanded. Hildegard has a tendency towards extensive use of metaphor in her visions where she uses both nature and creatures to express what she means by the vision. Consider this example: In the same vision she states:

If meanwhile, we give up the green vitality of these virtues and surrender to the drought of our indolence, so that we do not have the sap of life, and the greening power of good deeds, then the power of our very soul will begin to fade and dry up.

Previously in the vision she says, ‘this divine power gives us the opportunity to reach the head of the crab, which stands for trust. From the crab two sets of pincers emerge

⁵² Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 6.

⁵³ Thiselton, p. 44.

like two feet, hope and doubt.’⁵⁴ Recognition plays a part here, and we must ask what, if anything, are we able to recognise and is there anything familiar in the text. We might be familiar with the words but nothing else is comprehensible. Why does the head of the crab represent trust, for example? The symbolic and metaphorical content of her visions is at times somewhat perplexing. This does present a case for expansion then, in moving beyond the text itself in order to begin to understand it.⁵⁵ Between reader and text, the boundaries of horizons can be moved and indeed extended, thus producing new horizons. This is what we seek out with Hildegard’s writings.⁵⁶ In this way, an interaction begins to occur between the reader and the text. A horizon means that the reader needs to look beyond what is close at hand. This is not with a view to disowning it, but to seeing it in a broader way and from within the larger whole.⁵⁷ Understanding can already be described as interpretation because it creates the hermeneutical horizon within which the meaning of a text comes into force. However, in order to try to begin to understand, it is necessary to translate it into our own cultural language; this does not only require as in the case of Hildegard, a translation from German into English, but a translation that responds to how we can relate to language in a cultural setting. So in this case, moving beyond medieval language and thought forms.⁵⁸

We have reached the point in the methodology where we can consider the horizons that have emerged from applying the theories of Gadamer and Thiselton. The concept of a horizon of expansion and the concept of a horizon of expectation are useful in the process of being able to arrive at a meaningful interpretation of Hildegard’s work which in turn helps to arrive at a cosmology that is significant for today. By examining these medieval texts, it becomes easier to obtain a fuller picture of not only what Hildegard was actually trying to express but to draw out the important issues of her

⁵⁴ *Book of Divine Works*, ed. by Matthew Fox (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), p. 37.

⁵⁵ Thiselton, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Thiselton, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 1989), p. 304.

⁵⁸ Gadamer, p. 397.

work and in doing so, expand and fuse them into a series of 'horizons.' It is in this sense that we can really begin to see the cosmology grow.

Certainly the humanity of Christ which is thoroughly expressed in the writings of Hildegard as it is throughout Teilhard and is one horizon that allows expansion and that is important in developing a modern spiritual cosmology. Her work emphasises the physical, mystical, and cosmic body of Christ, presenting him as a continuing living presence. The work of Hildegard expresses a profound understanding of Christ. She constantly stresses the greening power of nature and sees the greening action continuing through Christ, particularly in his co-creative work alongside God. She sees him as the living word that brought the greening power into being. She is trying desperately to convey to humanity to heed the call to come back to God and in this way we see a horizon that presents an awakening. This requires the human being to expand its scope of thinking and where Hildegard urges us to realise and indeed remember that we belong to God.

We currently live in a world where people are seeking a more holistic approach in terms of for example, medicine, lifestyle, healing practices, and certainly Hildegard's work points the reader towards a holistic understanding of self, the earth and of religious experience. She had a great passion towards developing what might be termed as a more holistic cosmology and therefore I suggest that passion is another horizon that can be used. Hildegard's passionate tone challenged not just the Church to renew itself in terms of honesty and justice but also challenged the individual which I suggest is what is required today.⁵⁹

The emotional aspects of this mystic's writings further help to expand the horizon in evoking emotion in the contemporary reader. The depth and intensity of the visions themselves invite a reaction, not least because of their intricate detail where we

⁵⁹ Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Passionate Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), p. 99.

can begin to understand the isolation, loneliness, despair and at the same time, joy and ecstasy of humanity but also the seemingly timeless message they convey about relationship to each other and to God.⁶⁰ All this can serve as a needed resource in contemporary spirituality.⁶¹ Further, mystics such as Hildegard and Teilhard present us with the challenge to become fully alive and passionate about the earth, ourselves and each other.⁶² All of this makes an invaluable contribution then, to creatively transforming the cosmology of Hildegard of Bingen and Teilhard de Chardin into a modern cosmological reality.

Both Teilhard and Hildegard's work in modern terms can be perceived as being ecological in nature and cosmic in scope. Their work cannot be viewed in a secular way as ecology might be seen by some today because it fully includes the divine. Teilhard's writings are difficult to comprehend at times, because they are both scientific and theological. It is not an easy task to combine the two. However, the evolutionary aspect of Teilhard's work assists in overcoming a boundary in that we begin to see a path that merges the scientific and the divine together. In Teilhard, we are moving towards something that is ultimately cosmic in nature. In terms of expansion and expectation, there is a fluidity present in Teilhard that allows us to create a more informed picture of what he was saying and where that picture can be broadened out even more to join up with Hildegard's cosmology.

Firstly, the boundaries must be removed to enable the text to be moved along. Therefore, Gadamer speaks of expanding the texts beyond the cultural settings of that time in the case of Hildegard so it produces a positive hermeneutical function. In doing so, this does not demean the text in any way and the main thrust of the text can thus remain intact. What I believe Gadamer is saying, is that the texts must be examined

⁶⁰ Dreyer, p. 30.

⁶¹ Dreyer, p. 139.

⁶² Dreyer, p. 145.

from the standpoint of discovering and opening up the meaning of the texts and remembering that a number of horizons may be present which fuse together both the strange and the familiar. The purpose in a hermeneutics of horizons is to offer both the reader and the text fluidity of movement, removing some of the restrictions imposed by a historicist model of reading that might present boundaries and opening up the text so that it can be read in such a way that its meaning can be expanded. Formulating an understanding of the text is the key to creating a hermeneutical horizon. It is not Gadamer's intention to bridge the gap between the centuries because this still creates a sense of separation. Time, therefore, does not need to be regarded as an obstacle but rather can be seen as providing a sound, supportive springboard for the present. This applies to both mystics. The past therefore, serves to ground the text providing a basis from which to move and grow. Confining ourselves to another age merely serves to impose restrictions. This is not what Gadamer seeks. The distance between the centuries in Hildegard's cosmology can be regarded as a positive element towards reaching an understanding. Providing a further angle on the hermeneutical process, we also turned to the theories offered by Thiselton. His horizon of expectation is useful because, like Gadamer's horizon of expansion, it widens the scope to open up the texts, consider the issues surrounding the text, advancing the text (moving it forward) and releasing it from its seemingly static position. Gadamer argues that the reader will more than likely come to the text with some fore-projections of what they anticipate from the text. These may be correct at times, whereas Thiselton suggests that assumptions might be made concerning the text. Both have a valid point to make in this instance because it would be impossible to come to a text without some kind of pre-conception. This means that thought processes have been put in motion. Gadamer and Thiselton equally have their own approach yet support each other. Thus we in the end, we are able to achieve a modern day cosmology.

Chapter One

The Ecological Crisis and its Religious Significance in the 21st Century

The cosmological narrative is the primary narrative of any people, for this is the story that gives to a people their sense of the universe, states Thomas Berry. It explains how things came to be in the beginning and how they are now what they are. It is the provider of the first sense of creativity in a story that is generally narrated at any significant initiation event of the person or the community. It is a power story, a healing story and a guiding story. All human roles are continuations, expansions, further elaborations, and indeed fulfilments of this story. So any creative deed at the human level is a continuation of the creativity of the universe.

In current times, we need to experience human activities as continuation of the creativity that brought about the emergent galactic systems and shaped the elements; that brought the planet Earth into existence within the solar system; that brought forth life in the amazing variety of its manifestations; that awakened consciousness in the human order; that enabled the great cultural sequence to take place in its four basic periods: the tribal-shamanic period; the period of the classical religious cultures of the Eurasian, American, and African worlds; the scientific-technological-industrial period; and now the emerging ecological period when the intercommunion of all living and non-living systems of the planet is being activated at a new level of mutual presence.¹

The development of science has provided us with vast knowledge of our universe. And whilst such scientific perceptions of the universe are powerful, they are only expressing, states Berry, in more analytical terms and with more scientific evidence, what was known intuitively from the earliest moments of human

¹ Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006), p. 59.

understanding for which we have records. For example, the importance of the early Chinese sense of the human as the *hsin* of the universe. The word *hsin* can be translated as either “mind” or “heart”. So the Chinese phrase defines the human as the heart of the universe or as the consciousness of the universe. And we are now discovering our human presence within the larger context in which we have our existence. We are entering a period of greater human identity with the natural world and its generative powers.²

At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the urgency of this ecological crisis was discussed. Many issues surround the crisis such as climate change, excessive discharge of greenhouse gases and de-forestation. It was vital to examine further possible factors that may be linked, with the recognition that we are not simply talking about ecology, but that there are also issues of social and economic injustice involved.³ Such issues include overpopulation, global poverty, and inequality. It would also be far too simple to make the allegation that environmental problems present the only symptoms of economic disorder. Economic deprivation can be said to have resulted in environmental damage. However, it must be pointed out that ecological deterioration has certainly resulted in a marked increase in poverty and human suffering.⁴ In fact, the question of Earth survival was focussed upon more sharply in Kyoto than at the Rio Earth Summit argues Berry. In Rio, the dominant question was how to foster sustainable economic development of the human community, whereas in Kyoto the question was concerned more immediately with the damaging impact that humans are having on the integral functioning of the earth through global warming. The fundamental question slowly

² Berry, p. 61.

³ Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Redeeming the Creation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), p. 12.

⁴ Granberg-Michaelson, p. 13. Lutzenburger, the Brazilian environmental activist who also served as Brazil's minister for the environment said that, 'Most of the poverty we see in the world today is the result of the destruction of traditional cultures, of the rape of their resources in the name of 'progress' of the uprooting of people who are then left with no choice but to vegetate in the festering slums, or rape the last remaining wilderness.' His analytical view is that the entire concept of progress, economic growth and industrialism plus escalating affluence, is the root of ecological destruction and the continued economic impoverishment for millions.

emerging is whether human dominance will be asserted as normal practice over the earth or whether the priority of the integral functioning of the earth will be accepted by humans.

Decisions made in the past and decisions made in the present suppose that human benefit must be advanced as far and as effectively as possible at whatever cost to the earth. This absolute subservience of the natural world to the human has been supported by our modern Western cultural traditions, by our religious and moral traditions, by law and politics, by science, education, and medicine. Such dominance over the natural world is particularly evident within the industrial-commercial world, the world of the great national and transnational corporations. This is why, argues Berry, so many business lobbyists gathered to influence the decisions made in Kyoto. However, this attitude was severely questioned and a new view of the human was proposed, a view that sees the human as a component member of the earth whose well-being depends absolutely on the flourishing of the life community of the planet.⁵ This sense of the human as a subsystem of the earth system has not been central to Western civilisation. Even more challenging is the view that there is a single earth community and that every component of this community, including the human being, survives only within the well-being of the larger community.

Prior to this, the issue of integrating human activities with the natural processes of the earth had been dealt with in the World Charter for Nature in 1982 and in the 1987 Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*. As regards the World Charter for nature, overwhelmingly passed in the United Nations General Assembly, the United States cast the only negative vote. While these two documents were significant accomplishments, neither was created with the sense of urgency and the feeling of anxiety such as that which existed in Kyoto.

⁵ Berry, p. 104.

What can be noted at all these conferences is the negative attitude of the United States towards passing any resolution that would in any way limit the existing activities of the commercial establishments belonging to the United States. This negative attitude further led to the oppositions by the United States to any serious proposals in Kyoto that would lessen the harmful impact of humans on the natural world. Economic concerns had an absolute priority, even though an abundance of evidence indicates that activities that were going on in 2006, aimed simply at human economic well-being, would produce severe and even catastrophic effects on the integral functioning of the natural world. The irony is that, by all measurements, the United States is the largest contributor to global atmospheric pollution.

Under such circumstances, the fact that mainstream institutional religions have not, in Berry's opinion, demonstrated adequate concern for the survival of the natural world, must be recognised. At the same time, the World Council of Churches has had an active group working on climate change for over a decade, and the evangelical community is voicing its concerns regarding the moral issues involved in global warming.⁶ Yet, says Berry, many religious authorities and theologians still seem to have little understanding that the natural world is the primary revelation of the divine and the context in which religion is awakened in the human soul. Loss of the splendour and diversity of the natural world is loss of the primary source of religious awakening. This failure, states Berry, in the basic establishments that govern our lives is so devastating in its consequences for both the physical and spiritual aspects of human survival that a growing revulsion towards such crass insensitivity is occurring throughout society. A small number of scientists, activists, spiritual leaders, and scholars as well as writers and artists, have arisen to call for a new era in the geo-biological, as well as the human-cultural, history of the planet. For the first time, the human community is directly

⁶ Berry, p. 105.

confronting the question of the integral well-being of the earth. This is the meaning of the Kyoto Protocol conference in December of 1997. Even as the ratification of the protocol regulations has taken place (2004), the ultimate success of the protocol to reduce global warming remains in doubt. The weakened decisions that were arrived at have a minimal chance of being sufficiently implemented; yet the confrontation has taken place.⁷

The problems presented by global warming in the 21st century have certainly presented great cause for concern. But what significant events have played a contributory factor to the situation we now face? Certainly the period between the 1950's through to the 1970's was characterized by a new awareness of the environmental damage caused by humans: the devastating effects of World War II, the nuclear bomb, the discovery of harmful effects produced by fertilizers, pesticides and detergents, the chemical war in Vietnam and the oil crisis.

Between the 1960s and 1970s, ecologists, after this extensive period of environmental disasters, made their knowledge public and accessible to civil society and governments, requesting their support more and more frequently.⁸ The issues addressed through the field of environmental science were, in turn, able to become more widely known in society. To clarify here, according to Ynestra King, ecological science is concerned with examining interrelationships among all forms of life, aiming to harmonize nature, human and non-human. It can be described as an integrative science in an age of fragmentation and specialization. It is referred to as a critical science which both grounds and necessitates a critique of our existing society.⁹ It can be thought of as a reconstructive science, where it suggests directive routes for the reconstruction of

⁷ Berry, p. 106.

⁸ Chiara Certoma, 'Ecology, Environmentalism and System Theory', *Kybernetes* Vol 35, Issue 6 (2006), 915-921 (p. 918).

⁹ Ynestra King, 'The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology' in *Healing the Wounds: the Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. by Judith Plant (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1989), p. 150.

human society so that it operates in a harmonious way with the natural environment.¹⁰ As the issue of climate change is unquestioningly a global primary issue, the effects it produces are equally important and I intend to begin by looking at exactly what that means.

‘Managing the Health Effects of Climate Change’ is the work of UCL academics from many disciplines across the university – including health, anthropology, geography, engineering, economics, law and philosophy. Professor Anthony Costello, who is leading the team, says that this climate-change project brought down the traditional interdisciplinary barriers common at all universities, and hopes it could act as a model for global governance bodies to work together. The UCL team focused on key areas: patterns of disease and mortality, food security, water and sanitation, shelter and human settlements, extreme events, and population migration. Professor Costello says: “The big message of this report is that climate change is a health issue affecting billions of people, not just an environmental issue about polar bears and deforestation. The impacts will be felt not just in the UK, but all around the world – and not just in some distant future but in our lifetimes and those of our children.”¹¹ In terms of disease and mortality, the UCL–Lancet Commission discusses the global health implications of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projections – from the optimistic average global temperature rise of 2 degrees C to the catastrophic 6 degrees C. The authors consider a wide range of pathways through which climate change could exert its effects on health, some of which may happen before others. Changing patterns of disease and mortality would emerge in a greater rate of transmission and geographic spread of traditionally tropical endemic diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. Heat – the ‘silent’ killer – has a major effect on mortality, with the 2003 heat wave causing

¹⁰ King, p. 151.

¹¹ Anthony Costello, ‘Climate Change: The biggest global-health threat of the 21st century’, (2009) <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news-articles/0905/09051501> [accessed 12 May 2011] (para. 2 of 7)

up to 70,000 excess deaths in Europe. While some people believe populations in India and Africa may be more resistant to heat waves, there is little evidence of this and major heat waves could increase death rates in these populations more than in high-income countries. Food and water security will be a major issue as climate change progresses. Scientists believe that crops are much more sensitive to temperature changes than first thought – a 1 degree C change can make a difference of 17% in yields. Professor Costello says: “If we are going to get early changes in the next 20 or 30 years, falling crop yields could trigger more of an effect through rising food prices. Indeed we are seeing effects of dramatic rises in food prices at this particular time. One billion people currently have calorie-deficient diets – this situation will get worse as demand increases from India, China and other nations with a population boom.” Up to 250 million people in Africa will face water shortages by 2020 if no action is taken on adaptation. Water and sanitation are crucial to prevent gastroenteritis and malnutrition. Melting glaciers, and changing river flows and rainfall patterns, are already causing flooding and droughts. While 2010 is the warmest year on record, future years are projected to get even warmer. The temperatures between the two years differed less than 0.018 degrees Fahrenheit. The next warmest years are 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2007 and 2009, which are statistically tied for third warmest year. The analysis found 2010 approximately 1.34 F warmer than the average global surface temperature from 1951 to 1980. To measure climate change, scientists look at long-term trends. GISS began keeping global temperature records in 1880. “If the warming trend continues, as is expected, if greenhouse gases continue to increase, the 2010 record will not stand for long,” said GISS Director James Hansen. The analysis produced at GISS is compiled from weather data from more than 1000 meteorological stations around the world, satellite observations of sea surface temperature and Antarctic research station measurements. A computer program uses the data to calculate temperature anomalies; the difference

between surface temperature in a given month and the average temperature for the same period during 1951 to 1980. This three-decade period acts as a baseline for the analysis. The resulting temperature record closely matches others independently produced by the Met Office Hadley Centre in the United Kingdom and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Climatic Data Centre. The record temperature in 2010 is particularly noteworthy, because the last half of the year was marked by a transition to strong La Niña conditions, which bring cool sea surface temperatures to the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. "Global temperature is rising as fast in the past decade as in the prior two decades, despite year-to-year fluctuations associated with the El Niño-La Niña cycle of tropical ocean temperature," Hansen and colleagues reported in the Dec. 14, 2010, issue of *Reviews of Geophysics*.

A chilly spell also struck last winter across northern Europe. The event may have been influenced by the decline of Arctic sea ice and could be linked to warming temperatures at more northern latitudes. Arctic sea ice acts like a blanket, insulating the atmosphere from the ocean's heat. Take away that blanket, and the heat can escape into the atmosphere, increasing local surface temperatures. Regions in northeast Canada were more than 18 degrees warmer than normal in December.

The loss of sea ice may also be driving Arctic air into the middle latitudes. Winter weather patterns are notoriously chaotic, and the GISS analysis finds seven of the last 10 European winters warmer than the average from 1951 to 1980. The unusual cold in the past two winters has caused scientists to begin to speculate about a potential connection to sea ice changes. "One possibility is that the heat source due to open water in Hudson Bay affected Arctic wind patterns, with a seesaw pattern that has Arctic air downstream pouring into Europe," Hansen said.¹²

¹² Eric Mclamb, '2010 Global Temperatures Warmest on Record', (2011) <http://www.ecology.com/ecology-today/2011/0131-global-temperature-warmest-on-record> [accessed 12 May 2011] The information for this report has been supplied by NASA.

Another problematic area is that rapid urbanization, particularly in developing nations, leads to inadequate housing, particularly slums, which are the most exposed during extreme climatic events. Extreme events, including cyclones and hurricanes, have doubled over the past 20 years, according to the insurance companies who insure against them. But in an event such as a cyclone, a rich nation would normally have relatively few casualties compared to poorer countries. Consider Hurricane Katrina with a loss of 1,850 lives compared with the recent cyclone in Burma which is thought to have claimed 150,000 lives. Of the 20 largest cities in the world, 13 are on a coast. Sea levels have been predicted to rise from anywhere between 0.5m and 1.2m over the 21st century; some predictions as high as 5m are beginning to emerge. This would be catastrophic.¹³ Professor Costello says: “We might be reaching a tipping point in public opinion. I think the health lobby has come late to this debate and should have been saying more. Young people realise this is the great issue of our age.” He proposes three action points leading from this report: “First, we have to add the health lobby to the mitigation debate – they must emphasize the threat to our children and grandchildren from greenhouse-gas emissions and deforestation. Second, there must be a focus on health systems – there is massive inequality in health systems throughout the world. Because of this, the loss of healthy life years as a result of global environmental change is predicted to be 500 times higher in Africa than in European nations, despite Africa making a minimal contribution to the causes of climate change. Third, we must develop win–win situations whereby we mitigate and adapt to climate change and at the same time significantly improve human health and wellbeing. There are major health benefits from low-carbon lifestyles, which can reduce obesity, heart and lung disease, diabetes and stress. He concludes: “We believe that all the main players – in health, politics, science, technology and civil society – must come together. The UCL–Lancet

¹³ Costello, para. 5 of 7.

Commission laid out a framework for action, and we have called for a collation of information on the health effects of climate change leading up to a major international conference in the next two years. We especially want representation from poorer nations. This conference would set out some clear indicators, targets and accountability mechanisms. We need a new 21st-century public-health movement to deal with climate change.”¹⁴

An accompanying editorial in *The Lancet* states: “UCL is a university that has combined a distinguished history of moral engagement with a more recent revitalized global purpose, expressed through its strengthened commitment to global health in teaching, research and institution building. In preparing to undertake its work for this first Lancet Commission, the UCL team reached out beyond health to engineers, political scientists, lawyers, geographers, anthropologists, economists, philosophers, and students, among others. They discovered new ways to review evidence and integrate ideas collaboratively.” Through these efforts, they identified five critical challenges that scientists, clinicians, and policymakers will have to address if climate change is not to become the biggest catastrophe threatening human survival. First, there is a massive gap in information, an astonishing lack of knowledge about how we should respond to the negative health effects of climate change. Second, since the effects of climate change will hit the poor hardest, we have an immense task before us to address the inadequacies of health systems to protect people in countries most at risk. Third, there is a technology challenge. Technologies do have the potential to help us adapt to changes in climate. But these technologies have to be developed out of greater research investments into climate change science, better understanding about how to deliver those technologies in the field, and a more complete appreciation of the social and cultural dimensions into which those technologies might be implanted. A fourth challenge is political: creating

¹⁴ Costello, para 6 of 7.

the conditions for low-carbon living. And finally there is the question of how we adapt our institutions to make climate change the priority it needs to be: “Our commitment is long term. With UCL and other partners, we plan to convene an international summit in two years’ time to review progress and priorities in our collective responses to the urgent and alarming health effects of climate change.”¹⁵

The effects of climate change are increasing pressure on already limited natural resources in many parts of the world, which puts the 900 million poor people who do not have enough to eat at even greater risk. How can the world’s farmers meet the food demand of a growing population despite an unstable climate and other food security challenges? In 2010, IFPRI’s climate change experts and collaborators responded to this question with *Food Security, Farming, and Climate Change to 2050*, a research monograph in which the authors developed 15 different food security scenarios through 2050 based on alternative combinations of potential population levels, income growth, and climate change. CASE (climate, agriculture, and socioeconomic) maps—interactive online visualization tools—present much of the data underlying the report’s analysis and provide evidence that broad-based economic growth, improved agricultural productivity, and robust international trade can partially offset the negative effects of climate change on food security. To achieve these goals, increased public investment in land, water, and nutrient use and relatively free international trade are essential. The Institute’s global change research also looks at energy scarcity and its implications for agriculture. In collaboration with Stanford University and an international team of researchers, an ongoing examination of the relationship between biofuels and food security shows that strong biofuel growth can occur in developed countries even without government protection and subsidies as long as product prices are competitive with crude oil, flexible-fuel vehicles have a significant presence, and adequate

¹⁵ Costello, para. 7 of 7.

infrastructure for distribution exists. In developing countries like Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania, the familiar problems of poor infrastructure and low productivity in agriculture are likely to pose additional challenges to national biofuel programs. However, if appropriate investments and logistical efforts within the agriculture sector are made (and if governments are realistic about the high level of support necessary during the early stages of a program), promising possibilities exist that could benefit local farmers.¹⁶ The effects of slow-onset climate change are expected to have “potentially catastrophic” impact on food production in developing countries in the future, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned today, calling for action to mitigate the adverse consequences. “Currently the world is focused on dealing with shorter-term climate impacts caused mainly by extreme weather events, said Alexander Müller, the FAO Assistant-Director General for Natural Resources, in a submission to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). “This is absolutely necessary, but ‘slow-onset’ impacts are expected to bring deeper changes that challenge the ecosystem services needed for agriculture, with potentially disastrous impacts on food security during the period from 2050 to 2100. Coping with long-term changes after the fact does not make much sense. We must already today support agriculture in the developing world to become more resilient,” said Müller. In its submission, FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) outlines steps that governments could consider in climate change negotiations to ensure that food security is not threatened. The agency recommends that food security be used as an indicator of vulnerability to climate change, saying that agriculture systems and the ecosystems it depends on are highly sensitive to climate variability and climate change. Changes in temperature, precipitation and related outbreaks of pest and diseases can reduce

¹⁶ International Food Policy Research Institute, Annual Report 2010, <http://www.ifpri.org/annualreport/2010> [accessed 12 May 2011]

production, with poor people in countries that depend on food imports particularly vulnerable, according to FAO. “If we’re looking to assess vulnerability to climate change, it makes very good sense to look at food security as one important indicator,” said Müller. FAO suggests that global climate change adaptation mechanisms include greater attention to risks arising from slow-onset impacts of climate change, particularly the effect on food security. A key measure highlighted in the FAO submission is the need to develop staple food varieties that are better adapted to future climatic conditions. Plant genetic material stored in gene banks should be screened with future requirements in mind, and additional plant genetic resources – including those from wild relatives of food crops – should be collected and studied because of the risk that they may disappear, FAO recommends. Climate-adapted crops such as varieties of major cereals that are resistant to heat, drought, submergence and salty water, the agency suggests, stressing this should be done in ways that respect breeders’ and farmers’ rights, in accordance with the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources.¹⁷

There is much work to be done in creating better circumstances for the world to live under. It is quite clear argues Berry, that the natural world has, inherent within it violence and a vulnerability. The commercial-industrial world has given Western civilisation, at least in the interim, security against famine, against cold and heat and protection against many diseases, for a certain portion of the human community. The human community enjoy the convenience and luxury of refrigerated food, we have cars, air conditioning, aeroplanes, computers, and so the list goes on. We are not yet prepared to give all that up. Yet it must be made very clear that we are certainly paying a high price for these luxuries and herein lies the difficulty. Despite the disintegration of the

¹⁷ ‘UN Warns of Climate Changes Potentially Dire Impact on Food Security’, (2011) <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/climatechange/gateway>. [accessed 12 May 2011]

industrial bubble, humanity cling to these possessions in the belief that only the industrial corporations can provide the better life that we so ardently long for.¹⁸

At its current order of magnitude, it would be difficult to maintain the industrial world. Berry identifies three reasons for this: First of all, when it was created, there was limited awareness of the dark side of the world of industry. Its creators saw and experienced only the bright side. Many who built the roads, structures and dams viewed them as glorious ways into the future. Now we see the damage dams can do the damage of irrigation processes, the damage the car is causing.¹⁹ The second reason is a financial one: It costs many times more to maintain things than to construct them in the first place. We have insufficient resources for repair. Every government is running a deficit. The United States for example, was in 2006, in excess of \$8 trillion dollars in debt. It has an annual budget deficiency of hundreds of billions of dollars. The third reason is that natural resources are no longer readily available. The petrochemical industry is already beyond its apex. Within twenty years in the United States, Berry predicts that petrol and petrol based products will become increasingly expensive. All the oil in Alaska will be unable to keep America going for more than a few years. No matter how much fossil fuel is discovered within the lifetime of our children, the petrochemical industry will be seeking out other sources of supply.

Berry argues that it is within this context that we have to counter so many of the most forceful structures that have determined the world as it is. Even now, we are in the process of restructuring the story of the universe that we must tell our children. A restructuring of all the professions is in process. All the human professions, states Berry, must recognise their prototype and their primary resource in the integral functioning of the earth. The natural world itself is the primary economic reality, the

¹⁸ Berry, p. 29.

¹⁹ Berry, p. 29.

primary educator, the primary governance, the primary healer, the primary presence of the sacred, the primary moral value.

In economics, it is clear that the human economy derives from the earth economy. The glory of a rising gross national product with an irreversibly declining gross earth product is an economic absurdity. The only viable human economy is one that is integral with the earth economy.

In education, ecology is not a course, nor is it a programme. It is the foundation of all courses, all programmes and all professions. Such a statement can be made because ecology is a functioning cosmology and cosmology deals with the ultimate self-referent mode of being, the universe itself. The ecology issue is not restricted to one course in education.²⁰ It is *the* course, *the* curriculum, *the* structure of the entire educational programmed. It is the basis of medicine; it is the context for law. *Ecology* refers to the way the universe functions. The universe is the ultimate referent for every mode of being and every mode of activity in the universe. Cosmology is the unifying context and the ultimate referent for all human understanding. It is the entire sequence of education from pre-school to high school. It is the comprehensive context of phenomenal existence. Berry believes that college education should move into an ecological or planetary phase. In addition to teaching the arts and sciences, we should teach an ecological economics that recognises the cost to the planet of industrialisation. Traditional economics focuses on the exchange and productions of services and goods, but the discipline has been reduced to a mere utilitarian and exploitative process. Such a distortion of economics is at the base of many social and environmental problems in current times. Therefore, we need new forms of ecological economics, such as Herman Daly, Robert Costanza and Hazel Henderson suggest.

²⁰ Berry, p. 30.

Education, according to Berry, is already late in revising itself to include attention to the environment. But he hopes that this will eventually change. Education will be defined as knowing the story of the universe, or the planet Earth, of life, of consciousness, as a single story. For Berry, there is no other way of discovering the role of the human in the universe. The work of Maria Montessori is valuable here where she states that in the child's search for experiencing the universe, Montessori found the basic guidance that we need for an integral educational programme within the Epic of Evolution. In her 1936 series of essays titled *To Educate the Human Potential*, the six year old child needs to experience his or her own centre as the centre of the universe. Montessori writes:

Since it has been seen necessary to give so much to the child, let us give the child a vision of the whole universe. The universe is an imposing reality, and an answer to all questions. We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity. This idea helps the mind of the child to become fixed, to stop wandering in an aimless quest for knowledge. He is satisfied, having found the universal centre of himself with all things.²¹

She proceeds to describe the security that the child feels within the integral functioning of the natural world as soon as he/she is assured that the universe is that which gives him/her orientation. In this wandering through the natural world, the imagination becomes inspired, the mind is activated and the feeling of nobility developed. What Montessori could not experience in her times, argues Berry, was the empirical evidence of the intimacy of every phase of the universe with every other phase such as we now recognise to be the basis for all scientific inquiry. Yet she knew that the child needed to know the story of the universe and to grow throughout life with ever greater intimacy

²¹ Maria Montessori, *The Clio Montessori Series Vol 6* (Oxford: Clip press, 1989).

with the universe and ever greater delight in celebrating the grandeur of existence within this vast community.

This story of the evolutionary universe, she told with incredible detail for the period in which she lived, recognising that the telling of the story of the universe should not be a technical explanation of the evolutionary process, nor should it be interrupted by constant reference to how we discovered the story.²² She says:

To interest the children in the universe, we must not begin by giving them elementary facts about it, to make them merely understand its mechanism, but start with far loftier notions of a philosophical nature, put in an acceptable manner, suited to the child's psychology.²³

Just as the earth is a biospiritual planet, the universe is a physical, spiritual, biological reality. Knowing the story of the universe, of the Earth, of life and of consciousness, all as a single story, is where the synthesis is. Humanity articulates this story in a particular human way the birds do it in their way, as do whales, worms and insects. Every particle of the universe tells a story in its own context. It is a kind of symphonic process. When we exile the scientific telling of the story from the humanities and theology, we do not allow them to be an integral expression of the great story.²⁴

Early in the 1960's two books were published in the USA, both of which according to Halkes, produced explosive results. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* quickly brought to the attention of the public, the already existing discussion on, and the concern for, the disintegration and slow destruction of the environment in America. This publication also saw to it that the struggle for a cleaner environment was begun. Carson, an American biologist, had previously written a study in 1941, entitled, *Under the Sea Wind*, in which she denounced the harmful effects of DDT on the organisms in

²² Berry, p. 119.

²³ Montessori, p. 28.

²⁴ Berry, p. 31.

sea water.²⁵ Rachel Carson argues passionately for the wondrous appreciation of the natural world.²⁶ However, such appreciation brought with it a certain amount of anxiety about what might happen to the world if humans continued to destroy the environment. The sense of wonder Carson expresses is, she believes, a prelude for care for the earth. She states:

The more clearly we focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the world about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction', and 'A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is to our misfortune that for most of us that clear eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe inspiring is dimmed and even lost when we reach adulthood.'²⁷

However, perhaps we have now reached a stage where this is no longer acceptable to many of us. Throughout the world, states Vandana Shiva, a new questioning is growing, rooted in the experience of those for whom the spread of what was termed as 'enlightenment' has been the spread of darkness, of the extinction of life and life-enhancing processes. A new awareness is growing that is questioning the sanctity of science and development and revealing that these are not universal categories of progress, but the special projects of modern western patriarchy. Shiva expresses how her involvement with women's struggles for survival in India resulted in her publication, *Staying Alive* and is informed by both the sufferings and insights of those who struggle to sustain and conserve life, and whose struggles question the meaning of a progress, a science, a development which destroys life and poses a great threat to survival. The death of nature is central to this threat. The earth is rapidly dying, says Shiva: her forests are dying, her soils are dying, her water is dying and her air is dying.

²⁵ Catharina J. M. Halkes, *New Creation: Christian Feminism and the Renewal of the Earth* (London: SPCK, 1991), p. 108. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (London: Penguin, 2000) Rachel Carson, *Under the Sea Wind* (London: Penguin, 2007).

²⁶ Celia Deane Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), p. 14. Rachel Carson, *A Sense of Wonder* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

²⁷ T. Locker and J. Bruchac, *Rachel Carson: Preserving a Sense of Wonder* (Colorado: Fulchrum publishing, 2004), p. 32.

Tropical forests, creators of the world's climate, the cradle of the world's vegetational wealth, are being bull-dozed, burnt, ruined or submerged.

Up to 50 per cent of all living things are estimated to exist in tropical forests. The unparalleled diversity of species within tropical forests means relatively few individuals of each; therefore any forest clearance disrupts their life cycles and threatens them with rapid extinction.

With the destruction of forests, water and land, we are losing our life-support systems. This destruction is taking place in the name of 'development' and progress, yet there must be something seriously wrong, Shiva argues, with the idea of progress that threatens survival itself. The violence to nature, which appears intrinsic to the dominant development model, is also associated with violence to women who depend on nature for drawing sustenance for themselves, their families and their societies.

Viewed from the experiences of Third World women, the methods of thinking and action that pass for science and development, respectively, are not universal and humanly inclusive as they are perceived to be; modern science and development are projects of male, western origin, both in an ideological and historical sense. They are the latest and most brutal expression of a patriarchal ideology which is threatening to annihilate nature and the entire human species.²⁸ Contemporary development activity in the Third World super-imposes the scientific and economic paradigms created by western, gender-based ideology on communities in other cultures. Ecological destruction and the marginalisation of women, we now know, have been the inevitable results of most development programmes and projects based on such paradigms; they violate the integrity of one and destroy the productivity of the other. Women, as victims

²⁸ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (London: Zen Books, 1988), p. xvi.

of the violence of patriarchal forms of development, have risen against it to protect nature and preserve their survival and sustenance. Indian women have been at the forefront of ecological struggles to conserve forests, water and land. They have challenged the western idea of nature as an object of exploitation and have protected her as Prakriti, the living force that supports life. They have further challenged the western notions of economics as production of profits, and capital accumulation with their own idea of economics as production of sustenance and needs satisfaction. A science that fails to respect nature's needs and a development that does not respect the needs of people inevitably threaten survival. In a fight to survive the onslaughts of both, women have begun a struggle that challenges the most basic of western patriarchy-its notions of nature and women, and of science and development. Their ecological struggle in India is aimed simultaneously at liberating nature from ceaseless exploitation and themselves from limitless marginalisation. They are creating a feminist ideology that transcends gender, and a political practice that is humanly inclusive; they are challenging patriarchy's ideological claim to universalism not with another universalising tendency, but with diversity; they are challenging the dominant concept of power as violence with the alternative concept of non-violence as power.²⁹

It is clear then that these women are very driven in facing the challenges presented to them and it is because women in India see themselves as being an intimate part of nature, in both imagination and practice. At one level nature is symbolised as the embodiment of the feminine principle, whilst at another, she is nurtured by the feminine to produce life and provide sustenance. This forms a part of Indian cosmology. Further from the viewpoint of Indian cosmology, the world is produced and renewed by the dialectical play of creation and destruction, cohesion and disintegration. The tension between the opposites from which motion and movement arises is depicted as the initial

²⁹ Shiva, pp. xvii-xviii.

appearance of dynamic energy known as Shakti. All existence arises from this primordial energy which is the substance of everything, pervading everything. The manifestation of this power, this energy, is called nature or Prakriti. Nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos; in conjunction with the masculine principle, Purusha. Prakriti creates the world.

Nature as Prakriti, is inherently active; a powerful, productive force in the dialectic of creation, renewal and sustenance of *all* life. The nature of Nature as Prakriti is activity *and* diversity. Nature symbols from every realm of nature are in a sense signed with the image of nature. Prakriti lives in a stone or tree, animal, fruit or pool and is thus identified with them. The living nurturing relationship between man and nature here differs dramatically, states Shiva, from the concept of from the idea of man as separate from and dominating over nature.³⁰

Contemporary western views of nature are fraught with the dichotomy of duality between man and woman, and person and nature. Contrastingly, in Indian cosmology, person and nature are a duality in unity. They are inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man. Each form of creation bears the sign of this dialectical unity, of diversity within a unifying principle and this dialectical harmony between the male and female principles and between nature and man, becomes the basis of ecological thought and action in India. Since, ontologically, there is no dualism between man and nature because nature as Prakriti sustains life nature has been treated as integral and inviolable. Prakriti, far from being an esoteric abstraction, is an every-day concept which organises daily life. As an embodiment and manifestation of the feminine principle it is characterised by: Creativity, activity and productivity; diversity

³⁰ Shiva, pp. 38-39.

in form and aspect; connectedness and inter-relationship between all beings, including man; continuity between the human and natural; and sanctity of life in nature.

From a conceptual viewpoint, this is radically different from the Cartesian idea of nature as 'environment'. Here, the environment is seen as separate from man.³¹ This dualism has resulted in nature being regarded as inert and passive; uniform and mechanistic; separable and fragmented within itself; separate from man; inferior, to be dominated by man. The rupture within nature and between man and nature, and its associated transformation from a life-force that sustains to an exploitable resource is characteristic of the Cartesian view which has displaced more ecological world-views and created a development paradigm which cripples women and nature simultaneously.

The ontological shift for an ecologically sustainable future has a lot to gain from the world-views of ancient civilisations and diverse cultures which survived sustainability down the centuries. These were based on ontology of the feminine as the living principle, and on an ontological continuity between nature and society. Not only did this result in an ethical context which excluded possibilities of exploitation and domination, it allowed the creation of an earth family.³²

The *African* search for a holistic Christology presents a Christ who is cosmological and who stands wholly at the heart of the search for justice on earth. Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike attributes the title of cosmological liberator to Jesus.³³ He is the one who hears the groaning of nature overcomes the exploitation and heals the pain. The Jesus who calmed the storms in his own historical time, can overcome the floods, droughts and famines that are killing Africans in our present day. It is Christ who is able

³¹ Shiva, p. 40.

³² Shiva, p. 41.

³³ Anne Nasimuyu-Wasike, *An African Woman's Experience in Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader*, ed. by Curt Codorette et al (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 101.

to restore balance to nature and through this, assist with the liberation of people. This presents us with a very important aspect in the Christological debate that has been disregarded for centuries by those more comfortable with understanding universal balance as meaning that dominant values will conquer. Nasimiyu-Waiske flags up a crucial point, argues Lisa Isherwood, which is that liberation has food as its basic component. People have to be in control of their own sustenance, and must not be dependant for the very basics in life if they are to be regarded as being truly free. The extent to which the West has intervened has played a major role in the increase of drought and famine and the ever increasing inability of Africans to cope with it. It was the colonizer who 'knew best' concerning farming methods, crop rotation and grazing. In addition to which the masters required that resources be used to maintain their wealth, with complete disregard to the survival of the population. This combination of greed and arrogance, argues Isherwood, has significantly contributed to the ruination of many African economies. A lot of the land is now ruined and numerous traditional, holistic ways of coping with the environment have either been lost or are no longer up to the new tasks. We must mention too, that colonial demands still exist which were placed on Africa and her people in the name of national debt. A cosmological Christology calls multi-national companies to account and poses serious environmental questions. This Christ, argues Isherwood, demands a major change in both economy and the way in which industry operates and pollutes the cosmos. Along with many other countries, Africa must no longer be subjected as a breeding ground for western luxuries. Instead, the west should provide aid where it is required as compensation for centuries of abuse and should, states Isherwood, 'stay out' of African politics. I could not agree more with these sentiments.³⁴

³⁴ Lisa Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 75-76.

There are many stories to tell relating to specific ecological situations and circumstances around the world that have arisen because we have basically allowed them to happen. Africa is one more example in the ecological drama of our time. Indeed, Ruether argues that narratives of world destruction that have arisen from ecologists certainly throughout the last century, can offer no guarantee of renewal of the earth. This paints an extremely worrying picture for the world. Ecological apocalyptic expresses a message that most humans today have great difficulty comprehending. The ecological message is that humanity has seized such power over the foundational life forces of the planet itself and this power has been used so unwisely that irreparable damage to a biosphere that took nature 4.5 billion years to develop is now a real possibility.³⁵ Destruction of the earth, states Ruether, is destruction of ourselves. Human power has assumed a worrying and frightening new responsibility. The capacity to be the agents of destruction of the earth also means that we must learn how to be its co-creators *before* such destruction becomes irreversible. This cannot be achieved by an adversarial or domineering relation toward nature. Because nature, even in its destruction Ruether argues, is following its basic laws of energy. We can construct our existence within these energy patterns constructively or destructively, but we are unable to change the actual basic laws themselves. It is by understanding how the web of life functions, that we can learn to sustain it as opposed to destroy it. This is not simply a task of intellectual understanding, but of *metanoia*, in the fullest sense of the word: of conversion, of our spirit and culture, of our technology and social relations, so that the human species exists within nature in a life-sustaining way. We must, says Ruether, effect this *metanoia* urgently. We do not have thousands of years to unlearn the wrong patterns that have been established over thousands of years. The exponential speed-up of these culminative patterns of destruction means we must learn new patterns and put

³⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), p. 85.

them into practice on a global scale within the next generation. Ruether argues that by 2030 C. E. it may be too late or at least too late to save much of the life-capacity of the biosphere that could be saved now. Human psycho-physiology and culture have failed to prepare us for with such foresight. We have been accustomed to responding to limited disasters after they have occurred, sometimes learning to avoid repeating the same mistakes, but too often reacting in ways that assure that the disaster will be repeated in new forms. To anticipate disasters on a global scale, that reach into the very foundations of the biosphere, to plan and act before disaster strikes, is something for which all societies seem ill prepared by our various histories and cultures. Many aspects of Western culture mitigate against such foresight and effective change on a global scale: our adversarial political divisions; our class, gender and race antagonisms, which suggest to the powerful that they can ride out the crisis, transferring the costs to a growing number of victims; and on a final note, the disinformation and fragmentation of our communication systems, long misshaped to distract people from reality, rather than to inform them intelligently.³⁶

What we need is global and local co-operation if we are to stabilise climate and preserve our planet. We can achieve this by cherishing and 'letting be' the varied bio-systems of the earth, from insects to harebells to woodlands and wetlands which, with our grasslands and fields, are our carbon sinks, our local or bioregional 'rainforest'.³⁷ We cherish our bio-regions by living sustainably locally which, with decreased trade and transport is the way we, in our supportive eco-systems, can reduce CO₂ emissions, begin to re-stabilise climate, restore soil and water, and live in a modest economy of quality, not growth, Harvey argues. Living sustainably locally, without indefinite 'sustainable economic growth', however, differs from the way our dominant culture,

³⁶ Ruether, pp. 86-87.

³⁷ Graham Harvey, 'Fields of Carbon', *Living Earth*, (2009), 16-19.

even in droughts and winter floods, tends to proceed. Jewish scholar Jonathan Gorsky observes, ‘Road building and airport expansion continue to provide tangible evidence of the power of short-term market forces to derail environmental good intentions.’³⁸ Comparing earth to a fragile living entity, from which people are taking too much, Jim Lovelock comments, ‘We are taking so much that it is no longer able to sustain the familiar and comfortable world we have taken for granted. Now it is changing, according to its own internal rules to a state where we are no longer welcome.’³⁹

Echlin states that to be welcome at home on earth again we urgently need to diminish our demands on our finite planet and to re-inhabit the earth community in co-operative symbiosis, in community with other people and all other creatures. We need to re-enter creation as fellow creatures with other animals, with insects, plants, aquatic life and life’s bio-diverse support systems rather than as semi-detached exploiters indulging in non-renewable, climate damaging energies. The hour is late, some, like Lovelock say it is *too* late-because we have not sufficiently persuaded urban industrial people in developed regions or people in aspirant developing regions, that unless we change course immediately to more renewable energies and local sustainable lifestyles, our children will be at planetary death’s door.⁴⁰

To sum up, we can see from the various reports highlighted that the current ecological situation is dire. Globally, we are faced with extreme situations that threaten nature and humanity alike. Scientists since the 1970’s have been keen to place the issues we are facing in the public domain. However, that is not to say that this has made a vast difference to how we treat the environment. As the ecological situation has increasingly approached crisis point, the key issues of over population, world poverty and climate

³⁸ Johnathan Gorsky, ‘Judaic Models of Sacral Transformation’, *Faiths in Creation*, (2008), (p. 15).

³⁹ James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. 7.

⁴⁰ Edward Echlin, *Climate and Christ* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2010), pp. 85-86.

change have to be addressed. As do pressing social and economic issues. We can no longer ignore what is happening to us and to our planet. The good news is that we are now more collectively working towards solutions with various organisations taking the lead. But the question begs, 'Are we doing *enough*?' It remains a fact that this global situation requires urgent, on-going attention.

Next we consult the work of Keller, placing the emphasis upon the idea of apocalyptic and its implications in contemporary times. The concerns of the ecological crisis examined in the first part provide a sound basis from which to focus more intensely on a very real global scenario.

The Notion of Apocalyptic in Modern Times

It is abundantly clear from this information that we are facing a very serious situation worldwide. What does it mean for humanity and the earth? In her book, *Apocalypse Now*, Catherine Keller, a process theologian, suggests that we are in the midst of apocalyptic times, arguing that given that there is so much illusion and disillusionment, judgement and indeed *hope* that it might serve our interests to consider such an idea.⁴¹ What we are considering here from Keller are some ideas that might be deemed as useful in terms of viewing where we are now in history as being 'apocalyptic'. We can no longer afford to think of the apocalyptic primarily in terms of long lost biblical times. The end-of-the-world scenarios that were present in the approach to the millennium, such as the prophecies of Nostradamus, the Mayan calendar and UFO's, brought us to what may be regarded as a particular point in time in earth history. In this respect, we can look to theology to assist our understanding in locating humanity within the mythic history of the apocalyptic.⁴²

Keller speaks of an apocalypse pattern operating in Western history. This pattern produces several beliefs: that the world as it has been is unacceptably and pervasively corrupt; there will be an imminent and unavoidable catastrophe, which will bring about the end of the "age" or "world"; that the one proclaiming the end is prophetic and chosen. As the original and intended meaning of "apocalypse" is "unveiling" "disclosure" or "revelation" it becomes the most extreme genre among biblical eschatologies in its biblical modes and this pattern will always involve a fourth belief: hope for a new age beyond the final showdown, where injustice is removed and the natural cosmos renewed. But, Keller states, the distance that exists between the

⁴¹Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

⁴²Catherine Keller, 'Why Apocalypse Now?', *Theology Today*, 49 (1992), 184-195 (p. 185).

biblical “prophetic” revelation and the current associations of “apocalypse now” is itself revealing. Apocalyptic anxieties and messianic hopes flow like alternating currents throughout the world taking a fervent religious form or a strident secular one. Apocalyptic myth signifies the “end” in some way, shape or form. It might be the end of capitalism or communism or patriarchy. Such predictions point towards the apocalyptic pattern of a final, inevitable showdown between the forces of light and darkness. Since the pre-millennialist movements of the nineteenth century, apocalypticism has shown that it has the capacity to be revolutionary, reactionary, marginal or mainstream. Ultimately then, reactions against it can equally take on numerous forms. In the late twentieth century, the “bang” of the bomb and sometimes the “cry” of the earth and its persecuted populations have propagated the notion of doom. As a result of this, it becomes problematic in differentiating final end of history from the actual crises of present history. While religious language has surrendered its ability to give any overriding coherence to a modern culture, it still seems to play a powerful performative role. It becomes difficult to know when some version of apocalypse is working itself out as a self-fulfilling prophecy, or when biblical prophecy-apocalyptic would provide a legitimate interpretive framework. That is not to say that any apocalyptic influence is a bad thing by way of producing alarmism, hysterical pessimism or naïve utopianism. But read in context, as a resource for oppressed communities, the intonations of apocalypse may deliver vital dialectical correctives to the vicious cycles of complacent optimism and self-defeating pessimism to which life in the “first world” predisposes us.⁴³ Methodologically, unlike the authors of the first apocalypses, who wrote from the anonymity of a vision taken from beyond history, it becomes impossible for today’s theologians to escape their own historicity. Therefore, there is a constructive tendency

⁴³Keller, p. 186.

to write from within the articulated boundaries of a precise historical situation, the situation of our own ethnic, social and sexual embodiment.⁴⁴

Moltmann argues that apocalypse as a text reveals not a divine investment in catastrophe but a hermeneutic of crisis allowing a beleaguered community to interpret its place within historical crisis in a meaningful way. The move from classical prophecy to apocalypse cannot simply be explained in terms of imperial oppression. This oppression is supplemented and matched by an extension of the notion of the “world” as universally inclusive. This universal horizon is opened by the apocalyptic vision of the inescapable interdependence of all creaturely life, bound together in apocalyptic destruction and the new creation.⁴⁵ Writing in 1992, Keller states that the last decade of the twentieth century may reveal to humanity, not the end of apocalypse but the accelerating, near simultaneous encounter with its many faces: secular and religious, judgemental and promissory, patriarchal and egalitarian. The crisis of ethnic diversity and separatism discloses something critical about this crisis—a moment of the crisis of converging difference. The apocalypse of ethnicity seems to be emerging as multilateralism begins to replace bilateralism. The struggles for national-ethnic identity, peoplehood, non-racialism and liberation all manifest the insurrection of difference against the institution eschatologies of those committed to the world as it has been. The postmodern high value of “difference” when it does not just celebrate difference for its own sake sounds a positively apocalyptic theme for the not-yet-being of a small and over populated planet.⁴⁶ The implications are vast and the quest for freedom and liberation becomes more urgent. Feminist theology, specifically, is the provider of the single most important test of the capacity of Christianity to convert itself into the future of freedom; a future for which all might express hope and toward which we must all

⁴⁴ Keller, p. 186.

⁴⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 232.

⁴⁶ Keller, p. 190.

work. The emerging work of women in religion offers invaluable criteria because it is internal to the tradition of the apocalyptic eschatological impulse. In a certain sense, the women's movement constitutes the most radical and the most apocalyptic challenge to what is referred to as "Western civilisation." Women whose hermeneutic derives from the awareness of the radical performative power of patriarchy in history and before biblical history, find hope in a version of the myth of apocalypse. The patriarchal world that is, the known world must collapse and is perceived to be collapsing. This is the presupposition of *New Woman, New Earth* and of *A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey*.⁴⁷ We are motivated to act in hope for nothing less than a "new aeon" in which the difference inflicted upon us by the history of injustice becomes the basis for a new justice of mutual relation, in which difference can be not tolerated but celebrated. However, the discontent of feminism within the Christian culture is, like all modern movements for justice, profoundly indebted to the prophetic eschatological heritage. Yet the "master" images of biblical eschatology are irredeemably identified through the male and often misogynistic. They cast the messianic force in the image of a raging patriarch, who in his Christian apocalypse takes the form of the bloodiest warrior-messiah of the bible. This is a constant problem for Christian pacifists. There is nothing of this in Jesus' apocalyptic beatitudes or in his parables of the "realm of God." But in the final text of the bible, we encounter a vision of his return with a double-edged sword of destruction protruding from his mouth to lead the angelic cavalry, clothed in whiteness and light, to a victory where blood flows to the bridles of the horses. The divine warrior does not originate, though he does worsen, in the apocalyptic desperation. He is there at the origin of the exodus-liberation motif and of the prophetic understanding of divine judgement as the justice of liberation. These texts illumine and

⁴⁷ Keller, p. 192. Titles of important works by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, both of whom present visionary re-readings of history from the vantage point of a feminist future. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth* (London: HarperCollins, 1989). Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1988).

inspire the myth of the redemption by violence that energises many contemporary revolutionary efforts, with whose cause we may be in solidarity. Feminism shares the apocalyptic convergence of revelation with revolutionary efforts, but women do not, by and large, look forward to a violent overthrow of men.⁴⁸

Conclusion

It is clear that humanity's dominance over nature has produced catastrophic results. Therefore, radical changes are required if humanity and the planet are to divert further disasters that threaten both. There needs to be a much wider sense and understanding of what it actually means to be human and the responsibilities that it carries in terms of all other life and the planet itself if it is to flourish and be fruitful. Certainly an awakening to the divinity of creation is paramount. This calls for re-education. A cosmological Christology calls for the recognition that everything, whether it is economics, politics, ecology, is part of the world in which we live and as such requires right action for the highest good of all. We can no longer ignore this if a living, loving cosmology is to be put into place.

Certainly Keller is correct in pointing us towards the possibility and plausibility that we might be in the midst of an apocalyptic time, locating our comprehension of this in mythical biblical history. Apocalyptic literature is crisis literature. The ecological situation can definitively be viewed as having placed the earth and humanity in crisis. However, she argues for the validity of a fourth aspect of apocalyptic; that of hope. Whilst we are placed in a pessimistic situation, there must also be a way forward and a new age to be ushered in. A 'raging' messiah figure is *not* the way forward. A patriarchal structure has shown us all too frequently that an aggressive approach is not

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 25, pp. 181ff.

the right one and it goes completely against the peaceful message and intention of Jesus. A quieter but equally effective approach to bring about the liberation we so desperately need seems a much better way.

We turn now to examine the Christian roots of the ecological crisis. We will address terms such as 'stewardship', 'subdue' and 'dominion' in an effort to make sense of the extent of misunderstanding and misuse these terms have incurred. We question how such misappropriation has come about and how it can be rectified to a greater degree.

Chapter Two

Christianity and the Roots of the Ecological Crisis

It is of importance to the research that we try to identify causes, situations or circumstances that might have their roots in Christianity and that may or may not have played a major role in the ecological disaster we could find ourselves facing. Therefore from a Christian perspective, it is necessary to examine how humanity has arrived at this point on a global scale where we are witnessing calamities of nature and where lives are being severely affected and even destroyed due to humanity's seeming lack of concern for the environment and indeed for others who inhabit the worst hit areas.

According to Susan Power Bratton, the role that Judeo-Christian theology has played in the developing environmental ethics has frequently been portrayed as negative or inadequate to modern problems. Historians, for example Lynn White, Jr. and Roderick Nash, have placed the blame on either the church or Biblical writings for encouraging the abuse of nature.⁴⁹ Even contemporary theologians from the Christian tradition, such as John B. Cobb, Jr., find the traditional Judeo-Christian view inadequate, offering the suggestion that we should seek new theological and philosophical alternatives.⁵⁰ Packer states that the question is a complex one because the Western Church has, through the centuries, neglected the study of creation.⁵¹ Interest in creation theology, argues Bratton, has been minor in comparison to other doctrinal

⁴⁹ Susan Power Bratton, 'Christian Eco-theology and the Old Testament', *Environmental Ethics*, 6 (1984), 195-209 (p. 195). Lynn White, Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155 (1967), 1203-1207. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

⁵⁰ Bratton, p. 195. John B. Cobb Jr., *Is it Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (California: Bruce, 1972).

⁵¹ James B. Packer, 'The Gospel: Its Contents and Communication', in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture* ed. by John Stott and Robert Coote (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 97-114.

issues such as Christology and soteriology, and many Christian scholars have a better understanding of the Greek texts than of the older Hebrew writings. Therefore, states Bratton, the attitude of the Church may not have been based on a thorough analysis of Scripture. Also, the recognition of a global environmental crisis is a recent phenomenon; our present scientific comprehension concerning the processes of environmental change was not available at the time the scriptures were written.

Bratton suggests that one possible way to develop a sound Christian eco-theology, and to determine a proper Christian approach to environmental ethics, is to first analyse scriptural texts that concern God-creation and man-creation relationships. In this way, we are then able to draw an accurate picture of what the biblical writers originally meant when discussing creation. In order to do this, we must refer to important components of Old Testament thinking on both creation and God as creator with a view to discussing these concepts in relation to the development of a viable Christian eco-theology.

It should be mentioned states Bratton, that modern Old Testament critics are not in agreement regarding the best methodology for analysis; nor do they all handle the question of the historical content in the same way. There are those critics who treat the Old Testament as if it had one main theme; others view it as presenting several main themes. Authors such as Von Rad and Brevard Childs, attempt to include the full canon in their work, or at least state that all books must be considered. Others, such as Claus Westermann do not regard all the books as being equally important or interpretable concerning central themes. Writers also vary greatly in how they relate the Old Testament to the New Testament: some disregard the New Testament entirely; others try to integrate the two, despite the fact that they are the products of different historical

and cultural environments, composed in different languages.⁵² Whilst such disagreements concerning detailed study of the Old Testament are important, Bratton states that she avoids such conflicts by referring to the principles For Old Testament theology outlined by Hasel.⁵³ Firstly, Biblical theology is to be treated as a historical-theological discipline and the method must be historical and theological from the starting point.⁵⁴ These are quite different, states Bratton from many attempts at constructing eco-theologies or at evaluating the potential success of a Judeo-Christian eco-theology, in that most such efforts are either historical or theological, but not both.⁵⁵ The only appropriate source for Old Testament theology is the Old Testament, not related literature or traditions.⁵⁶ This principle, Bratton argues, is important to eco-theologies where authors have seen passages such as the Genesis accounts only as versions of myths derived from alternative sources. Hasel, argues Bratton, would reject this treatment as inadequate.⁵⁷ An analysis need not follow the order of books in the canon, but should be based, as best can be determined, on the dates of the writings.⁵⁸ Hasel states that “An OT (Old Testament) theology not only seeks to know the knowledge of various books, or groups of writings; it also attempts to draw together and present the major themes of the OT...OT theology must allow its themes, motifs, and concepts to be formed for it by the OT itself.”⁵⁹ We have to be careful then argues Bratton, not to do what numerous environmental writers have done and view the Old Testament largely from the point of view of our own current philosophical interests and cultural environment. In evaluating Old Testament thought, we must undertake it with a recognition both of the writers original intentions and the Hebrew world view. Old

⁵² Bratton, p. 196. Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972).

⁵³ Hasel, pp. 169-183.

⁵⁴ Hasel, pp. 169-171.

⁵⁵ Bratton, p. 196.

⁵⁶ Hasel, p. 177.

⁵⁷ Bratton, p. 196.

⁵⁸ Hasel, p. 179.

⁵⁹ Hasel, p. 180.

Testament theology must be founded on what the Old Testament itself actually states about something. We should also discriminate between those ideas, practices or events merely recorded or described in the texts and those which are condoned or affirmed. Any discussion of creation theology must endeavour to be eclectic care must be taken not to replace the priorities of the ancient Hebrews with our own.⁶⁰ Hasel states “As the OT is interrogated for its theology, its answers first of all by yielding various theologies, namely those of the individual books and group of writings, and then by yielding the theologies of various longitudinal themes. But the name of our discipline as theology of the OT is not only concerned to present and explicate the variety of different theologies. The concept foreshadowed by the name of the discipline has one theology in view: namely the theology of the OT.”⁶¹ For our purpose, argues Bratton, this has the implication that in analysing creation theology of the Old Testament, we have to examine both individual books and groups of writings, and at the overall presentation of all the books. In light of Hasel’s remarks, creation theology might be better termed the “creation theme” and seen as one of many theological strands, intimately connected to other the other themes that combine to make Old Testament theology. In pursuing the creation theme we cannot depend solely on the first few chapters of Genesis. Numerous writes who have tackled the question of the adequacy of Judeo-Christian environmental ethics, have been reliant upon one or two passages of Scripture and may then, have misunderstood the total thrust of the scriptural texts.⁶² Finally, Hasel states that “The name ‘theology of the Old Testament’ implies the larger context of the Bible of which the New Testament is the other part. An integral OT theology must demonstrate its

⁶⁰ Bratton, p. 197.

⁶¹ Hasel, p. 181.

⁶² Bratton, p. 197.

basic relationship to the NT or to NT theology.”⁶³ Bratton states that this is critical in determining how the Old Testament should relate to Christian eco-theology.⁶⁴

Bratton argues that although many environmental commentators start the discussion of Judeo-Christian eco-theology with the question of man’s dominion, most OT commentators begin the discussion of creation theology with an investigation of God as creator. Contemporary readers tend to search for passages explaining man’s relationship to nature, but this is a poor way to begin analysing OT texts, which are very theocentric. Westermann states: “A theology of the Old Testament has the task of summarizing and viewing together what the Old Testament as a whole, in all its sections, says about God.”⁶⁵

In terms of how the OT presents God as acting in the original creation, we begin by comparing the Hebrew presentation to those of neighbouring cultures. Anderson states that the OT has some striking parallels to Babylonian creation accounts.⁶⁶ These were developed in an environment where there was extensive threat of syncretism with Egyptian and Canaanite cultures. In spite of some borrowing of imagery, the Hebrew picture of God as creator was distinctive. In the Babylonian accounts, the god Marduk fights chaos and in the process creates life and order. In the Genesis accounts chaos is mentioned, but is conceptually different. The “Enuma Elish” epic of the Babylonians describes a watery chaos that is not only living matter, but is part of the first two principles, Apsu and Tiamat, in which Heidel states that it is in Apsu and Tiamet where all the elements of the future universe were comingled.⁶⁷ In the Babylonian epic then, the universe is pre-existing. In Genesis, God is the creator of all matter and gives life to his creatures via his divine breath. Bratton makes the point that Biblical scholars

⁶³ Hasel, p. 183.

⁶⁴ Bratton, p. 198.

⁶⁵ Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 9.

⁶⁶ Bratton, p. 198. Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (New York: Association Press, 1967).

⁶⁷ Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 97.

disagree on the question of whether the first chapter of Genesis really describes creation from nothing. Genesis 1:1 could also imply there was something present before creation, even if it were “chaos.” However this is a semantic question and alternate readings are possible.⁶⁸

The gods of the Babylonians arise out of the primeval chaos and are, therefore, merely deified natural forces. In the Hebrew accounts, even when Yahweh confronts chaos, “creation does not draw the deity into the flux of the world process...” states Eichrodt.⁶⁹ Much less does it generate God or the godly. The OT puts forward the universe as God’s creation, which he transcends. This contrasts considerably to both the Canaanite and Babylonian religions, where heavenly bodies, trees, and other natural objects were credited with supernatural power and thus deified. We can observe that from the very start, that Yahweh is seen as acting personally and spiritually to create order. In the Genesis accounts and in the prophets, Yahweh creates through His word.⁷⁰ Von Rad thus states that these accounts provide us with the concept of the absolute effortlessness of divine creative action and if the world is the product of the creative word, it is therefore sharply separated in nature from God himself: “It is neither an emanation nor a mythically understood manifestation of the divine nature and power.”⁷¹ This produces a number of implications for the relationship between God and creation. Gilkey observes that no part of creation shares “divinity in any of its aspects, as if the being or substance of God has separated itself into many pieces to become the being of each creature.”⁷² Further to this, states Gilkey, the difference between God and His

⁶⁸ Bratton, p. 198.

⁶⁹ Walther Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 98.

⁷⁰ Bratton, p. 199.

⁷¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 142.

⁷² Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1959), p. 86.

creation “is the result of God’s creative act, not a ‘fall’ or turning away from God...” and God’s transcendence is itself a source of the “alienation” of creation from God.⁷³

The spirit or *Ruah* in Hebrew meaning ‘breath of God,’ is instrumental in the original creative act states Bratton. And as such is held throughout the OT to be the very principle of life.⁷⁴ Both man and animals come to life through this breath. Gilkey also sees this spirit as “the instrument of God in salvation history,” and the “consummating power of the new age.”⁷⁵ Neither the spirit nor the creation event are independent of other major OT themes. Westermann points out:

...only he who is active in everything could be savior. Since God is one, the savior must also be the creator. It follows that in the Old Testament the history established by God’s saving deed was expanded to include the beginning of everything that happens. The savior of Israel is the creator; the creator is the savior of Israel. What began in creation issues into Israel’s history.⁷⁶

Environmental commentators who restrict their reading to Genesis often miss the complex interweaving of the OT idea of creation with other themes.⁷⁷ Von Rad argues “that Israel was interested in creation not because of nature and its problems, but because of its history.”⁷⁸ The “history only” point is extreme, states Bratton, but a careful re-reading of the Old Testament in its entirety shows creation as relating to history, the people of Israel, wisdom, salvation and eschatological events. The references appear throughout the Old Testament, but are most numerous in the wisdom literature, the Prophets, and in Psalms.⁷⁹

At this point, we now need to examine the way in which humankind relates to God in the midst of creation, and thereby relates to creation. The initial problem we encounter concerns the statement in Genesis 1:26: “Then God said : “Let us make man

⁷³ Gilkey, p. 87.

⁷⁴ Bratton, p. 199.

⁷⁵ Gilkey, pp. 57-58.

⁷⁶ Westermann, p. 86.

⁷⁷ Bratton, p. 199.

⁷⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *God at Work in Israel*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), p. 99.

⁷⁹ Bratton, p. 200.

in our own image, after our likeness....” This has been interpreted by some authors as simply placing man above creation, but it might be better interpreted as placing man in an especially close relationship to God. Von Rad in his commentary on the passage states that “God participates more intimately and intensively in this than in the earlier works of creation.”⁸⁰ Westermann takes this further, suggesting that this is about the creation of human life by God and not primarily a statement about human life. The creature that God is now planning will stand in relation to him; humans are to correspond to God in order that something can happen between them and God, so that God can speak to them and they can answer.⁸¹

In the same verse, immediately after God declares that Adam is to be made in the divine image, we encounter this controversial passage: “...and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over cattle, and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” Many environmental commentators have taken this as a presentation of earth to human beings as a gift to them, when argues Bratton, in reality, it is a more complex matter of setting man to work under the continuing authority of God. Even the creation in the image of God is not a gift or a declaration of simple superiority but a necessity required before Adam can rule. Von rad states:

This commission to rule is not considered as belonging to the definition of God’s image; but is its consequence, i. e., that for which man is capable because of it...Just as powerful earthly kings, to indicate their claim to dominion, erect an image of themselves in the provinces of their empire where they do not personally appear, so man is placed upon earth in God’s image as God’s sovereign emblem. He is really only God’s representative, summoned to maintain and enforce God’s claim to dominion over the earth.⁸²

Eichrodt fundamentally concurs when he writes:

The connection between Man’s creation in the image of God and his dominant position within the world of creatures is...indeed associated with the declaration

⁸⁰ Gerhrad von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 57.

⁸¹ Westermann, p. 97.

⁸² Von Rad, pp. 57-58.

of God's intention to create Man, being mentioned as a consequence of the especially close relationship of this creature to his Creator, but in the detailed exposition of the divine plan it is then quite clearly distinguished from this relationship as a separate item which has to be promised by a special creative act of blessing. Subjugation of the earth and dominion over its creatures bestows on the human race a common universal task, and in the execution of this task Man's special nature is to become visibly effective in that he is hereby made the responsible representative of the divine cosmic Lord.⁸³

The command to take dominion was, states Bratton, necessary for man to assume his special responsibility. That is to say, the command was both enabling and differentiating. Man's dominion was not a simple transfer of civil power, but was actually a spiritual transfer of authority centered in a special creative act.

After giving man dominion, God repeats the blessing given to the creatures and applies it to humankind: "And God blessed them, and God said multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."⁸⁴ Again, environmental commentators have usually placed the emphasis here on the dominion aspect and have thus neglected the fact that God gives mankind exactly the same blessing as the rest of creation and that He requires that man take on the responsibility of representing God's interests. Westermann argues that in these verses, we can see that they sum up what it means to be a human being. Man is what he is precisely as a creature of God. It is his creature-state that determines his capability and the meaning of his existence. What man is capable of is bestowed on him by the blessing. This blessing seen as controlling the power of fertility is a gift which man shares with the animals. Thus it is something that binds man and beasts together. The blessing as a power of fertility belongs to all organic life; they commonly share this, however man and beast may develop.⁸⁵

In the Genesis 2 account, which scholars view as being a second separate creation account combined with Genesis 1, "The Lord God took the man and put him in

⁸³ Eichrodt, p. 127.

⁸⁴ *The Holy Bible* (London: Collins, 1971), Genesis 1. 28.

⁸⁵ Claus Westermann, *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 49.

the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”⁸⁶ This passage does not, Bratton argues, present a portrait of man called to be despot, but presents man as being called to serve. The verb *abad* translated as “to till” has the implication not only of work, but of service, and so it can be translated as “to serve” or “to be a slave to.” The word *shamar* “to keep” might also be translated “to watch” or “to preserve.”⁸⁷ It is important that God’s power placed man in Eden to serve and preserve the earth. God then allowed man to eat the fruits of the garden. Nowhere is it implied that man has a right to do this, or that the earth is man’s servant to be done with as he pleases.⁸⁸

Some authors have pointed out that the command “to take dominion” uses the words *rada* and *kabas*, which are very strong and imply trading down or trampling.⁸⁹ All relevant texts must be interpreted in a compatible way, argues Bratton, however, and in this context some form of ravishing the earth is clearly not intended in Genesis 2. 15. James Barr makes the suggestion that nothing more is to be read into the Hebrew words of the dominion passage than “the basic needs of settlement and agriculture,” including tilling the ground, and this interpretation is satisfactorily within the limits imposed by the passage on the keeping of Eden.⁹⁰

Von Rad states that following Adam’s placement in Eden comes the temptation and spread of sin in Genesis 3. Man, having been given a special relationship to God and a position of power over creation, breaks his relationship with God, who then reacts to the “increasingly grave violation of his order.”⁹¹ Westermann argues that the power of Adam is limited, and these limitations affect his ability to understand and know God.

⁸⁶ *The Holy Bible* RSV (London: Collins, 1971), Genesis 2. 15.

⁸⁷ *Earth Keeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources*, ed. by Loren Wilkinson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 209.

⁸⁸ Bratton, p. 204.

⁸⁹ Von Rad, p. 59.

⁹⁰ James Barr, ‘Man and Nature: The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament’, in *Ecology and Religion in History*, ed. by David and Ellen Spring (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 63-64.

⁹¹ Von Rad, p. 155.

Adam also ceases to comprehend godly matters, such as executing dominion and receiving the blessings of Genesis 2.⁹²

In the course of rebuking Adam and Eve for the transgression in Eden, God pronounces His punishment by means of a curse. This includes a curse of the ground. This curse then puts an obstacle in front of Adam who is still under the commission to work presented in Genesis 2. 15. Henceforth, “man’s work is always in some way tied up with toil and effort; every area of work throws up its thorns and thistles which cannot be avoided...”⁹³ In basic recognition that what man requires or needs must come from creation, the passage declares that the barriers to man successfully completing his tasks are found in his broken relationship with creation itself. Santmire argues that although theologians disagree as to whether all creation fell with Adam, nature is, at the very least, an innocent victim, under a curse due to man’s sin and does not now fully produce its fruits because of it.⁹⁴ From this it can be inferred that proper dominion is not an easy matter for man, who is struggling because of the effects of sin, to relate not only to God, but also to other humans and nature in its entirety. Bratton argues that the breaking of the relationship with God and the expulsion from the garden further imply that dominion, as God intended it, can only be carried out with careful attention to the will of God and with tremendous effort. If dominion originally required God as both a lord and co-operator, God becomes even more necessary after the curse, because only God can lift it.

At this point, and in light of the discussion so far, rather than stop with the Genesis accounts, we can pose the question: does God continue to interact in creation and if so, how? Since there are significantly few direct references to creation in the New Testament, and the references in the Old Testament are scattered, it is easy to

⁹² Westermann, pp. 89-112.

⁹³ Westermann, p. 102.

⁹⁴ Paul Santmire, *Brother Earth: Nature God and Ecology in Time of Crisis* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1970), pp. 163-168.

concentrate on the Genesis passages and to start to take a deist view, that is, to view God as creator only at the beginning of time. In the Old Testament, God continues as creator throughout.

God acts in creation by both saving and blessing. Blessing differs from saving in that the continuing blessing of God “is a quiet, continuous, flowing, and unnoticed working...which cannot be captured in moments or dates...Evening and morning songs speak about the activity of a blessing God”⁹⁵ Additionally, Westermann argues that God also saves communities and individuals and will ultimately redeem creation as a whole. God’s continuous action then, permeates the whole of the Old Testament.⁹⁶

The hostile attitude towards the environment exuded by Christian fundamentalists such as Ann Coulter, has its basis in Genesis. Their literal reading of the command that “man” should “fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1. 28) has endorsed the view of nature as a God-given resource for unlimited human use.⁹⁷

Further hostile reaction comes from E. Calvin Beisner, a professor of Interdisciplinary Studies is a key signatory to the ineptly named Cornwall Declaration of Environmental Stewardship. He asserts his opposition to the scientific consensus on the causes of environmental crises that he believes appeals to the work of nonconformist climatologists and other marginal researchers. He also enlists support for his anti-environmentalist standpoint by citing passages from the bible such as the dominion mandate in Genesis, “Man was not made for the earth, but the earth for man”.⁹⁸ Calling

⁹⁵ Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 103.

⁹⁶ Westermann, p. 103.

⁹⁷ Paul Maltby, “Fundamentalist Dominion, Postmodern Ecology”, *Ethics and the Environment*, 13, (2008), p. 119.

⁹⁸ E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population Resources, and the Future* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 24 and 163.

upon Psalms 115. 16 and 8. 6, he sees “man as [God’s] vice-regent”, a subordinate owner of the earth, as opposed to steward.⁹⁹ Beisner argues, “God intended there to be considerable liberty regarding the ways in which we rule the earth”,¹⁰⁰ upholding that the unregulated and private use of resources is compatible with God’s provision of a bountiful earth to serve humanity’s needs. Further to this, he is adamant that “global warming [is] indeed an expression of God’s will.”¹⁰¹ The destructive effects of climate change, as Beisner sees it, are not primarily the result of irresponsible social practices but God’s punishment for human sin, analogous to the flood in the story of Noah. (God cursed the Earth after Adam and Eve, so natural disasters like that of Hurricane Katrina are expressive of God’s retributive will.¹⁰²

Genesis 1.28 and its interpretation might then be said to have contributed greatly to humanity’s distorted view of where we stand in relation to the rest of creation.¹⁰³ White presents the suggestion that the ideological source of our current woes relating to the environment has emerged from within orthodox Christianity and its ‘arrogance toward nature.’ In accordance with White’s view, during the Christian Middle Ages, evidence already exists of attempts to technologically master nature and such tendencies appear to expose themselves more fully in scientific and technological revolutions of later periods in history, all of which is concomitant with the influence of Judeo-Christian notions of creation.

In examining the extent to which Christianity is to blame for the environmental damage we witness today, Lynn White Jr argues that Christianity should at least bear some of the guilt. We will look at some of the reasons why he took this view. He states that Christianity’s alienation from nature means that to many a tree, for example, has

⁹⁹ Beisner, p. 156. *The Holy Bible RSV* (London: Collins, 1971), Psalms, 115. 16, 8. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Beisner, p. 163.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Bill Moyers, “Is God Green?” October 11 2006 Public Broadcasting System.

¹⁰² Maltby, p. 122.

¹⁰³ Steve Bishop & Christopher Droop, *Earth is the Lord’s: A Message of Hope for the Environment* (Bristol: Regius Press Ltd, 1990), p. 33.

virtually no importance except that it is a physical fact; he further states that the entire notion of a sacred grove has become alien to Christianity, arguing that for 2000 years Christian missionaries have chopped down sacred groves, which they believe to be idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to paganism of the ancient world, Christianity established not merely a dualism of nature and man, but insisted that it was the will of God that man exploit nature. In antiquity, trees, streams, hills and springs had a guardian spirit. Such spirits were thought by people of the ancient world to be accessible to humans, but were very unlike them. (People believed them to be fauns, mermaids and centaurs.) Before the cutting of a tree, for example, it was important to let the spirit in charge of the tree know what was about to happen. But by destroying pagan animism, Christianity allowed the exploitation of nature to take place through indifference towards the independent reality of natural objects.¹⁰⁵ However, whilst Christianity may have played its part in alienating the sacred, it cannot be said that this alone has been responsible. The philosophical tradition has also contributed with its insistence on dualisms, as has the rise of science and its technological advances; both of these can be said to have played their part in the loss of a sense of the mystical.

But our attitude towards nature is now of vital importance if we are to prevent further damage from being done to creation and requires recognition that humanity cannot continue to be allowed to treat nature as though it were not a living thing. Therefore, what we do about ecology will depend upon humanity's concepts regarding the human-nature relationship.¹⁰⁶

E. S. Feenstra, commenting on White's article, argues White suggests Christianity has got something positive to say and shows a constructive approach

¹⁰⁴ Lynn White Jr, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, Science, 155, 1967 p. 1206. White has faced some sharp criticism from Christian theologians for seemingly accusing Christianity of causing the ecological crisis. *The Holy Bible RSV* (London: Collins, 1971).

¹⁰⁵ White Jr, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ White Jr, p. 3.

towards the relationship between God, humanity and nature. The gospel implicates good news for both. Feenstra does argue though, that Christianity has at times communicated a confusing testimony to the world. However White makes a valid point when he argues that in our dualistic thinking we have separated the 'spiritual' from the 'material' with the result that only the soul has value in God's eyes; our concern thus lies here and not with the body. So if the body is of little concern, then the natural universe will present us with even less concern. It might then be perceived as being an unbalanced view.¹⁰⁷

Whilst there is some element of truth in White's argument, he has been criticised for overstating Christianity's impact on Western culture, failing to provide convincing evidence of the causal relationship. There is little doubt that Western culture has been greatly influenced by the Enlightenment. White asserted that there was no new set of basic values in place that had been accepted by Western society to displace those of Christianity. Cooper regards this to be a serious error. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Director of Church and Society at the World Council of Churches argues, 'our problem lies in the Church's historical captivity to Western culture, rather than the reverse'.¹⁰⁸

It might seem that the Christian tradition has little or nothing then, to offer those who contemplate and reflect upon new ways of approaching the natural environment during this time of global ecological crisis. Indeed Santmire suggests that many who are concerned about environmental issues have turned to other traditions such as Eastern or Native American religions in a bid to discover an ecological consciousness elsewhere where humanity and nature are understood as being interconnected and where there exists no evidence of a hierarchal model. Ian McHarg, a famous landscape architect, says that:

¹⁰⁸ Cooper, p. 35.

Judaism and Christianity have long been concerned with justice and compassion for the acts of man to man, but [they] have traditionally assumed nature to be a mere backdrop for the human play.¹⁰⁹

It was Lynn White's intention to show that the disruption of the global environment arose from Western science and technology and that its development was directly related to the Christian view of humanity's attitude and relationship to nature. He argued that human beings had become separate from nature and nature was there to serve human needs. It might be argued that an essential aspect of scientific discovery and the development of technology was that it allowed humanity to assert its power over nature.¹¹⁰ White believes that these powers are out of control and the result is that we now find ourselves facing a serious ecological crisis.¹¹¹ White believes that the solution then is for Christianity to recognise its part in this and reject that nature only exists to serve humanity. There are many cases where there has been serious damage to the balance of nature including loss of species or land having been destroyed due to unwise farming or over cutting, White argues that this has occurred due to humanity's ignorance of the effects these actions would have.¹¹² There has been, according to White, a significant amount of irresponsibility on the part of humanity where people have acted irresponsibly preferring to ignore or disregard nature's balance and the welfare of species. Accompanying this as a result, modern technology has allowed humanity to further exploit resources at the expense of others. White acknowledges that if we are to look positively on scientific advancement, then it must co-operate wisely, if further exploitation is to be avoided.

¹⁰⁹ Santmire, p. 1. Quote taken from Ian McHarg, *Design with Nature* (United States: Wiley, 1995).

¹¹⁰ Cooper, p. 34.

¹¹¹ Wayne Friar, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, (1969) <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1969/JASA6-69White.html> [accessed 23 June 2008] (para 19 of 36) please note that the article itself was written by Lynn White Jr and this reference refers to a comment made by Wayne Friar on White's article.

¹¹² Friar, p. 5.

White advocates a wiser approach in humanity's rule over nature, realising its responsibility not just to nature but also to God.¹¹³ According to White, Christianity "bears a huge burden of guilt for environmental deterioration."¹¹⁴ But White's views have not remained free of criticism. Biblical scholars have remained firm in their argument that the passages to which White refers in the Judeo-Christian scriptures do not support the interpretation that White and his conformists have adopted.

Since White's published article appeared, other more differentiated accounts of the ideological sources concerning Western attitudes toward nature have duly made their appearance. For example, John Passmore's *Man's Responsibility for Nature* written in 1974 indicated two distinct emphases within the tradition of Christianity; stewardship and authoritarianism. This suggested that the counterproductive attempt to dominate nature is more akin to Greek ideas than to biblical tradition.¹¹⁵

The historical link that supposedly exists between the Christian doctrine of creation and the Western attitude toward nature is endlessly evident in literature that concerns itself with environmental degradation and its causes.¹¹⁶ Harrison argues that some of the ways in which the creation narratives of Genesis were utilised during the medieval and early modern periods, demonstrate that "the roots of our environmental crisis" are actually more complicated than White or his critics believe. Harrison argues that the biblical imperative "have dominion" ascribes an important role to the rise of science in modernity and is without question implicated in what seems to be the "exploitation" of nature; the same imperative, when linked to the fall of humanity, equally promoted the aim to restore the earth. Therefore it can be argued that the words

¹¹³ Friar, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Lynn White Jr, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155 (1967), 1203-1207.

¹¹⁵ John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (London: Duckworth, 1974), pt. 1.

¹¹⁶ Peter Harrison, 'Subduing the Earth: Genesis 1, Early Modern Science, and the Exploitation of Nature', *The Journal of Religion*, 79 (1999), 86-109.

“steward” and “authoritarian” are twin aspects of a single role rather than opposing traditions.¹¹⁷

Harrison argues that numerous vocal attacks launched upon White’s thesis emerged from the area of biblical criticism. Some biblical scholars attempted to explain that when Hebrew terms such as “have dominion” and “subdue” come under scrutiny, the result is that this is not the true meaning. Barr suggests that the verb *rada* meaning “have dominion” is not an especially strong expression and was in fact used to make reference to Solomon’s peaceful rule; *kabash* meaning “subdue” is a simple reference to the ‘tilling’ or ‘working’ of the ground in the J story.¹¹⁸ Steffen points out that although one of the meanings of the word “dominion” (*rada*) is “to tread down,” in the Genesis context, the term denotes “the idea of just and peaceful governance.” Therefore, states Steffen, dominion “is not a domination concept.”¹¹⁹

White has been faced with the accusation by some biblical scholars of being ignorant of the findings of source criticism. We are informed that the creation stories in Genesis have their origins in two distinct sources; P meaning the Priestly account and J which refers to the Yahwist account. They are argued to be very different and not to be confused with each other. If White had not been “critically illiterate” as Hiers observes, he would not have unified the P and J creation stories, “thereby obscuring and omitting significant elements.”¹²⁰ Callicott equally argues that White wrongly regards Genesis

¹¹⁷ Harrison, p. 87.

¹¹⁸ James Barr, ‘The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 55 (1972), 9-32.

¹¹⁹ Lloyd H. Steffen, ‘In Defence of Dominion’, *Environmental Ethics*, 14 (1992), 63-80. Other analyses exist in this context. For example see Claus Westerman, *Creation* (London: SPCK, 1974), pp. 52 and 82. Also Susan Bratton, ‘Christian Ecotheology and the Old Testament’, *Environmental Ethics*, 6 (1984), 195-209.

¹²⁰ Richard H. Hiers, ‘Ecology, Biblical Theology, and Methodology: Biblical Perspectives on the Environment’, *Zygon*, 19 (1984), 43-59.

“as a composite whole,” moving in a careless and carefree manner between J and P in a bid to wrestle his own interpretation from the text.¹²¹

It ought to be said that there exist some critics who have made the point that the bible has not presented a single perspective relating to the question of the human relation to the natural world. If Genesis offers the idea of dominion, it also offers one of stewardship. Passmore argues that a minority view exists in the Western tradition that sees the human being in the role of steward as opposed to that of authoritarian. although he also makes the point that there the support for this interpretation is minimal.¹²² In fact the most common complaint that White has been in receipt of concerning his thesis is that he seemingly ignores that human dominion granted by God was intended to ensure that humanity became the caretakers or stewards and not its despoilers.¹²³

In Harrison’s opinion, these criticisms have failed to take into account the true meaning of the text and how it might have informed attitudes towards nature and environmental practices. In the case of White, his thesis is not really concerned with this or how it might have been comprehended by the community who initially received it or indeed what modern biblical scholars have made of it. The hermeneutics of the text appear to have no significance for White who concerns himself more with the historical aspect. It is not therefore clear that contemporary understandings of the meaning of the Genesis accounts of creation have a direct bearing on the question of how such texts were utilised in the past or what practices may have been encouraged. It thus becomes important that in order to evaluate claims regarding a connection between biblical teachings and attitudes towards nature, the search for a definitive meaning must become

¹²¹ J. Baird Callicott, ‘Genesis Revisited: Murian Musings on the Lynn White Jr. Debate’, *Environmental History Review*, 14 (1990), 65-90.

¹²² Passmore, chapter 2.

¹²³ Ian G. Barbour, ‘Teilhard’s Process Metaphysics,’ in *Process Theology*, ed. by Ewert H. Cousins (New York: Newman Press, 1971), p. 60.

secondary and attention must be directed toward the history of interpretation of the relevant texts.¹²⁴

Harrison notes that certainly for the first fifteen hundred years of the Christian era little can be found in the history of hermeneutics of Genesis to support White's main arguments. Patristic and medieval accounts of human dominion are not primarily concerned with exploiting nature. A common patristic reading of "dominion over the beasts," by way of explanation was referring to the battles of the soul, in other words, control over the impulses and thoughts of the human mind that produce a detrimental effect upon the soul and which requires the conquering of such "beasts".¹²⁵ Origen states that "the same things which are brought forth by the vices of the flesh and the pleasures of the body hold dominion over sinners."¹²⁶ John Chrysostom spoke of "bringing the beast under control" by "banishing the flood of unworthy passions."¹²⁷ Throughout the patristic period then, the term 'have dominion' could thus be construed as a powerful incentive to bring carnal lust under the control of reason.

During the Middle Ages, this universal practice of the allegorical approach to texts also informed the structures of knowledge concerning the world of nature. Knowledge of things was not sought after with the intention of bringing nature under the control of humanity, but to shed light on the meanings of nature and the sacred page. It was assumed that living things had been partly designed to serve the physical needs of humanity but also to serve a spiritual function, too. The intention during the period of the Middle Ages was not for nature to be materially exploited, but to become better known and understood so that its moral and spiritual meanings might be determined. According to Harrison, there is no approach better suited to this than that of

¹²⁴ Barr, p. 23.

¹²⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 1.11 (FC: 71:60).

¹²⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 1.16 (FC71:69).

¹²⁷ Jerome, *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem* 1.1.6/8 Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 75 vols, (Tuenhoti: Brepols, 1975), pp. 11ff.

Physiologus. This was produced in Alexandria somewhere between the second and fifth centuries and set out the theological and moral significance of many natural objects; it encompassed work on plants, stones and animals. It came to be highly popular during the Middle Ages, a popularity second only to the bible itself.¹²⁸ The *Physiologus* advocates and promotes an anthropocentric conception of nature, but it is one that adopts an interpretive and passive view of the world as opposed to one that seeks exploitation of the material.

But a new source of knowledge based on the natural world arrived in the West, that of a thirteenth century translation of the biological works of Aristotle translated into Latin.¹²⁹ The rediscovery of ancient Greek knowledge added the new dimension of dominion over nature which was encouraged by a more direct engagement with the world. That said an explicit ideology of material exploitation of the world was still not evident. Instead this period in history saw the emphasis being placed upon the intellectual mastery of the knowledge of living things. Adam had once enjoyed the beauty, harmony and perfected nature of paradise but when the fall came, this became lost. Adam had become alienated from God and was extracted from the original knowledge; the perfected knowledge of nature. An example of this can be said to be Adam's naming of the creatures. To restore such knowledge was viewed as restoring the original dominion that had been missing since the fall. Two of the dominant senses of dominion encountered during the patristic period and the Middle Ages are to do with the realm of the human mind. The creatures thus needed to be reunited in the human mind.¹³⁰ Typical of the Middle Ages is Aquinas's claim that human dominion over

¹²⁸ Patricia Cox, 'The Physiologus: A Poiesis of Nature', *Church History*, 52 (1983), 433-43.

¹²⁹ Michel de Bouard, 'Encyclopedies Medievales: Sur la Connaissance de la Nature et du Monde au Moyen Age', *Revue des Questions Historique*, ser. 3, 16 (1930), p. 258-304.

¹³⁰ Harrison, p. 93.

things is intimately related to the fact that the human being “contains all things.”¹³¹ That said, it must be noted that some modification of nature was apparent in the Middle Ages and this was often on a large scale. Although the monks carried out their spiritual duties, they were sometimes accompanied by the more trivial aspects of every day existence. The monasteries, whilst understood as places of contemplation, also had to cater for bodily needs and to this end agriculture was a necessity in transforming woods and swamps into fields and pastures, thus assisting in the provision of fruits and vegetables. This could arguably be said to demonstrate a religiously motivated attempt to conquer nature. However, this was not to be seen as an attempt to assert dominion over nature or reap material gain; neither was it a brutal disregard for the earth. Apart from producing foods to help sustain the physical requirements of the monks, it was also to be seen that otherworldly preoccupations were the sole motivator for such activity. William of Malmesbury has this to say:

In the middle of wild swampland where the trees are intertwined in an inextricable thicket, there is a plain with very green vegetation which attracts the eye by reason of its fertility; no obstacle impedes the walker. Not a particle of the soil is left to lie fallow; here the earth bears fruit trees, there grapevines cover the ground or are held on high trellises. In this place cultivation rivals nature; what the latter has forgotten the former brings forth. What can I say of the beauty of the buildings whose unshakeable foundations have been built into the marches....This is an image of Paradise; it makes one think already of heaven.¹³²

White highlights some other examples of attempts in medieval times to master nature that happened independently of religious communities in a bid to further the point of his thesis. The introduction of the heavy plough into northern Europe made possible the large-scale cultivation of land. This raised agricultural production above the level of subsistence farming. This in turn revolutionised the relationship between humans and

¹³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.96.2, Blackfriars edition (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964-76).

¹³² William of Malmesbury, *De gestis pontificum Angliae* in *PL* 175: 1612-13. This text is quoted in Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), p. 165.

the land, yielding up food surpluses and aiding the development of towns. It was this one advancement White argues, that meant that whereas “once man had been a part of nature; now he became her exploiter.”¹³³ Of course with the advancement of technology, fly-wheels, treads, water wheels, sprang up, yet there is nothing to show that this was intended to be an explicit attack on nature. Such developments were merely instrumental in advancing technology and seeking more efficient means of doing things. No real justification is required in this instance, nor any religious; it is quite simply a case of providing basic human needs such as food and shelter. This is a universal requirement, regardless of culture. But it is bound to result in depletion of natural resources and ecological change.¹³⁴

It would appear then, that what is absent in this analysis is the notion of a religious ideology that promotes and intends the exploitation of the natural world, explicitly informed by aspects of the Christian teachings on creation. A lengthy study carried out by Jeremy Cohen on the history of the interpretation of that key text Genesis 1. 28, “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion,” does not support the view that it was allied with exploitative material practices at the time of the Middle Ages.¹³⁵ Cohen, who devised this study, states that first and foremost, the meaning of Genesis 1. 28 during patristic and medieval times represent the promise of divine commitment and election.¹³⁶

Harrison argues that the term dominion is to be interpreted in a psychological sense. It is internal and refers to the spiritual not the physical. Physical dominion over the world does not have any bearing then. Religious motivation for material domination was, Origen maintained, secondary to the quest of spiritual domination over wayward

¹³³ Lynn White Jr, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 56.

¹³⁴ Harrison, p. 95.

¹³⁵ Jeremy Cohen, *‘Be Fertile and Increase: Fill the Earth and Master it’*, *The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (New York: Cornell University Press: 1989).

¹³⁶ Cohen, p. 313.

bodily impulses. Unfortunately this line of thought could not be sustained into the seventeenth century with the rise of modern science accompanied by mastery of the world. The resulting consequences were catastrophic for nature and thus a new reading of the aforementioned text in Genesis was undertaken. By this period in history, the intellectual meaning of the word dominion was fast becoming a reference to the physical. A number of factors may have contributed to this: the replacement of Aristotle's world view was replaced by a more mechanistic worldview; the move away from "symbolist mentality" that had been apparent throughout the Middle Ages brought about the loss of a belief in the transcendental significance of natural things and new interpretations that arrived with the modern period where the literal sense was seen as the true meaning of a text.¹³⁷

The term dominion was therefore taken literally to refer to exercise of power over things of the natural order. Adam was viewed as Lord over all creatures and in the seventeenth century, it became clear that his dominion was to be taken literally.¹³⁸ Dominion over the earth was to be established through regaining the knowledge previously lost in Eden. Adam's knowledge of the creatures and the tilling and maintain of the land, etc, was sought not for the purpose of reuniting all creatures in the human mind and in doing so find their way back to God, which had been the case during the Middle Ages, but to seek out Adam's literal dominion. Knowledge was not enough to promote this idea, however; work had to enter the equation, too. And so the emergence of the Protestant work ethic inspired support through literal readings of the Genesis text. The Garden of Eden was now seen as an actual garden, one in which Adam had literally conducted agricultural work. Eden was no longer an allegory of the human soul. The fruits cultivated by Adam were no longer the fruits of the spirit. Paradise was no longer

¹³⁷ Harrison, p. 97.

¹³⁸ See Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis, 1527-1633* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948).

associated with the purity of the heavenly sphere but became instead a part of material existence.¹³⁹ Deprived of their allegorical and moral significances, the passages in the Genesis creation accounts were taken to refer unmistakably to the world of the physical and its living inhabitants. But it must be stated that in spite of any ecological practices in place during medieval times, at no previous time in the Western world do we encounter a blatant ideology of the subordination of nature. We can say that White was right to allocate a key role to the creation story in the development of modern science and technology but he was wrong in locating it earlier than the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁰

In a seventeenth century framework, “have dominion” is used to explain the technological mastery of the natural world. Through disobedience to God, human rule over the earth had been lost. In seventeenth century scientific discourse it is a *recovered* dominion that is sought. That is, a return to the natural intended state of paradise prior to the fall. To explain further, the fallen world of Adam inherited by the descendants of Adam was not the earth in its natural state, but more an earth that was suffering under a curse on account of human transgression. The infertile land, the ferociousness of the beasts, the presence of weeds, thistles, thorns and venomous serpents were agonizing reminders of the irrevocable loss of paradise. In its original unspoiled state, the entire earth had been an ordered garden. It had become unkempt and untamed. It had sadly become a wilderness.¹⁴¹

When placed in this context, early modern discourse about human dominion is not a proclamation of a human autocracy over a wretched earth, nor is it indicative of a conceited indifference to the natural world. Rather, dominion is seen as the means by

¹³⁹ Harrison, p. 100. Further reference on allegorical readings of paradise see Alexander Neckham, *De naturis rerum* 2.49. Also Bartholomew Angelicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, 15:111, 158. Seventeenth-century criticism of these readings see Arnold Williams (above).

¹⁴⁰ Harrison, p. 102.

¹⁴¹ Harrison, p. 103. For typical accounts concerning mutations of earth and its creatures as a result of the fall, refer to Richard Franck, *A Philosophical Treatise* (London, 1687), pp. 124-70.

which the earth can be restored to its pre-fall state of perfection. Based on this understanding, the seventeenth-century discourse of dominion is usually accompanied by a rhetoric of restoration. For example, John Pettus refers to “subduing the earth” and “conquering those extravagancies of nature,” but his intention is “the replenishment of the first creation.” In respect of “extravagancies,” he is referring to those of a nature gone wild and unchecked. Agriculture, a levelling of land and draining of swamps, was the activity that lay at the forefront of these schemes toward restoration. According to Timothy Nourse, agricultural activities heal the land of “the Original Curse of Thorns and Bryers” thus bringing about the effect of “the *Restoration of Nature*, which may be looked upon as a *New Creation* of things.”¹⁴² Dominion was not to be exercised so that humanity could leave its mark upon the earth, but to remove the scars that embodied the physical legacy of a moral fall. Such measures were intended to improve the earth, to reinstate paradise on earth and to provide the anticipation of heaven.¹⁴³

The Hebrew Bible may be said to offer what can be described as an interactive account of the relationship between God, humanity, nature, the social order and the natural ecological order.¹⁴⁴ In *The Cosmic Covenant*, Robert Murray argues that there is an unstable balance between the created order and cosmic disorder that runs throughout the Hebrew Bible and that laws and rituals of Israel’s covenantal community are designed to preserve and restore this order, in the midst of human or cosmic forces which threaten to overwhelm or disrupt it.¹⁴⁵ To this end, Murray acknowledges traces of an earlier creation story in different parts of the Hebrew Bible where the creative process is conceived as controlling chaos and the subsequent imposition of order and covenant on the raging forces of the cosmos. Such a tradition can be seen in Jeremiah

¹⁴² John Pettus, *Volatiles from the History of Adam and Eve* (London, 1674), p. 83. Timothy Nourse, *Campania Foelix*, (London, 1700), p. 2.

¹⁴³ Harrison, p. 104.

¹⁴⁴ Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 164.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1992), p. 12.

where it describes the sea as a power in need of taming and controlling. As Murray sees it, this early idea of a confrontation between the chaos of nature and God's ordering power forms an integral part of the Hebrew notion of the covenant.¹⁴⁶ The covenant put in place by God after the Flood gave the promise that the fruitfulness of the earth would not be threatened again by chaotic waters and that Noah and his children would be blessed. This covenant was established between God, humanity and all living things.¹⁴⁷ The terms of the covenant bear witness to the relation between cosmic and human order and the covenantal context in which all life pursues its collective purposes in the cosmos.¹⁴⁸ The covenant is not simply between God and humanity as anthropocentric exegetes have traditionally expressed. It is a 'cosmic covenant' where all the orders of creation are involved and are interlinked with the ethics, rituals and society of humans.¹⁴⁹ The exile from Eden presents a mythic explanation of evil and disorder in the world and Murray argues that this could be said to interact with contemporary criticism of a humanly originated ecological disorder and the scientific discovery of ecosystems that are not dominated by human interference and that represent stability. There appears to be little doubt that together science and technology have given mankind powers which, judging by the state of the current ecological crisis, are now to a great extent out of control.¹⁵⁰

The rise of modern science can be traced back to the sixteenth century in Christian Europe and the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo. The association between Christianity and the rise of modern science is sometimes regarded as being more than historical coincidence as Christian belief in the rational ordering of the universe, and the predictability of nature's laws, encouraged the regularities and

¹⁴⁶ Murray, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Genesis, 9. 12.

¹⁴⁸ Murray, chapter 3.

¹⁴⁹ Murray, p.47.

¹⁵⁰ White Jr, p.1206.

underlying causative and motive structure of the universe.¹⁵¹ Hans Blumenberg argued that the experimental method is linked not with a view of the world as rationally ordered by God, but with the medieval ideas of nominalists such as William of Ockham that the world is governed by accident and contingency as opposed to divine reason and purpose.¹⁵² Such an assertion of the absolute otherness of divine rationality and the will of God denies the coherent order of the material world so that in effect 'chance becomes the sole principle of reality'.¹⁵³ God thus becomes superfluous to the order of the material world, which can be better explained in terms of the accidents and movements of atoms. Thus the world then becomes 'open' to investigation by the alchemist and scientist whose job it is to transform this accidental world into a world that is more truly at the service of human need and human desire. Isaac Newton who was both an alchemist and physicist embarked upon the quest to uncover the secrets of matter and motion and the elements of the universe. Through this, he discovered and described the laws of attraction and motion, gravity and mass, which have subsequently become the foundational rules for modern physics.¹⁵⁴ John Brooke argues that Newton's identification of certain predictable laws in the movement of objects in the heavens and earth are predicted upon the notion of a world of relative fixity and order, which maintained a reflection of the earlier Christian concept of the relation of the contingency and motion of the world to the ordering of a rational God. Brooke further identifies an unusual mixture of the alchemical and the mechanical in Newton's view of the cosmos. However, in Blumenberg's thought, there appears to be no opposition between an alchemical and a mechanical universe, because both rest on the supposition that that the world is basically made up of matter which is governed not by reason or divine

¹⁵¹ Northcott, p. 57.

¹⁵² Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* English trans. (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), p. 149.

¹⁵³ Blumenberg, p. 150.

¹⁵⁴ John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 137-141.

intention but is purely the product of accident and chance, for the hidden God of the medieval nominalists was absolutely other to the world of matter and therefore could not be known or perceived through the material world. This meant that God's only clear and knowable intention and purpose regarding the cosmos was the creation and salvation of humanity.¹⁵⁵

Kant, in his response to the development of this accidental and mechanical cosmology in the scientific method, reached the conclusion in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, that knowledge of God and of the good and scientific knowledge based on empirical observation involved two very different kinds of knowing.¹⁵⁶ The laws of nature did not reveal to scientific observation the teleological activity of a good God because a God that is holy and good cannot be understood by reasoned reflection on the nature of life or the cosmos, but only by having faith in the existence of such a being. Kant's aim was to disentangle science and scientific rationality from morality and religion in order to preserve a rational space for moral order and purposiveness within the human mind and soul, even if this could no longer be identified with the order of nature and the cosmos.¹⁵⁸ By such a device, Kant redirected all purposive and teleological activity in the world and nature from God to humans. Kant's transcendental criticism of reason eliminates the notion of a progressive order in the world which is guided by God. The world can therefore be said to be 'unfinished', and as a result for science and philosophy in the modern age, 'material at man's disposal'. Therefore, Kant, with his de-objectification of God and morality and Newton's mechanistic cosmology, together had forged a new philosophical and scientific ground for the

¹⁵⁵ Blumenberg, p. 187.

¹⁵⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Everyman, 1934, p. 30.

¹⁵⁸ Kant, p. 31.

subsequent development of an atheistic cosmology, displacing God from the cosmos, positing the world and the universe as just products of accident and chance.¹⁶⁰

Scientific ideas also arose with regard to animals, justifying the abuse of creatures which were said to lack moral status, reasoning powers or a soul, and some argued, no sense of pleasure or pain. Descartes believed that animals were like machines, they were 'mindless': however, he did think that they might be susceptible to feeling pain.¹⁶¹ Cartesian followers seemed to ignore the latter, however, and argued that if animals felt no pain, feeling or sensation, then to abuse them would hold no moral significance. It is this mechanistic Cartesian approach to the natural world that is partly responsible for the abuses of nature, characteristic of modern civilisation.¹⁶² Nature thus seemingly becomes 'available' for human expropriation and exploitation. Indeed, reverting back to the classical scientific approach, nature is to be perceived as both meaningless and unproductive.¹⁶³ Indeed, it was through Descartes that a dualistic framework of thought began to infiltrate Western culture at a crucial period when the conditions for scientific advance were being established and industrialisation was emerging. He believed there to be no life, spirituality or purpose in matter and thought the material world operated like machinery. As we have already become aware, Descartes gave little credence to animals, believing them to also be mechanistic, comparing them to clocks.¹⁶⁴ For centuries, people have argued that science and religion do not mix and that matters such as pollution and resources are not connected with religion.¹⁶⁵ However, this might be argued to be greatly misplaced. God may have

¹⁶⁰ Brooke, pp. 204-206.

¹⁶¹ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method: Discourse V*.

¹⁶² Bryan Appleyard, *Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man* (London: Pan Books, 1992), pp. 149-150.

¹⁶³ Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 77.

¹⁶⁴ Tim Cooper, *Green Christianity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), p. 36.

¹⁶⁵ Bishop & Droop, p. 47.

promised a new heaven and earth, but for humanity to believe that it can ignore nature in the hope that God will make things right in the end, is dualistic.¹⁶⁶

Over the last 2000 years, Christian orthodoxy has argued against dualism in the case of Gnosticism for example, regarding it as heresy, but despite this, a strain of dualism has continued to infect Christian thought to a great extent.¹⁶⁷ Johnson ascribes this to the prevalent force of the “hierarchical dualism that was indigenous to the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic categories” present in Western Christianity in particular, the scholastic tradition following Aquinas. In many ways, the dualism which Christian orthodoxy avoids returns to haunt it by means of mapping onto each other soul/body, divine/human, heaven /earth, creator/creation and good/evil, to offer a few examples. Plumwood specifies these pairs in themselves do not represent hyper-separations. But the mapping of the pairs onto each other constructs a conceptual framework in which the valuation of creator over creation fuels a dualistic interpretation of each pair.¹⁶⁸ Underlying this framework is a foundational hyper-separation between spirit and matter.¹⁶⁹ The concept of dualistic thought is a necessary aspect of presenting a living cosmology. This is not because it has a place, but rather because it has *no* place. Within the construct of a living cosmology, the notion of any kind of separation thought to exist between any part of creation is neither viable nor is it acceptable. The living cosmology presented in this thesis is one that embraces all creation as being one: that is, inter-related and inter-connected. In the early modern period of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a number of voices could be heard expressing outrage at human exploitation of the natural environment and its consequences regarding alienation from each other

¹⁶⁶ Bishop & Droop, p. 46.

¹⁶⁷ Anne Elvey, “Beyond Culture? Nature/Culture Dualism and the Christian Otherworldly”, *Ethics and Environment*, 11 (2006) p. 66.

¹⁶⁸ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 54.

¹⁶⁹ Theodore Hiebert, “The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions”, *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. By Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), pp. 135-54.

and from nature. One such voice was that of seventeenth-century thinker Henry More who wrote of the 'Soul of the World, or Spirit of Nature'.¹⁷⁰ Following in More's footsteps was botanist John Ray, a student of More's, who published *Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*. William Derham, a supporter of Ray's work, continued this tradition with his *Physico-theology* which Carolyn Merchant has described as an 'eco-theology [embodying] a number of ecologically sound principles, in a managerial framework of stewardship modelled on humanity's role as caretaker of God's creation'.¹⁷¹ Leibniz in one of his best known works, *The Monadology* (1714), a system expressing his later philosophy, instilled every particle of creation with some kind of spiritual-if overly rational- significance, a view adopted and to some extent modified in the monistic vitality of Lady Anne Conway who was in a minority of seventeenth-century women able to pursue an interest in philosophy. Also amongst the counter cultural voices was that of Spinoza, whose pantheist philosophy re-established some sense of *animus loci* to the natural environment. Towards the close of the eighteenth century, this pantheist philosophy had been transmuted into the more nuanced panentheism of Romantic figures such as Wordsworth and Coleridge in England, and Goethe and Schiller in Germany.¹⁷²

To sum up, we have addressed the ecological crisis, albeit in a brief sense, but it is hoped sufficiently to outline some of the global problems earth is currently facing and to demonstrate that this is a key issue in the research. Christianity, some would argue, has played a contributory role, as has dualistic thought and science, seemingly further alienating humanity from nature. Despite the triumphs of science we have examined the notion that it too has served the dualistic idea that humanity is separate from creation

¹⁷⁰ James A. Nash, "Seeking Moral Norms in Nature: Natural Law and Ecological Responsibility", *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. by Dieter T. Hesel & Rosemary Radford Ruether (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 227-50.

¹⁷¹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 248. John Ray, *Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (USA: Kessinger, 2010).

¹⁷² Merchant, p. 84. Leibniz, *Monadology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

and its creator. It is not just nature that has suffered as we have seen; women have long been associated in a negative way alongside nature, to the point where it seems as though they are equal partners in their externalisation from the more holistic view of creation.

In the following section we examine the meaning of eco-feminism and how it links to the ecological crisis. This section will also serve as a platform for further examination of women's association with nature and how it is to be presented in a more positive way.

Identifying the Problems and the Link to Ecofeminism

What we need to ascertain at this point is the way in which feminism and ecology sit together. Sandra Schneiders presents a useful starting point for determining what is meant by 'feminism'. She states that feminism is a comprehensive ideology that is rooted in women's experience of sexual oppression, which engages in a critique of patriarchy and embraces an alternative vision for earth and humanity, actively seeking to bring this vision to realization.¹⁷³

The term eco-feminism refers to feminist concerns about the natural world which, it is argued, has been subjected to almost the same abuse and ambivalent behaviour as women have. The claim that the domination of women and nature are 'intimately connected and mutually reinforcing' is the common denominator that can be found throughout eco-feminist writings.¹⁷⁴ It appears to be the role of eco-feminism, whilst operating from within Western culture, to create an alternative theory and praxis to that of patriarchy. The first and foremost question is in what ways can eco-feminists change the patriarchal world view that for centuries has allowed women and nature to be devalued, into an eco-feminist consciousness that re-informs mutuality between humanity and nature?¹⁷⁵ Eco-feminist consciousness refers in a broad sense to the conscious position held by feminists. It is their world view, in other words, advocating a different model of relationship between nature and humanity than the relationship implied by the domination model of patriarchal consciousness. It is based upon a model

¹⁷³ Sandra Schneiders, 'Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church', in *Feminist Theology: A Review of Literature*, *Theological Studies*, 56 (1995), 327-351 (p. 327).

¹⁷⁴ Jim Cheney, 'Eco-feminism and Deep Ecology', *Environmental Ethics*, 9 (1987), 115-145 (p. 115).

¹⁷⁵ L. Teal Willoughby, 'Ecofeminist Consciousness and the Transforming of Powerful Symbols', in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed. by Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 133.

of mutual support where the health and survival of both nature and humanity are inherently valued.¹⁷⁶

But due to its rather different perception of human beings and their relationship to the earth and the cosmos, the eco-feminist perspective in terms of a methodological approach, aims to propose a somewhat different epistemology. Gebara says “somewhat different” because no one can claim to be starting from zero. We are, argues Gebara, one body in process, a living body that is growing; we cannot deny all our earlier moments and former phases, as if we could learn to know again from zero, or if we could begin a new history that is out of continuity with the past. Certainly what we refer to as “knowing” is the most plausible way we have discovered to say something to one another about the mystery that we are in and in which we have our being. It is one manifestation of our reflexive way of existing and articulating for ourselves our images of the universe, of human relationships, of our perceptions and of our dreams and desires.

Such components can lead us to particular affirmations, themselves drawn from lived experience, and form an integral part of eco-feminist epistemology. These affirmations are sketches whose ill-defined outlines express aspects of the quest we begin ever anew in the world of knowing. We move within a horizon in which we can always add new perceptions and include different approaches, recognising the constant challenge and mystery present in the term “to know.”

Knowing states Gebara, is not first and foremost a rational discourse on what we know. To know is first of all to *experience*, and what we experience cannot always be expressed in words. What we say we know is a pale reflection of what we experience. What we say about what we experience is no more than a limited “translation” of that experience. Thus, what we experience can neither be fully thought through by reason

¹⁷⁶ Willoughby, p. 135.

nor exhaustively expressed in words. Therefore, we need to ask, to what human experience does this affirmation correspond? To try to express in cautious and limited words what our experience is vis-à-vis is to struggle to translate into words not just the vibrations that pass through our bodies but also our meditative silence on things and facts in life. This might be referred to as the second step in what we call “knowing.” The first step remains our alone; it is what we feel happening on the periphery of our body-person, of our intimate personal being. The second step is the expression of what we know, and this expression takes a variety of forms in light of the different situations we are exposed to.

When we speak of theological truths, Gebara argues, we refer to truths as experiences some people have had and tried to express within the framework of their own religious culture. We repeat them as if they were ours, but often do so without making them our own. If we do not make these experiences our own, we may well lose contact with vital meanings that are contained within them. Our religious affirmations must be related to meaningful experiences in our lives. Often, we turn traditional religious statements into “truths” that are somehow above and beyond our bodies and personal histories. We give them something resembling an existence of their own. In this way, because we somehow have then made them independent, we distance these truths from their origins and from ourselves. This is not only a personal process, but it is also a collective one. Many of us accept these religious truths as higher experiences that occurred in other times and that have perhaps come from other worlds: experiences that are handed down to us in order to be accepted, confirmed and contemplated. This attitude in part justifies the development within religions so-called sacred powers; it further justifies religions’ authority over persons, the manipulation they countenance, and the fears they incite. It is as if, argues Gebara, “the wise and powerful” in the religious hierarchy somehow knew the secrets of religion and had a deep

comprehension of its mysteries. To insist on raising questions on the basis of experience is, among other things, to democratize these powers to a certain extent, making it clear that they exist in a variety of forms in various human beings and groups.

Thus it follows that when we ask the question, ‘to what human experience do we refer when we speak of God, of the incarnation, of the Trinity, of the resurrection and of the Eucharist?’ We become filled with alarm. We might believe that we are on the edge of heresy or atheism. We believe we have lost our faith, because such questions are appropriate only for those who are suffering from doubt or who might have lost respect for the authority of the church. Nevertheless, these are the key questions that give meaning to the eco-feminist perspective we are describing. To recover our *human experience*-to allow the deepest of our beliefs to develop in our minds and bodies-is the guiding principle of this epistemology.

All this opens up a critically important dimension of recovering our human experience: struggling against particular alienations that continue to hold us captive to an authoritarian system that limits our ability to become totally immersed in our own experience. To recover our own experience does not mean affirming some isolated, individual, closed-off-within-itself reality. Nor can it be done within an anthropocentric perspective. The anthropocentrism that remains a part of every one of us needs to be complemented by a wider biocentrism, an acknowledgement of the central importance of all life-forms. Our reflexive human experience does not exist in isolation from the whole of our Sacred Body. We cannot detach our knowing from our human reality, but neither can we detach it from our wider cosmic identity.¹⁷⁷

Beyond any shadow of doubt, it is on the basis of our own personal experience that we ground ourselves experientially as being on the earth and in the cosmos, part of

¹⁷⁷ Gebara, pp. 49-51.

the earth and part of the cosmos, and having within us both the earth and the cosmos.¹⁷⁸

Ruether writes:

The capacity to be conscious is itself the experience of the interiority of our organism, made possible by the highly organized living cells of our brains and nervous systems that constitute the material 'base' of our experience of awareness. Human consciousness, then, should not be what utterly separates us from the rest of 'nature'. Rather, consciousness is where this dance of energy organises itself in increasingly unified ways, until it reflects back on itself in self-awareness. Consciousness is and must be where we recognise our kinship with other beings.¹⁷⁹

On this basis, we are justified in speaking about a few characteristics of feminist epistemology, one that is in the process of developing and as such, seeks its own frame of reference.

The assumption central to eco-feminist epistemology is the interdependence among all elements related to the human world. Interdependence means accepting the fundamental fact that any life situation, belief or behaviour is always the fruit of all the interactions that make up our lives, our histories and our wider earthly and cosmic realities. Our interdependence and relatedness do not stop with other human beings. They involve nature, the powers of the earth and the cosmos itself. In this way, knowing is a human act so insofar as it refers to the specific kinds of conscious processes and awareness that characterize the human being as a form of living organization. However, the vegetable, animal and cosmic forms of consciousness are equally part of our make-up. But this other type of interdependence does not reach full, conscious awareness and therefore is rarely considered. We fail to recognise its importance because it seems so obvious that we live in a given place, and in this place we eat, walk, breathe, walk and sit. Further to this, Gebara argues that our senses are seldom educated to perceive the huge importance of this interdependency. When we do finally wake up and recognise its importance, we will be able to take care of the earth and all its inhabitants as if they

¹⁷⁸ Gebara, p. 51.

¹⁷⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1992), p. 250.

were our closest relatives, as parts of our greater body, without which, individual life and consciousness are impossible.

It is the task of the eco-feminist perspective that seeks to open us to the importance of this greater body. It does not require us to deny our individuality, our own subjectivity and all the wonderful and not so wonderful experiences that form a part of our very being. Moreover, it is an invitation, says Gebara, to obtain a deeper perception that includes our greater self, and therefore an openness to identify other resources that are available to us in life and that are not exclusively limited to what falls within the anthropocentric horizon.

Certainly, a new understanding of human knowing becomes possible on the basis of this interdependence. We must open ourselves to experiences that are wider than the ones we have grown accustomed to throughout the centuries. Within the scope of education, we are required to introduce the concept of communion with, as opposed to conquest of, earth and space. This could diminish competitiveness within our education system and in the economy that, owing to the exclusive and hierarchical character of our current system, have been forgotten.¹⁸⁰

Historically Western philosophy has revealed various facets of our human nature, from our attributes as rational animals to our existential loneliness and our identity as beings destined to die. Whilst Gebara acknowledges that such philosophies have possess their own particular values and can express much of what we experience, eco-feminism invites us to move outside the closed subjectivity that sees the world and other humans as objects subservient to our will.

It is not merely a matter of describing the relationship between human subjects and the objects of our knowing. Eco-feminism affirms that all objects are contained in the subject. And the subject itself is both subject and object: It is neither separate nor

¹⁸⁰ Gebara, p. 51-52.

independent, but rather it is interdependent, interrelated and interconnected with all it proposes to know.

We should then relate subjectivity to objectivity, individuality to collectivity, tenderness to compassion and solidarity, plants to humanity, and animals to humanity and this must be based on a perspective that is all-encompassing and intimately woven. Such a perspective allows us to widen our comprehension of human life, and in particular, of human suffering. The existential drama of the individual human being can no longer be blown out of proportion, as if it were an isolated situation; we know from experience that the pain of the whole is mysteriously felt in every being. To have awareness that our tragic existential situation of violence, tribulation and destruction as well as tenderness, joy and hope, is lived out fully in an intimate relationship with the whole of our Cosmic Body opens us gradually to a new understanding of our human condition. We need to seek a new understanding of our personal existence within the larger self that is the Sacred Body of the cosmos.

Gebara is accurate in saying that many people would argue that recognising the interdependence among all things is pointing to the obvious and this fact does nothing to change our consciousness. But Gebara argues, what we often acknowledge is a mechanical interdependence, like that of a car requiring fuel in order for it to run. It is not a mechanical interdependence Gebara proposes, but a living one; a sacred interdependence that is vibrant and intuitive.

This sacred interdependence would, for example, require a radical modification of the transnational market economies, which fail to respect regional cultures and virtually always abuse both the land and populations that inhabit it. It would call for a new understanding of the makeup of nations, one that will recognise ethnic groups along in accordance with their customs and cultural expressions. It would further require, states Gebara, the building of a new network of relationships among peoples.

Further, it would demand that we rethink Christian theology not on the basis of pre-set dogmas but of the concrete lived experience of groups that find their inspiration in the very same fountainhead of wisdom that inspired Jesus of Nazareth. We need to welcome this source of wisdom. We are talking about opening up a new dialogue among religions, one that is founded on respect for the variety of religious expressions and above all the desire to labour together in exploring new ways of sharing life among humanity in the context of our earth systems. Instead of referring to non-Christian religions, it would be more conducive to speak of dialogue among different religions; this would help us drop the insulting attitude of imperialist superiority that has characterised the Christian world.

Reflection on the interdependence of knowing should, states Gebara, open up a new page in the history of Christian theology, encouraging us to utilise a language that is humbler, more existential, more tentative and more open to dialogue.¹⁸¹

Eco-feminist epistemology tries to be inclusive. In other words, it does not impose rigid limits on knowing. It is inclusive in recognising the diversity of our experiences. This inclusiveness has not only cognitive but also ethical consequences. This means that we are not guided by a single, normative model or paradigm, whether it be in culture, how we live our Christianity or in our sexual orientation. According to this perspective, there is no model or criterion available for determining what is authentic knowing.

This inclusive character also influences the many fields of knowledge. As an example, a sociological study opens out into other fields and in a certain sense depends on them. It undoubtedly has certain autonomy and makes its own specific contribution, but it is not independent of other fields of knowledge.

¹⁸¹ Gebara, pp. 53-54.

We attempt, then, to overcome all mechanistic theories of knowing, those in which the whole is seen as merely the sum of its parts and each part can be regarded as a mechanical entity or a relatively independent component. Inclusive epistemology speaks of the reciprocal interdependence in which we live and have our being.

This inclusive aspect is just as essential in theological knowing. What we refer to as “the experience of God” or “the experience of the divine” is always an inclusive experience: our perceptions, our intuitions and our ecstasy are aptitudes that express themselves in a thousand and one ways without any one of them exhausting any other.

Religious experience argues Gebara, is polyphonic and multi-coloured, despite the fact that in the depth of each of us we hear something of the same note, or perceive something of the same choir. It is a search for the meaning of our existence, a groping for that “mysterious something” that is within us and yet at the same time surpasses us.

It is for this reason that an inclusive epistemology is welcoming towards the great multiplicity of all religious experiences as different expressions of breath, a single pursuit of oneness.

This is not some new idealism, argues Gebara. Neither is it a cheap uncritical inclusivism. What she is proposing is the re-articulation of our lives’ deepest values in the very heart of our cognitive processes.¹⁸²

Most feminists would probably agree that there are important connections between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. They are in harmony in viewing the patriarchal conceptual framework, which has given rise to value-hierarchical thinking, as being responsible for a logic of domination. They therefore believe that a reconceptualization is necessary. Eco-feminists agree that: Life is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy, all parts of the ecosystem have equal value, nature

¹⁸² Gebara, pp. 64-65.

knows best, healthy systems maintain their diversity and that there must be unity in diversity.¹⁸³

The earth has been phenomenally supportive of humanity. However, Willoughby argues that such support might not always be in place i.e. in the case of hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes, etc. The eco-feminist consciousness might seek a wider understanding of the cause of natural disasters and the possible role of humanity within it. The relationship pattern established in mutuality is an awareness of interconnectedness as well as individuality. Therefore, the eco-feminist point of view does not deny the complexity of understanding and initiating a response to natural events.¹⁸⁴

It has to be said that not all eco-feminists consider religion as fundamental to their concerns, however within the scope of eco-feminist theology there are debates about the way in which God might be perceived.¹⁸⁵ Taking into account the numerous examples of the way women are negatively portrayed in a demeaning way in the Christian tradition, it is not surprising that some eco-feminists have ceased from seeking inspiration from Scripture.¹⁸⁶ Some accounts of spirituality have echoed throughout the writings of many authors, despite differing opinions in terms of content. For example, Susan Griffin offers a poetic interpretation of the intense closeness between nature and humanity in her book *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. Griffin traces the dualisms between flesh and soul, mind-feelings and culture-nature as the outcome of men being confronted with the terror of mortality. Instead of facing the notion of mortality, Griffin makes the suggestion that men oppress women and nature. For her

¹⁸³ King, p. 199.

¹⁸⁴ Willoughby, p. 136.

¹⁸⁵ Deane-Drummond, p. 146.

¹⁸⁶ Deane Drummond, p. 147. See Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 3.

then, the solution is to identify with the earth in its mortality.¹⁸⁷ Carol Christ uses ideas such as the Goddess, earth and Life as symbolic of the whole of which we are a part, states Deane-Drummond. This is so that the ‘divinity which shapes our ends is life, death and change, understood both literally and as a metaphor for our daily lives’.¹⁸⁸ What Christ is stressing upon here is to recognise that we are part of the cyclical processes of life and death.¹⁸⁹

Ideas such as these have served to influence the way eco-feminist theologians have strived to develop a spirituality that engages with more explicit Christian theologies. Such writers are more often than not suspicious of the notion of the goddess, on the basis that this serves to reinforce the identification between women and the earth that is inherent in the patriarchy that is opposed. However, generally eco-feminist theologies have a different methodological starting point compared with traditional theology in that usually they start with an earth-centered approach that then offers an analysis of tradition, as opposed to focusing first on tradition as such.¹⁹⁰ For example, Ruether rejects those aspects of a goddess theology that promote religious practices without taking into account economic and social structures that have led to particular patterns of oppression. She is drawn to the new creation story of Thomas Berry, but weaves it into her version of a way of thinking about the earth as an interacting organism. In *Gaia and God*, Ruether aims to stress the Judeo-Christian covenantal theme expressed in an ethic of caretaking.¹⁹¹ For Ruether, Gaia represents the sacramental tradition, especially the cosmological presence of the divine in the natural world. Yet like writers such as Griffin, she is keen to identify with the mortal processes

¹⁸⁷ Deane-Drummond, p. 147. Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (London: The Women's Press, 1984).

¹⁸⁸ *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. by Judith Plaskow & Carol Christ (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), p. 321.

¹⁸⁹ Deane-Drummond, p. 147.

¹⁹⁰ Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 3.

¹⁹¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (London: SCM Press, 1993), p. 210.

of the earth, so that for her resurrection becomes interpreted in terms of the continuation of our bodily matter in some future life forms on earth, leading to what she terms as a 'spirituality of recycling' that is only possible once humanity has experienced a 'deep conversion of consciousness'.¹⁹²

Mary Grey is more inclined towards biblical prophetic themes, moving away from the covenantal and sacramental spirituality that forms the background to Ruether's analysis. In doing so, for Grey, they become sources of inspiration in what she refers to as 'an outrageous pursuit of hope'.¹⁹³ Similarly to Ruether, Grey situates her discussion in cultural analysis, and highlights the culture of consumerism as being of critical importance in fostering a culture where wants become needs, indirectly leading to exploitative attitudes towards the environment. She argues for a prophetic vision taken from Isaiah's vision of flourishing, one that is inclusive of both people and planet, and one that does not split ecology from social justice.¹⁹⁴ Grey also makes the suggestion that Isaiah adopts an ecological wisdom, embedded in a liturgical context so that it becomes the source of change and renewal:

The emphasis is on *Leitourgia*, the authentic work of the gathered community: a people who grieve, lament, give thanks, and at the same time work to free the land from the poison of pesticide, the long death of nuclear radiation and nuclear winter, and the injustice of being wrenched away from the ownership of indigenous peoples, with all the conflict and complexity that means.¹⁹⁵

As far as Grey is concerned, eco-feminist spirituality arises from the margins and out of the concrete concerns linking the devastation of the earth and the suffering of vulnerable people. This is even more clearly stated in *Sacred Longings* where she argues not just

¹⁹² Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 119.

¹⁹³ Deane-Drummond, pp. 147-148. Mary Grey, *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope: Prophetic Dreams for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000).

¹⁹⁴ Mary Grey, *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1989), p. 49.

¹⁹⁵ Grey, p. 57.

for an alternative spirituality that is sensitive to the needs of the earth, but also for one that takes particular cognisance of the threats posed to human societies through globalisation. She particularly argues that globalisation poses as an effective spirituality, a misplaced desire of the heart that requires tackling through providing an alternative, one that re-educates desire, using other ways of communicating that appeal to the person as a whole. In this particular book, Grey is more self-conscious in her tracing of particular sacramental traditions.

Deserving of a mention at this point, certainly in terms of her writings, is the fact that Grey is actively involved in a non-government organisation that builds wells in India, and it is practical experience such as this that becomes apparent in her writing which can be described as both passionate and full of conviction regarding the experience of Indian women in the lower castes and their struggle for human dignity. She especially challenges her readers, who will most likely be Western, to embrace a way of renunciation, sacrifice and simplicity. In offering an alternative spirituality, Deane-Drummond in *Eco-Theology* argues that *Sacred Longings* succeeds in the possibility of appealing to those from a variety of religious perspectives. In the same vein as many other eco-feminist writings, it is more concerned with engaging with practical contexts and the challenges they present, than with more specific theological analysis that tends to be more theoretical.¹⁹⁶

It can indeed be argued that close identification between women and the earth presents problems for many writers, who hold the opinion that such views amount to an essentialist connection between women and nature that cannot be defended. Indeed it has resulted in the setting up of a hot debate within eco-feminist discourse as to whether women should be identified with nature or not. Stacy Alaimo has been strongly critical

¹⁹⁶ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), p. 148.

of such identification, because she argues that while it 'sings' of unity with nature, it unwittingly widens still further the divide between nature and culture. Deane-Drummond states that in some ways, she shares such reservations.¹⁹⁷ Alaimo states:

Speaking for nature can be yet another form of silencing, as nature is *blanketed in the human voice*. Even a feminist voice is nonetheless human: representing cows as ruminating over the beauty of the mother-child bond no doubt says more about cultural feminism than it does about cows.¹⁹⁸

Other concerns about eco-feminist spirituality focus on the extent to which it is relevant only to Western middle-class women, argues Deane-Drummond, and therefore out of touch with the real needs of those in the poorer communities of the world. Eco-feminists have looked to correct this tendency by directing their attention to listening to the voices of those in the third world. Evidence of this can be found in Ruether's book, *Women Healing Earth*. Mary Grey has equally taken into account this critique in *Sacred Longings*, by consciously including religious elements from religious traditions outside Christianity in the work of Mahatma Ghandi. Mary Ress has also described a developing shift towards eco-feminism among Latin American activists who are committed to the poor and the Christian faith, some of whom are reluctant to use the label 'eco-feminism' to describe the shift in their comprehension of the human and divine. They 'long for a more adequate metaphor, a more poetic, authentic term that would also reflect earlier cosmologies'.¹⁹⁹ Deane-Drummond argues that there are other examples where an eco-feminist approach is unequivocally unhelpful in some social contexts, and this is an issue that must be faced. Although environmental problems affect women in a disproportionate way in many parts of the world, eco-feminism needs to be connected with specific practices. In particular, some societies show that women

¹⁹⁷ Deane-Drummond, pp. 148-149. Mary Grey, *Sacred Longings* (USA: Augsburg Press, 1984).

¹⁹⁸ Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 182.

¹⁹⁹ Mary J. Ress, *Ecofeminism in Latin America: Women from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), p. 202. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women Healing Earth* (Norwich: SCM Press, 1996).

are not necessarily more nature friendly than men. For example as in the case of the farming people of the Mijikenda in Kenya, or women in highland Chiapas in Mexico.²⁰⁰

In both examination and consideration of what has been discussed thus far, it is becoming increasingly apparent, that we *must* reconsider our relationship to the cosmos in light of the current problems earth is facing. Spretnak, in particular, makes some interesting points that could work well within the framework of a modern spirituality. She articulates that our universe is full of mystery and the way that it self-organises and self-regulates means that we use a variety of names for it such as Cosmic Consciousness, the divine, Holy God or Goddess and Ultimate mystery. When an individual experiences the 'oneness' and comprehends the interrelatedness, it can be said they have been visited by grace.²⁰¹ Within the framework of an eco-feminist perspective, the separations or divisions that have prevented us from experiencing oneness, disappear. Thus, we are invited to live in the oneness of the matter and energy that are our very makeup yet without fully realising or understanding what oneness really is. No longer, states Gebara, can we have the spirit struggling against the body, angels against devils and God against humanity. Rather, we need to begin again at all levels of our activity and reconstruct the unity that we truly are, as well as the unity of our being in all the evolutionary processes that have taken place in space as well as in time.²⁰² Because when we experience oneness, reverence for the whole community both human and non-human comes into play, filling us with awe and wonder. This might be regarded as experience of the 'cosmic self'. Who are we in relation to the cosmos and what is it in relation to us? Where there is direct individual experience, revelation often follows of the larger reality. An intense awareness of a benevolent presence is thus felt.

²⁰⁰ Deane-Drummond, p. 149. For an overview of these issues, refer to Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorenzen, *Ecofeminism and Globalisation: Exploring Culture, Context and Religion* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield: 2003), pp. 41-71.

²⁰¹ Charlene Spretnak, *States of Grace* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), p. 264.

²⁰² Gebara, p. 57.

It might be argued that modern society has unfortunately taught us to desensitise in the respect and to see what appears to be real. It requires us to exist in a rational thinking mode that is forever questioning. But if we do, how can we grow in our awareness of the intricacies of creation, disintegration and recreation?²⁰³

For Spretnak we have become too mechanistic and it is this that prevents us from discerning the true reality. We are living in a universe that requires us to participate and enter into conscious union with it. Yet the ways in which modern society views itself serves only to marginalise contact with the sacred Whole. There seems to be little room for spirituality and cosmology which appear to exist only on the periphery.²⁰⁴ The loss of the sacred means the loss of the mystic within, where the connectedness to the divine remains elusive.²⁰⁵ It can be said that mystical experiences of the cosmos have direct implications for how we think about God and his relationship to the world, indeed Borg describes Jesus as a 'mystic'.²⁰⁶

Perhaps then it is time for humanity to regain its sense of the sacred, however there is no suggestion here that it would be an easy task. We ask the question why? Because modernity will tell us that it is considered as our natural role to function in opposition to nature and to 'master'.²⁰⁷ It seems that experiencing 'oneness' with the world of nature (and indeed God), might even be somehow feared by humanity so we set out to seek to control it. Spretnak demands: what is it that we are afraid of? That it may control us? That unchallenged it would physically destroy us? McFague argues that

²⁰³ Spretnak, p. 264.

²⁰⁴ Spretnak, p. 265. In the Roman Catholic world, it was primarily Vatican II (1963-5) in its constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 'The Church in the Modern World', which explained in more detail the positive teaching on creation which the Catholic tradition has always known and indeed confessed. Whilst the realisation of the kingdom and creation and redemption are clearly dealt with, there remains no mention of the cosmic interrelationship between God, the world and humanity.

²⁰⁵ N.T. Wright and Marcus Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1999), p. 60.

²⁰⁶ Wright & Borg, p. 62.

²⁰⁷ Spretnak, p. 265.

we are being cosmologically irresponsible because each 'earthly' action directs us back to the unity of the cosmos.²⁰⁸

We are dealing with a crafty enemy, McFague states, and that is *ourselves*. She believes that we are not all equally responsible nor does the deterioration affect us equally. Ecological blight may be seen as being neither fair and democratic nor egalitarian, but affects across the entire range of class, race. There are those who think that this ecological crisis is a flora and fauna issue, concerning plant and animal life rather than people. Of course the truth is that we cannot live without plants and animals and the ecosystem that is supporting us as a whole. It is definitely a people issue, McFague argues, and it is also an issue for justice. If we can define justice as meaning fairness, then ecology and justice are most decidedly linked.²⁰⁹

McFague is deadly serious in how such issues lead to the suffering of creation. What happens to us on earth, happens also to God, she argues. In this instance McFague points us towards broadening our vision by placing the planet and the body in intimate relationship with the divine and each other.²¹⁰ However, the trinity she produces leaves out the person of Jesus, but we can still regard it as being Christic, states Isherwood.²¹¹ The body of God, shaped by the Christic paradigm, is also the Cosmic Christ; that is to say, the loving compassionate God who is on the side of those who suffer, in particular the vulnerable and the excluded; effectively, those who live on the margins of society. All are included, not just in their liberation and healing, but in their defeat and despair. The resurrected Christ is the Cosmic Christ - the Christ freed from the body of Jesus of Nazareth, to be present in and to all bodies.²¹² The New Testament appearance

²⁰⁸ Spretnak, p. 266.

²⁰⁹ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 5.

²¹⁰ McFague, p. 19.

²¹¹ Isherwood, p. 77.

²¹² McFague, p. 179. For further treatment on the Cosmic Christ see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 321ff. See also Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins, 1960) and Matthew Fox, *The*

narratives verify the continuing empowerment of the Christic paradigm in the world: the inclusive, liberating love of God for all is alive in and throughout the whole cosmos. The power of God, for McFague at least, is incarnate throughout the world and becomes evident at times when the vulnerable are liberated and healed. We are not alone says McFague, as we endeavour to practice the ministry of inclusion. The excluded and the outcast bodies apparent in the world today, belong in and are comforted by, the Cosmic Christ.²¹³

Grace Jantzen's book *God's World* and Sallie McFague's *Body of God* have proved influential not just as eco-feminist theologies but also within debated in systematic theology.²¹⁴ Jantzen offers the suggestion that just as humans are embodied, as opposed to existing as detached souls and bodies, so God too is embodied in the world, and the transcendence of God is analogous to that of human beings. Such an approach is radically different from the interpretation of God as being Other, as exists in much classical theology. Jantzen also posits that more intermediate positions (such as found in a panentheistic understanding of God in which God somehow bears the world in a way analogous to a mother bearing a child) put too great a distance between God and the world. As far as Jantzen is concerned, it is the universe as such that is expressive of the intentions and will of God. God as embodiment is costly to God in that God's power is self-limited by the desire to love. While ideas such as the self-limitation of God's power are not unique to eco-feminism states Deane-Drummond in *Eco-Theology*, Jantzen takes this up in a new way by incorporating the idea of God as feminine divine, especially in *Becoming Divine*.²¹⁵ Along with numerous other feminist writers, Jantzen is extremely critical of dualistic tendencies that she finds in Western

Coming of the Cosmic Christ (London: Harper One, 1990) for two different 20th century reconstructions of the Cosmic Christ.

²¹³ McFague, p. 179.

²¹⁴ Deane-Drummond, p. 150. Grace Jantzen, *God's World: God's Body* (London: DLT, 1984); Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1993).

²¹⁵ Deane-Drummond, p. 150. G. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

culture, believing that under such dualism is a desire to control, leading to controlling attitudes not merely towards women and nature, but also towards sexuality, feelings and other races. Jantzen is concerned that the fear that underlies this dualism is fear of the body, which bears some resemblance to Griffin's belief that such fears arise from mortality. She is explicit in her celebration of pantheism, so that 'instead of mastery over the earth which is rapidly bringing about its destruction, there would be reverence and sensitivity; instead of seeing dominion as godlike we would recognise it as utterly contradictory to divinity'.²¹⁶

McFague, like Jantzen, argues for an embodied model of God that poses implications for the way we think about the earth. Instead of viewing the earth through an arrogant eye, as though it were a machine over which we seek control, McFague argues that we need to pay attention to the earth and become in tune with it, becoming conscious of its vibrant subjectivity. Whilst she is conscious of the earth sciences and evolutionary theory, by giving the earth subjectivity, this clearly moves outside this brief. For McFague, sin becomes a refusal to accept our place on earth. The planet is a reflection of 'God's back' and the notion of the earth as God's body is intentionally metaphorical, so that we are 'invited to see the creator in the creation, the source of all existence in and through what is bodied forth from that source'.²¹⁷ God is spirit expressed as agent in a way that expresses deep connectivity. Therefore, McFague's view allows for some distinction between God and the world, thus parting company with the more pantheistic approach of Jantzen. Yet we do need to question how helpful the image of the body might be for an understanding of God in feminist terms. Bodies today become subjects that can be manipulated and altered through medical practices and technology; consumerism places pressure on women to 'aspire' to idealistic images

²¹⁶ McFague, pp. 133-134.

²¹⁷ Deane-Drummond, p. 151. Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

of the body; cyberspace replaces the image of the body with a virtual world that is no longer subject to earthly constraints. It is significant then, that McFague's book *Life Abundant* places the emphasis more greatly on social and cultural issues of economics. Like Grey, she is concerned overall with the culture of consumerism that dominates the Western world and its economy. But she still maintains her earlier position of combining the agential and organic models through the pantheistic metaphor of the world as God's body.²¹⁸

An alternative way of identifying humans with the earth without resorting to ideas of the body as such is through discovering alternative systems that represent the earth in holistic ways. Anne Primavesi is an eco-feminist theologian who has drawn on the imagery of Gaia, but who has done so in a different way to that of Ruether. Primavesi has drawn explicitly on the scientific theory of James Lovelock who envisages the earth as a homeostatic self-regulating organic system.²¹⁹ Eco-feminists have a general tendency to be suspicious about the merits of Western science; in particular, the oppression of women implicit in its practices in the Western world and through its colonisation of other cultures.²²⁰ This does not mean though, that scientific considerations are redundant, and certainly Primavesi is an eco-feminist theologian who takes science seriously. The theology of Primavesi is equally in tune with the wider contemporary shift in understanding the natural world as sacred. As far as Lovelock is concerned, Gaia is not simply a shift in thinking away from reductionism, though it is certainly this; it is also reflective of the notion of emergence, in which a whole behaves differently from the sum of its parts. Primavesi finds the language of Gaia useful in as far as it allows theology to become translated into a scientific language in such a way

²¹⁸ McFague, pp. 138-141.

²¹⁹ Deane-Drummond, p. 153. Anne Primavesi, *Sacred Gaia: Holistic Theology and Earth System Science* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²²⁰ For a thorough treatment of this see Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

that she believes will make theology accessible to a much wider audience.²²¹ Deane-Drummond agrees with Primavesi on her premise that constructive dialogue between science and theology should take place, with science providing insights into complex relationships with our environment and theology examining reasons why our lives are validated by our religious beliefs. Primavesi, in a similar way to Mary Midgeley, views Gaia as a means of shifting Western consciousness away from individual competition towards co-operation, identifying in particular, the non-violent connectedness usually associated with Buddhism. Yet she makes the suggestion that this specific interpretation of Gaia is not just significant in an ethical sense, for theology takes on the characteristics of Gaia and becomes 'another earth science.'²²²

Primavesi's eco-theology is equally concerned with ethical outcomes and makes a distinctive contribution in this way. Ecological and interpersonal justice is grounded in a particular view of the earth as sacred through the notion of Gaia. Primavesi is insistent that the unitary view of the earth as sacred counters the damaging theological apartheid that affirms the superiority of the human that she believes has contributed to environmental degradation.²²³ Instead we see God as integral to the earth systems she describes. But in a way, that is not entirely clear, God is distinct from the earth too. Therefore, God is the 'God of the whole earth system: enchanting and terrible, giver of life and death, not separate from and not confused with the world and its sacred gift events.'²²⁴ Yet how can God, especially God that draws on Gaian imagery, be 'not confused' or distinct from the world? Moreover, God as 'terrible', while being 'sacred', seems not only to deny the possibility of intimacy with God, but also the goodness of God, so that the future outcome of the God-human relationship is not secure. Whilst

²²¹ Primavesi, p. xii.

²²² Deane-Drummond, pp. 153-154. Anne Primavesi, *Sacred Gaia Holistic Theology and Earth System Science* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²²³ Primavesi, pp. 170-171.

²²⁴ Primavesi, p. 179.

Deane-Drummond welcomes Primavesi's suggestion that humanity needs to be more aware of its biological and evolutionary origins, her conflation of God's being with the world appears to undermine her claims about the real possibility for change. While process theologians can look to the promise of nature by exploring the cosmological context of evolution, such a dimension seems to be missing in Primavesi's version of sacred Gaia. Deane-Drummond suggests that the implication is present that God is a gaian Goddess, though for some reason she resists making an explicit identification of one with the other in the same way as other eco-feminist writers such as Ruether.²²⁵

Osborn argues that one of the reasons why Gaia provokes such a strong reaction, either for or against it, is because it is representative of a specific archetype. In accordance with Jungian psychology, archetypes 'tend to have irrational emotions associated with them; they tend to become objects of devotion (or vilification).'²²⁶

Ruether identifies religious narratives of apocalypse, as well as classical narratives of sin and evil as taking hold of Western cultural heritage. As we are already aware, Ruether's alternative is to promote a sacramental and covenantal healing tradition, with *Gaia* merged into that vision. For Ruether and Primavesi, and other eco-feminists such as Carolyn Merchant, the archetype of the earth as a machine needs replacing with the archetype of the world as an organism. Primavesi further integrates her understanding of Gaia with her view of God, though she avoids using goddess language, or even making the suggestion that this is a 'female' voice of God.²²⁷

To sum up, we set out to first of all establish the meaning of ecology, identifying some of the problems that arise under this heading and identifying why it is described as a 'crisis'. The importance of right relations between nature and humanity has been pointed out; this is inclusive of all species. The seriousness of the situation has

²²⁵ Deane-Drummond, p. 156.

²²⁶ Lawrence Osborn, 'Archetypes, Angels and Gaia', *Ecotheology*, 10 (2001), (p. 15).

²²⁷ Deane-Drummond, p. 156.

hopefully been successfully highlighted. There does seem to be an increasing recognition on the part of humanity that these problems exist and that action needs to be taken before it becomes too late. We have examined the meaning of eco-feminism and its argument for banishing hierarchal structures in a bid to place a more equal balance between women, men and nature and to regard women and nature in a positive light. Eco-feminism clearly addresses a wider perspective in relation to the global situation where it seeks to encourage the development of a more spiritual outlook towards creation. Lastly, it has been discussed that there will be times when it will be necessary for humans to take control where necessary for the protection of both humanity and creature; this entails a very practical response to the crisis but we must also maintain an awareness and realisation of the cosmic spirituality and sacred aspect highlighted by Spretnak.

The intention of the following section is to highlight the need expressed by feminists to move towards a more equal and peaceful world existence and this cannot be achieved if one of the sexes remains dominant. It should be remembered that such an idea affects the whole of creation because we cannot simply recognise the need to reform humanity's relationship between the sexes; it would also have to include the recognition of interrelatedness between all of creation and humanity's responsibility to take care of it, which is a fundamental aspect of the thesis. We consider the fall from paradise and how it has led to preconceived derogatory ideas about women that have continued throughout history. Identifying the place of the feminine and Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the second Eve will be prominent and finally the importance and significance of land and the covenant in working towards an ecological spirituality will be discussed.

Women, Nature and the Patriarchal Stamp

In terms of healing, justice and marginalisation, not just of women but also of men, we re-visit Latin America, arguably the heart of liberation theology. It is here where we can find some of the most oppressed and exploited people on the planet. The dominant theological view preceding the 1960's was that there seemed little hope that change could take place considering the fallen state of those residing in this part of the world.²⁴⁵ Certainly, Latin America is a divided place in terms of lifestyle. On the one hand there exists a hedonistic way of being, where money is no object and everything is available. But it is also a place of beauty and ugliness. Not far from the warm sunny beaches exists the slums, home to the marginalised, the oppressed and the exploited. It was this aspect that drew the attention of the Medellín conference of bishops held in Columbia in 1968. The plight of the people needed to be dealt with as a priority. They needed to be raised up out of their poverty, argued Lisa Isherwood, and it was at that point that Christological discourse changed considerably. It was no longer acceptable for Christ to remain in the Church, but to be a part of the community and outside of the Church as well as in it. Christ knew well who the oppressors and the oppressed were. We cannot speak of Christ actively being in the world if we resign him to residency just within the Church and created doctrines.

Through meaningful discourse of Christ between oppressors and the oppressed it was possible to gain an understanding of themselves and their situation. Christ, argues Isherwood, is not to be resigned to just the Omega Point, the final point, the ending. But, says Isherwood, Christ was to be the starting point towards liberation in the present. Thus the emphasis became placed not on eschatology but on the incarnation. Not the past but the present. It was time for the clerics to emerge from their hiding place

²⁴⁵ Lisa Isherwood, *Liberating Christ* (Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), p. 48.

behind the mysteries of the Church and work with the people to find meaning when confronted with these so-called mysteries. Such aspirations and prospective hopes of liberation demanded a new way of finding Jesus.²⁴⁶

Latin American liberation theology has, says Isherwood, concentrated upon the figure of the Jesus of history for direction and orientation. But this solves little in reality because returning to the Jesus of first century Palestine keeps us rooted in the past. Isherwood argues that this is not where contemporary problems are situated. Therefore, we need a contemporary Christ. This is a Christ who is present in the problems we face today. Isherwood makes the point that the numerous theologies concerning liberation have their foundation in Christologies. This is what underpins them, she states.²⁴⁷ In the fight against injustice, God is on the side of the poor and the marginalised. Isherwood quotes Jean Marc Éla to this effect, “When we take the side of the poor, we enter into a conspiracy with God, that is, we conspire against injustice.”²⁴⁸ Jesus, better than anyone, knew the divine imperative for seeking justice. Especially and most importantly Jesus’ own concern with it was comprehensible given the level of eschatological expectation at that time in history. The angle Jesus took was that God’s reign becomes established when His will for justice for the poor is sought. Solidarity with the poor, argues Isherwood, was a sign of the individual’s readiness for the coming of such a reign. She makes it clear and we know from the gospels, that this was the rule Jesus lived by; including the excluded, healing the sick and transforming people’s lives by his actions.²⁴⁹ This, I believe, is of paramount importance in terms of understanding what the person and work of Jesus was ultimately concerned with in his own time and how that has continued and evolved through his role as the Cosmic Christ today. The

²⁴⁶ Isherwood, p. 49. The conference consisted of Roman Catholic Latin American bishops who challenged poverty and injustice in their countries.

²⁴⁷ Isherwood, p. 19.

²⁴⁸ Quoted in *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader*, ed. by Marie Giblin and others (New York: Orbis, 1992), p. 82.

²⁴⁹ Isherwood, p. 19.

pressing issues in Jesus' time are just as urgent now. Therefore, Lisa Isherwood makes the statement that through the brutal and torturous way in which Jesus died for humanity's sins, salvation was made possible. Jesus has paid the price, and therefore has removed the pressure from our shoulders to act responsibly because the debt has already been paid. This can be regarded as blasphemous to a great extent. She is correct to think this way because it is the most powerful call humanity will ever be given by God to wake up and take responsibility. If all we have to do is believe, argues Isherwood, then that still does not solve the problem of humanity's irresponsibility and can even be described as an abomination against what Jesus has done.²⁵⁰ Further to this, it is not just about humanity being saved, but the whole of creation. The Cosmic Christ stresses this reality, argues Isherwood. This in fact puts ecology at the centre of Christian concerns and not, as Isherwood puts it, 'as a marginal question to get round when the important business of individual salvation has been dealt with'.²⁵¹ There can be no such division made, because 'all creation is simultaneously being loved and created by God or else none of it is'.²⁵²

We are called to a global vision, argues Isherwood.²⁵³ We have it within our power to not only makes things better, but to make things *right*. Much of contemporary Christology, then, has focussed on how individual understanding of Jesus' life can assist in transforming present circumstances. What Isherwood is arguing here is that Christology should be less concerned with the already saving action of Jesus and look more to how we can be empowered to change and be willing to fight for that change. Feminist Christology, then, positions itself at the heart of this 'liberative' approach. It pushes all boundaries in all directions, says Isherwood. It is the lived reality of the lives

²⁵⁰ Isherwood, pp. 19-20.

²⁵¹ Lisa Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 76.

²⁵² Anna Primavesi, *From Apocalyptic to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1991), p. 151.

²⁵³ Isherwood, p. 20.

of both women and men that must be used as the starting point. Biblical history can be used as a reflective measure in moving forward.²⁵⁴ Humanity is making enormous demands of the earth. We are already informed of the extent of this earlier in this chapter. The earth is dysfunctional and is no longer able to sustain itself because of this, argues Isherwood. Therefore, we need to make the changes and also be mindful of how we do this, she says.²⁵⁵

What arises in the theology of Latin America is the move away from what Isherwood terms a 'tearful reflection on the gulf between the promises of heaven and the grim, hellish realities of earth to an examination of the causes of those realities'. She is quite right. This in itself produces a dualism. If we do not carefully examine the causes and be prepared to act then there can be little hope for the present and the future. Isherwood further states that original sin is no longer a suitable point of reference for all the sufferings present in the world today. Humanity is in its own process of becoming.²⁵⁶ It cannot therefore be kept in this pit of torment for its fallen state. That is why it is so important that humanity recognises its responsibility to earth and to each other. It does not, argues Isherwood, provide an 'inevitable and absolute' answer to all the suffering in the world. Within the framework of Latin American theology a fresh understanding became apparent where sin was no longer regarded as a personal weakness that had arisen from our 'inherited congenital disability', that of original sin. Humanity put it together, humanity can dismantle it, says Isherwood.²⁵⁷ It can be rectified and healed. It starts with the self and as Gutiérrez commented, the spirituality of liberation involves conversion to our neighbour.²⁵⁸ This is vastly important in terms of compassion and forgiveness. Isherwood makes reference to the way in which

²⁵⁴ Isherwood, p. 11.

²⁵⁵ Isherwood, p. 73.

²⁵⁶ Lisa Isherwood, *Liberating Christ* (Ohio: Cleveland Press, 1999), p. 51.

²⁵⁷ Isherwood, pp. 51-52.

²⁵⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM, 1974), p. 115.

Gutiérrez expressed the necessity to concretise the notion of the abstract Christ in the building of God's kingdom, his realm, on earth.²⁵⁹ To summarise the quote, Gutiérrez speaks of Christ as giving both meaning and fulfilment in the modern day, to the eschatological promises made by Christ. This requires opening up new perspectives by catapulting history forward. There must be a sense of fullness which takes on and transforms reality. This is of vital importance in bringing Christ into the 21st century.²⁶⁰ In solidarity with those who are oppressed and alienated, we manifest the realm of God, says Isherwood.²⁶¹ This is the only way we *can* manifest the realm of God, by addressing the issues. In challenging how we have reached this state in the first place, we are already on the path to manifesting God's kingdom on earth. A humanity that is poor, displaced, marginalised and oppressed is not the humanity that God desires. This is not representative of our true divinity. This is not how he intended us to be. However, we show a sign of that true divinity when we begin to recognise that actually, we do live in a misplaced, misguided world and it *is* of our own doing. To bring humanity back to Christ, back to God and back to a true sense of our own reality, we have to see that we are sisters and brothers placed on this earth to create God's kingdom and we can only achieve this if we work together and raise up those who are so downtrodden that they no longer have the fight to do it for themselves. It is the rest of humanity's responsibility.

McFague also understands God as liberator in Jesus as a continuation of that which finds expression in understanding God as creator. Here, McFague equally places her attention on Christology, believing that in its classical form it encourages individualism and 'spiritualism' by which she means a detachment from political, economic and cosmic concerns, which she sees as being ironic in light of the deeper meaning of the incarnation as physical embodiment. Like Mary Grey, McFague argues

²⁵⁹ Isherwood, p. 52.

²⁶⁰ Gutiérrez, p. 167.

²⁶¹ Isherwood, p. 53.

for a prophetic and sacramental theology but unlike Grey, she revisits Christology in such a way as to draw out these dimensions. Drawing out the idea of 'God is with us', she argues that an ecologically sensitive Christology centres on God as present with humanity as well as other life forms. She especially advocates that the significance of Jesus is not so much understanding who Jesus is as in showing us what God is like. She makes the suggestion that it is the liberative and prophetic ministry of Jesus towards those who are oppressed that needs to be extended to all creatures, including the natural world. McFague appears to accept the notion that all of reality has a 'cruciform shape', so that 'Jesus did not invent the idea that from death comes new life'.²⁶² For McFague, states Deane-Drummond, the sacramental dimension of Christology is both inclusive and embodied; the entire creation is *imago Dei* rather than just human beings. McFague further suggests correctly as far as Deane-Drummond is concerned, that sacramental Christology adds an essential ingredient for contemporary discussion, that of hope. Yet for McFague the resurrection is interpreted as symbolic of the triumph of life over death; Christ's resurrection is 'emblematic of the power of God on the side of life and its fulfillment'.²⁶³ The question begs though whether such hope, that appears to be akin to natural re-growth, is enough to sustain us in the face of the terrible tragedies facing humanity currently. But she is also prepared to argue that life for Christians is about following after Jesus as incarnate; the resurrection expresses God's yes to all that is for an abundant life despite pain and suffering. This is a different model of salvation compared with the traditional atonement images of substitution and sacrifice. For McFague, sin is not just individual misdeeds, as can be seen in much traditional theology; moreover, it is the movement away from such flourishing, whether it be an individual level or institutional level. She is also critical of theodicies which she argues agonize about how God could have permitted or caused evil, when the fact remains that

²⁶² McFague, p. 168.

²⁶³ McFague, p. 170.

we as human beings have failed to face the extent to which humanity is itself involved in evil.²⁶⁴ She states:

Whether we consider poverty and starvation, genocide, ethnic hatred and warfare, racial and sexual discrimination, greed and hoarding, species decline, deforestation, air and water pollution, land degradation, global warming and even floods, droughts and tornadoes, human beings are now responsible, directly or indirectly, to a lesser or greater degree-and some more than others-for all of the above.²⁶⁵

Whilst recognising the full extent and breadth of human sin, ranging beyond the human community, which is a view that Deane-Drummond shares, she questions to what extent McFague's Christological model deals adequately with that sin? If the resurrection of Christ is linked to natural cycles of re-birth, in what sense is reconciliation achieved for the human or wider cosmic community, other than a solidarity in suffering and rising again? In McFague's resistance to stark images of God as one who punishes the Son, as in some penal or substitutionary versions of Christ's atonement, she has completely moved away from recognising the importance of atonement as such; Christology is thus reduced to incarnation, where, in a similar way to Ruether, even the resurrection is resumed under the cycles of nature.²⁶⁶ In other words, states Deane-Drummond, we are required to discover a way of expressing the reconciling work of Christ on the cross that includes ecological and structural sin, without resorting to images of a brutal or unloving God. This also need not be inclusive of 'satisfaction' theories of the atonement, which suggests that God in some way has to be pacified or can undergo a change of mind-such a view represents anthropocentrism writ large. But with the resistance of penal or satisfaction theories, the theme of reconciliation ought not to be lost, but it is reconciliation sought in love and holiness, rather than anger. For without any reconciliation, there can be little hope of redemption, unless such redemption is merely reduced to a natural process in the manner McFague

²⁶⁴ Deane-Drummond, p. 152.

²⁶⁵ McFague, p. 201.

²⁶⁶ Deane-Drummond, p. 152.

suggests. Human history argues Deane-Drummond, proposes that a natural recovery is rarely adequate; instead what is required is God's grace working in creatures in order to restore relationships, and such grace is expressed in the Christian tradition through the wisdom of the cross.²⁶⁷

In an attempt to ground the vision of redemption in reality of the worldly suffering that we continue to see on a global scale now, we must consider further the meaning of the suffering of Christ and Christ's atonement.²⁶⁸ The image of the son sacrificed to his father, is a widely known theme in masculinist mythology and serve to demonstrate a bonding between the two to overcome rivalry. However, this unfortunately and unavoidably results in women being either victimized or alienated from this story. And the term 'salvific' for women, does not speak of sacrifice and suffering in terms of their own salvation, but rather as crushing of the very humanity they struggle to rejoice in, Isherwood argues. The symbol of the cross and the atoning interpretations placed upon it, have presented women with a serious dilemma down the centuries and certainly not least for feminist theologians over the last thirty years. In their reflection upon the lives of women as starting points for theological reflection, feminist theologians have arrived at the conclusion that theories of atonement have made women into victims.

Isherwood states that Womanist theologians were amongst the first to critically engage with the idea of sacrifice. For them, their situation had been one of slavery and so it is no surprise that they were mistrustful of teaching that seemed to justify suffering and death. Delores Williams is convinced that the cross legitimizes the surrogacy experience of black women and that it makes the weight of other people's burdens legitimate when, Isherwood argues, it is most definitely inhumane. Black women who are Christians are unable to forget the cross, but they would be unwise to glorify it as

²⁶⁷ Deane-Drummond, p. 153.

²⁶⁸ Deane-Drummond, p. 154.

they run the risk of making their exploitation sacred. The sacrifice and death of Jesus in its entirety has proved to be an extremely difficult challenge for womanists, many of whom recognise that their mothers before them had found immense comfort in the idea that Jesus could save them from their suffering through his own. This is dangerous territory here and the debate is certainly not over. Isherwood points out that a noteworthy newcomer to this debate is the phenomena of the Promise Keepers. This group consists mainly of an African American group of men who have repented of their waywardness and who have returned to their families to provide 'head-ship'. Tragically, one major result of this has been an increase in domestic violence. We ought not to be too surprised at this, says Isherwood, quite rightly, because they have returned with a very hierarchical and authoritarian understanding of what male headship should be like in a Christian family. This has, for womanist theologians, provided more upon which to ponder, and as a result are starting to address the type of muscular Christianity that leads to abusive conditions.²⁶⁹

According to Grey, women's experience has not yet been directly brought to bear on atonement doctrines. Yet it is in this belief in the essential salvific power of the cross which has presented the greatest paradox for the religious becoming of women. Identifying with the sufferings of Jesus on the cross, held up as essential for redemption, has contributed to women remaining transfixed as scapegoat and victim in society. But this matters not only for the socially sanctioned and punitive suffering of women.²⁷⁰ Process thinker Daniel Day Williams argues that if atonement is viewed as the capacity for suffering and endurance, then, 'the question has been too rarely asked, "What is the

²⁶⁹ Lisa Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 25-26. Delores Williams, *Sisters of the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993).

²⁷⁰ Grey, p. 118.

meaning of atonement as *love* doing its distinctive work in dealing with guilt and self-destruction?²⁷¹

Atonement, then, requires a reshaping of theological thinking so that it becomes inclusive rather than exclusive.²⁷² Deane-Drummond states that she interprets atonement to mean more than merely the reconciliation that is possible in spite of human, moral sin. Although it goes without saying that of course we need to be reminded of this, given the human tendency towards greed and the over-consumption that underlies much of the strain in the carrying capacity of the planet. Rather, atonement means ‘at-one-ment’, a right ordering of relationships that is accomplished paradoxically through Christ’s own descent into suffering, death and hell. This last aspect is not always appreciated, argues Deane-Drummond, or it is diffused through a re-description in existential language in a bid to express the horror of Christ’s sense of abandonment by God, his Father.²⁷³

However, maybe a modern understanding of hell could include the abyss that lies beyond extinction-what philosophers have often referred to as ‘horrendous hells’.²⁷⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar has written explicitly of Christ’s entry into hell on Holy Saturday. He argues that the purpose of theology that is reflective of this moment is the ‘realisation of all the godlessness of all the sins of the world, now experienced as agony and a sinking down into the “second death” and “second chaos”, outside of the world ordained from the beginning of God.’²⁷⁵ In this sense, Christ’s solidarity goes deeper than simply mortality; for it enters into that space that humanity fears most. Although von Balthasar did not extend his theology beyond the human community, a fear beyond that of simple mortality for non-human species would be that of extinction. Moreover, it

²⁷¹ D. D. Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (Herts: James Nisbet, 1968), p. 176.

²⁷² Deane-Drummond, p. 163.

²⁷³ Deane-Drummond, p. 164.

²⁷⁴ See Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

²⁷⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. by Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), pp. 51-52.

is in that descent that Christ is most able to 'become the ascent of all from the same depths'.²⁷⁶ The logic of this movement is one that expresses the deep love of God for all of creation and it is in agreement with the sentiment of Colossians 1. Although, Deane-Drummond argues, von Balthasar is correct to resist the notion that the passage from death to life that Christ demonstrates in his own death and resurrection is just one example of that renewing principle found on earth. Ruether suggests as much in her interpretation of the resurrection as a type of 'recycling'.²⁷⁷ Thus, the scandal of the cross remains, for it is a unique event, much more than symbolic of what happens on earth.²⁷⁸

According to Isherwood, eco-feminism is considered to be an important feature of Asian theology and as such has Christological implications. Kwok Pui-Lan is in a minority of Asian theologians who has taken on the challenge to deal with the implications of ecology for Christology.²⁷⁹ Pui-Lan makes it clear that it is not her intention to put Christology and ecology together because she is too overtly focussed on Christ, but rather because she is of the opinion that the west has been too anthropocentric.²⁸⁰ She argues that this is a mistake that has come about as a result of the way in which Christ has been envisaged. From a traditional perspective, God sent Jesus, his son, to live on earth, rescue sinful humanity through the process of salvation and give us the promise of eternal life. There is a concealed message here, states Isherwood, in that the natural processes of birth have to be superseded so that this divine human might be saved from the stain involved in the natural way of things. Moreover, we can be saved from the natural processes of decay.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ Von Balthasar, p. 53.

²⁷⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp. 257-258.

²⁷⁸ Deane-Drummond, p. 168.

²⁷⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, 'Ecology and Christology', *Feminist Theology*, 15 (1997), 113-25.

²⁸⁰ Piu-Lin, p. 116.

²⁸¹ Isherwood, p. 74.

However, Pui-Lan states that this does not have to be the case, arguing that there is sufficient biblical evidence to construct 'an organic model' of Christ. Jesus referred to himself as the vine and the disciples the branches. The breaking of the bread is also an organic paradigm.²⁸² Pui-Lan makes the claim that an organic model of Christ clearly demonstrates the interrelatedness of humanity and the cosmos. Furthermore, if we are to understand Jesus as the conveyor of wisdom, as some feminist theologians in the west wish for, then from an Asian viewpoint most of that wisdom would be to do with the earth and the way it offers numerous challenges to humanity. From within the context of an Asian understanding, Christ as wisdom presents us with a direct challenge to discover ways of preserving and honouring nature.

This presents us with an alternative image of Christ that enables us to move away from anthropocentrism and colonialism. Here, we are able to make the move towards a more globally empowering sense of the divine. Although Lisa Isherwood puts forward the argument that Pui-Lan is 'perilously close' to the notion that the cosmic Christ was no more than a religious colonisation; that said, argues Isherwood, given the pluralistic setting of Pui-Lan's background, we might find that this was never her intention and that she is, in fact, contributing her own cultural awareness to largely Western pictures and altering the landscape considerably. Christ is to be comprehended in and through the stuff that Christians have been encouraged to run away from, leading Pui-Lan to question the idea of the once and for all revelation of Christ. Christ can be regarded as not one but many and that all of us have the potential to reach the status that was possible for Jesus. Here, we are requested to give up all notion of dualistic thinking.²⁸³ No longer in this respect, states Lisa Isherwood, would we be separated from Christ by Greek metaphysics, but the prototype that Jesus presents us with points us in the direction of the awesome reality that God is among us, present in both

²⁸² Pui-Lan, p. 121.

²⁸³ Pui-Lan, p. 124.

humanity and nature. This 'Emmanuel' manifests itself when we stand against oppression, when we celebrate life with joy and when we act for the marginalised and the poor. It is in all these circumstances that we evoke the power of the divine. Such ways of being are not restricted to our interaction with others; they extend to nature and the cosmos itself.²⁸⁴

Feminists such as Nancy Howell also argue that it is time to cast aside differences between male and female, recognising that there is a complementarity existent between the two. Howell makes the suggestion that feminists have now entered a productive period in which constructive attempts at post-patriarchal theories of relations are being formulated in light of women's experience and concepts.

Howell's influence in reaching this line of thought may well stem from the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead.²⁸⁵ In process thought God is co-creative with the rest of creation. The source of power and creativity is ontologically distinct from God. Both God and finite beings are able to draw on the same source of creative energy. This precludes the notion of God as the source of all power and creativity and gives humanity and nature independence and autonomy of their own. Therefore, God does not have absolute *coercive power* but only has *persuasive power*.²⁸⁶ Neither is there a beginning to creation from the viewpoint of the Whiteheadians who support process theology; God and the universe are co-eternally creative. Process creation means creation out of chaos, as opposed to *creation ex nihilo*. The God of process thought is dynamic and ever-changing as the universe grows and develops in creative transformation.²⁸⁷ As all creative love requires great effort, Christ as the Logos makes exacting demands upon us; those that challenge us to fully engage with the problems we

²⁸⁴ Isherwood, p. 75.

²⁸⁵ N. F. Gier, 'A Process Doctrine of God,' *Theology Bluebook*, 1994.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ John B. Cobb & David R. Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 8-9.

face in contemporary life. Christ possesses that divine power that urges us to ever greater syntheses, achievements and ideals.²⁸⁸ It is possible then, that there might emerge a theory of relations from within the basis of Whiteheadian philosophy and feminist thought that could sufficiently promote a radical reconstruction of ecological and human relations. This would however, involve both a positive and negative evaluation of process philosophy from a feminist perspective and women's experience. Any hierarchical features contained within Whitehead's philosophy ought to be modified in response to feminist concerns.²⁸⁹ Howell proposes that an over-arching reason for experimenting with process philosophy as a contribution to feminist construction of a new view of relations is that it provides a cosmology radically different from dominant mechanistic and patriarchal world views. She argues that it is inadequate to work, however critically, within the dominant worldview. A change in worldview, she continues, will more adequately take account of and emerge from feminist concerns. Additionally, a new world view will be necessary to materialise the radical changes required by feminism. Although process philosophy is not a prefabricated feminist theory of relations, it does provide a worldview which can be said to be compatible with feminist perspectives in a number of respects and the complementarity of feminism and process philosophy suggest the fruitfulness of Whiteheadian metaphors for feminist theory.²⁹⁰

Penelope Washbourn describes her experience for relating process thought to feminism:

It was process thought that taught me to be a feminist certainly it was process thought that taught me to be interested in questions concerning women and religion. Perhaps I could say now in retrospect that my being drawn to the study and development of a process mode of thinking may also have been related to an

²⁸⁸ John B. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), p. 97.

²⁸⁹ Nancy B. Howell, 'The Promise of a Process Feminist Theory of Relations', *Process Studies*, 17, (1988), 78-87.

²⁹⁰ Nancy B. Howell, 'The Promise of a Process Feminist Theory of Relations', (1988), <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2743.37k-> [accessed 13 April 2011] (para. 4 of 45)

unconscious awareness that it offered me not only a more viable theological and philosophical framework than any other, but also an opportunity to integrate my identity as a woman within a religious framework.²⁹¹

Valerie Saiving, in the midst of her own emerging feminism discovered a conceptual framework within the area of process thought that she found valid. It was by means of this framework that she was able to interpret the profound transformations taking place in her own life. To Saiving, Whitehead's philosophy suggested an androgynous vision which confronted the non-androgynous ideal which had previously shaped her life. Feminist awareness and process thought led her to the following two conclusions:

On the one hand, not even an intimate acquaintance with Whitehead's ideas is capable of *creating* feminist consciousness; such consciousness arises out of certain kinds of life experience, explored in dialogue with other women. On the other hand, feminist consciousness, once awakened, seeks a conceptual framework for self-understanding and process philosophy may provide such a framework.²⁹²

While Whitehead's process philosophy is not a feminist philosophy, it might contribute one interpretive tool to women who desire a holistic understanding of women's experience.²⁹³

Within the scope of Whitehead's philosophy, experience is particularly significant and is insistent upon the inclusion of every variety of experience. In a passage taken from *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead indicates an infinite range of experience to which he refers. "Nothing must be omitted, experience drunk and experience sober..."²⁹⁴ If Whitehead is to be taken seriously in this instance, feminists must conclude that the range of experiences which funds philosophy includes women's

²⁹¹ Penelope Washbourn, 'The Dynamics of Female Experience: Process Models and Human Values', *Feminism and Process Thought: The Harvard Divinity School/Claremont Centre for Process Studies Symposium Papers*, ed. by Sheila Greeve Devaney (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), p. 83.

²⁹² Valerie C. Saiving, 'Androgynous Life: A Feminist Appropriation of Process Thought', *Feminism and Process Thought: The Harvard Divinity School/Claremont Centre for Process Studies Symposium Papers*, ed. by Sheila Greeve Devaney (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), pp. 12-13.

²⁹³ Howell, para. 11 of 45.

²⁹⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 226.

experience. Making this point explicitly, Saiving has amended “experience female and experience male” to Whitehead’s list.²⁹⁵

In addition to the priority of experience in the area of process philosophy, many feminists have noted the importance of Whitehead’s attempt to overcome classical dualisms.²⁹⁶ Daly was the first feminist to note that Whitehead banished the Creator-creature dichotomy by replacing the notion of God the creator with the view that God is with all creation.²⁹⁷ All this is crucial in relation to Teilhard because it furthers expands the move towards an all-embracing modern cosmology where creation is fully interrelated and where God is ever present within that creation.

Dorothee Soelle also argues for a non-dualistic theology of creation, suggesting that the traditional distinction between God and the world is captured in a set of dualisms; “godly”/“worldly” Creator/Created, Lord/Servant, maker/made, Artist/Artifact, Will or form/Stuff or matter, Cause/Effect, Subject/Object.²⁹⁸

States Soelle:

The problem with the supposedly unbridgeable gap between the creator and the created is that it has been transposed, for example, into sexist dichotomizing, in which we ascribe “godly” characteristics into the male and “worldly” Characteristics to the female. The ontological concept is used in a sexist sense. Indeed, many injurious dichotomies flow out of our positing an unequivocal separation between God and humanity. Must we subscribe to this imperialistic concept of creation and the relationship between God and the world?²⁹⁹

Soelle’s answer is that there is a way to overcome the God/world dichotomy (and attendant dualisms) through a non-imperialistic re-conception of God. Soelle credits Whitehead and process thinkers with the advancement of one option which images God as dynamic and relational with respect to the world.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ Saiving, p. 12.

²⁹⁶ Howell, para. 16 of 45.

²⁹⁷ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (London: Beacon, 1973), p. 189.

²⁹⁸ Howell, para. 17 of 19.

²⁹⁹ Dorothee Soelle et al, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 24.

³⁰⁰ Howell, para. 19 of 45.

The Cosmic Christ emphasises the reality that unless the created order in its entirety is saved, then nothing else can be. Perhaps in this case we can start to comprehend the notion of a *complete* creational transformation. In this way, Primavesi places ecology directly at the centre of Christian concerns and not as a marginal question to grapple with when the importance of individual salvation has been dealt with. There is no room for such a division Primavesi argues, because 'all creation is simultaneously being loved and created by God or else none of it is.'³⁰¹ When we place Christ in the world, and in this way, we can look around and not just upwards in order to see and be aware of the mystery present within all of creation. Primavesi takes this one step further in that she argues that seeing Christ in creation should not just stay at the mystical level; it has to lead to political action. Envisaging the suffering Christ in a world that is drowning in its own waste is not compliant with being a Christian; we must be committed to policies and praxis that sort out the waste and get rid of it and also honour the planet.

Primavesi argues that by placing Christ outside of the created order and theologizing about heaven and the end times, traditional Christology has created a lack of ecological awareness with Christians often disengaging with it. By putting the focus on the cosmic Christ, a welcome change in emphasis is able to enter into the debate. But it fails to go far enough, states Isherwood. Why do Christians not value the world in itself? Why, she questions, does it somehow have to be seen to be working towards a larger androcentric plan? ³⁰² Halkes, Isherwood argues, is one of few theologians who openly recognised that the created order has its own value system that is not in any way related to ours and might not even be in our interests.³⁰³ Halkes insists this is still a Christian position and is fully consistent with a feminist acceptance of diversity and

³⁰¹ Primavesi, p. 151.

³⁰² Isherwood, p. 77.

³⁰³ Catherina Halkes, *New Creation in Christian Feminism and the Renewal of the Earth* (London: SPCK, 1991), p. 93.

difference. The earth might well contain its own value system, where it is able to exist without humanity but yet still be enlivened by the divine. Lisa Isherwood states:

Surely it is time for cooperation with the cosmos based on its own integrity rather than on our patriarchal value system and the innate destructiveness of androcentric thinking. It seems time to give up our desire for control, embrace our fear of smallness and expand our vision.³⁰⁴

It must be said that women have suffered more assaults on their humanness than males, that is not to say that males have not had their place in the world reduced as women have due to the understanding or maybe misunderstanding that God was literally male, although Christianity has never posited the claim that God is in a literal sense male. However, it is the Hellenistic underpinning has led to numerous assumptions concerning the nature of God and normative humanity that has resulted in an unspoken, but still enacted, androcentric bias that has produced this reductionism for both women and men. However, this did not stop Augustine from announcing that in our femaleness we cannot be redeemed, but men, who possess the image of God, can be. Women are the not the full creation God intended. A male saviour then, holds disturbing implications for women. Whatever way we look at it, according to Christian narrative, women are systematically excluded or defined as inferior. In fact, states Isherwood, much of the Christian story depends upon the ‘truth’ of women’s inferiority. This is because the logic of many of the Christian teachings, such as redemptions and atonement, arise from an understanding of Eve and so-called Original sin. Had it not been for the weakness and deceit of Eve, we would have no need for a redeeming saviour.³⁰⁵ Overall, it is the patriarchal culture that has been allowed to overwhelm us rather than the gender of Jesus that has and continues to be the problem.

From a methodological viewpoint, Gebara argues that in raising the issue of gender, overall, what we are contending is that the universalization and

³⁰⁴ Isherwood, p. 77.

³⁰⁵ Isherwood, pp. 16-17.

overgeneralization of the masculine at the expense of the feminine should be abandoned; the concept of universalization means that masculine knowing is considered paradigmatic, or as constituting a framework for all meaning. Overgeneralization means that we do not know when a given statement refers to the masculine or to the feminine. For example, we often speak of “human rights” but we know that in practice only men enjoy these rights. From within the context of such a generalization, there exists in all probability not even an awareness of specific situations where women could have a real chance of gaining access to this or that right.

The gender issue when introduced by feminists, will, Gebara argues break down the myth of masculine universality in the various fields of knowledge. In a sense it has proclaimed the need to take another look at human knowing, revealing this knowing’s limitations and showing the extent to which official history has failed to include women and oppresses peoples.

The masculine can no longer be the synonym of the human, and the earth’s ecology can no longer be regarded as a natural object to be studied and dominated by humankind. In opening up epistemology to gender and ecological issues, we are able to bring in new frames of reference for our knowing, broader ones than those established by patriarchal epistemology.

There are those who might fear that eco-feminism may wish to introduce a new essentialist perspective by seeking to affirm the difference between specifically masculine and feminine epistemological perspectives. However, we are not dealing with philosophical or biological essentialism but with the contextualising of our knowing on the basis of men’s and women’s own everyday experience. We know the extent to which patriarchal society has insisted on the separation between public and private domains. The public domain has been eminently masculine, whilst the private or domestic domain has been eminently feminine. This society has also ascribed strength

and courage to men and fragility and fear to women. This cannot be described as essentialism, rather it is a culture built on the ideologizing of certain cultural and biological perceptions. This in turn is dependent upon our styles of approaching the world, of acting and living out our social roles and the way in which we understand all of these. The intention is not to try to promote some predetermined feminine essence nor are we attempting to tame some irrational aspect of nature. Moreover, we are dealing with concrete relationships in the de facto situation in which our understanding of women developed and remained reduced to the domestic sphere.³⁰⁶

Elizabeth Johnson believes that the marginalisation of women and the exploitation of both women and nature have produced forgetfulness of the creator spirit, arguing that both are commonly excluded from the 'sphere of the sacred, taken for granted and ignored, used and discarded'. Yet women are integral to sustaining life because they have the ability to give birth. Women and earth together then, possess a symbolic and literal affinity with God.³⁰⁷ Johnson advocates the theology of Hildegard of Bingen (whose cosmology we will be examining in the next chapter) in that humanity, earth and God are profoundly interconnected.³⁰⁸ And the key, Mary Grey argues, lies in recovering a sense of connection with all living things. She states that whenever women have kept alive and vibrant sense of living contact with natural processes, they have been engaging in the work of redemption on behalf of all humanity.³⁰⁹ That women preserve a connectedness with nature is also paradoxical, states Grey, given that theology has more commonly identified the divine with a transcendence which stood over-against the world, nature and matter. This is where we touch 'another voice' says Grey. Women do not make an exclusive claim to discovering the beauty and joy of nature, for this has certainly been the source of poetic inspiration

³⁰⁶ Gebara, pp. 58-59.

³⁰⁷ Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit* (USA: Paulist Press, 2001), p. 2.

³⁰⁸ Johnson, p. 3.

³⁰⁹ Grey, 42.

down the ages. Neither have women a unique claim on the discovery of nature as a source of religious experience. For evidence of this we need only refer to 'The Canticle of the Sun' of St Francis of Assisi to observe that this is untrue. However, if we look more closely at the way theologians and poets have used the theme of nature, it will often reveal a scarcely-contained dualism of body/spirit. Thus we can state that in The Great Chain of Being, the hierarchy of living things in which theologians categorized creation, nature and material things are quite firmly situated at the bottom, there to be dominated by categories of spirit and reason.³¹⁰ Certainly in Western thought humanity, earth and God have been conceived according to the values of patriarchy, there must be a readdressing of the situation and all three aspects need to be rethought together to inaugurate a new vision of wholeness. In order to do this, we must first revert back to what caused the problem in the first place; the fall from paradise.³¹¹

I want to begin this particular aspect of the section by making reference to the second creation account because it is this account that feminists theologians regard as the most challenging and in need of revisiting and reinterpreting. But it is also important to consider the role both Adam *and* Eve played. Therefore, I wish to address St Augustine's view on both fallen Eve and fallen Adam and follow on from there with Carolyn Merchant's argument for a Recovery narrative. To clarify, this is not a proposed exegesis of Genesis 1-3, but an insight from exploring varying constructions of it.

To elaborate on the initial situation with which the fall presents humanity, in the Book of Genesis we are informed in the second creation account that the fall from the garden of Eden has been brought about by Eve being deceived by the serpent.³¹² This is without question the way in which the Fathers of the Church after Augustine regarded

³¹⁰ Grey, p. 43.

³¹¹ Johnson, p. 8.

³¹² Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 22.

her. She was seen as the accomplice of Satan, the wicked temptress and the destroyer of mankind. Tertullian said of all women:

Do you not realise that Eve is you? The curse God pronounced on your sex weighs still on the world. Guilty, you must bear its hardships. You are the devil's gateway, you desecrated the fatal tree, you first betrayed the law of God, you who softened up with your cajoling words the man against who the devil could not prevail by force. The image of God, the man Adam, you broke him, it was child's play to you. *You* deserved death, and it was the Son of God who had to die!³¹³

It was the curse of Eve that she should bear children rather than be blessed with motherhood. She was identified with nature, a form of low matter that results in the descent of man's soul.¹⁰⁶ John Chrysostom warned: "The whole of her bodily beauty is nothing less than phlegm, blood, bile, rheum, and the fluid of digested food..."³¹⁴

Since the early Church, Eve and the subjection of *all* women has been bound up with the dualistic and contrasting role of mother and temptress.³¹⁵ It was thus considered essential, states Warner, that the Son of God not be contaminated by any sinfulness and so during the ascetic revolt throughout the earliest centuries of Christianity, the need to present the mother of Christ as pure and without sin, as opposed to the corruptibility of Eve, became urgent, exerting extreme pressure on definitions of doctrine and on scriptural commentaries.³¹⁶ Although Augustine along with Aquinas maintained that Adam and Eve will have experienced intercourse in Eden, they believe that it would have been different, untainted by concupiscence and without the possibility of the sufferings of pregnancy to create a flaw.³¹⁷

³¹³ Tertullian, *Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works*, trans. by Rudolph Arbesman et al (New York, 1959).

³¹⁴ John Chrysostom, *To the Fallen Monk Theodore*; quoted in Herbert S. J. Musurillo, *Symbolism and the Christian Imagination* (Dublin: Helicon Press, 1962), pp. 65-66.

³¹⁵ Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex* (London: Pan Books, 1976), p. 58.

³¹⁶ Warner, p. 59.

³¹⁷ Kari Elizabeth Boessen, *Subordination et Equivalence. Nature et Role de la Femme d'apres Augustin et Thomad d'Aquin* (Oslo and Paris, 1968), pp. 43-47, 150-155. This book offers further explanation concerning the ideas of Augustine and Aquinas on sex in Eden. Early Church Fathers such as Ireneus took the view that Eve remained a virgin pre-fall. It has never though, been definitively resolved.

In *The City of God* written around 413-26, Augustine suggested that the reason Adam and Eve became self-conscious after eating from the tree of knowledge was because the knowledge they had acquired was of an inner force. This he called *Concupiscence*. He wrote that it affects all areas of life but particularly the sexual act, which cannot be performed without passion. Therefore, he stated that although the sexual act itself was not sinful, the desire and passion were. Although Eve has been blamed for much, Augustine stated that the hereditary taint was either transferred through the male genitals during intercourse and it was the body itself and not the soul that became flawed, *or* as a child is unable to be conceived outside the sexual embrace involving the sin of passion the child becomes stained from that moment. Therefore, the blame would lie, according to Augustine, with both Adam and Eve.³¹⁸ Carolyn Merchant in *Reinventing Eden* presents Adam as the inventor of tools and technologies that will serve to restore the garden, while fallen Eve becomes the nature that must be tamed into submission, thus further establishing her secondary role. Throughout much of the history of Western culture, Eve is often associated with nature and the garden. In this way nature as Eve appears in three forms: as original Eve, nature is virgin, pure, and light-in other words, land that is pristine or barren has potential for development. As fallen Eve, nature is viewed very differently. Here she can be described as chaotic and disorderly; a wilderness, wasteland, or desert that requires improvement; dark and witchlike, the victim and mouthpiece of Satan as serpent. She is insatiable, the temptress and she becomes effectively, the 'whore'. But in her role as mother, nature is an improved garden; a nurturing earth bearing fruit. Adam is the agent of earthly transformation, the one who redeems the land. These designations of nature as female

³¹⁸ Boressen, p. 172.

and agency as male are encoded as symbols and myths into land that has the capacity for growth but must have the male hero.³¹⁹

Merchant argues that the recovery of Eden is the main stream narrative of Western culture and perhaps the most important mythology humanity has developed to make sense of their relationship to earth. Internalized by Americans and Europeans alike since the seventeenth century, this narrative has propelled numerous efforts by humanity to recover Eden by turning wilderness into garden, “female” nature into civilisation, and indigenous walkways into modern culture. Science, capitalism and technology have provided the tool, male agency the power and incentive. Today’s incarnation of Eden include the suburb, the mall and the worldwide web. However, a counter narrative challenges the plot. Postmodern and post- colonial stories reject the Enlightenment’s account of progress. Many environmentalists, argues Merchant, see the loss of wilderness as a decline from a pristine earth to a paved, scorched, endangered world. Many feminists, including Ruether and Johnson, see a nature once revered as Mother, now being abused, desecrated, and scarred and women as the victims of patriarchal culture.³²⁰ Thus we become compelled to seek a new story for the 21st century.

Narratives form our reality. We are shaped by the stories we hear as children. Some fade whilst others are reinforced by family, education and the church. The narrative of reinventing Eden, told by progressives and environmentalists alike, raises essential questions regarding the viability of the Recovery narrative. Does the earth not need a new story? What would a green justice for humanity and the earth look like? Why do people tell stories and whose ends do they serve?³²¹

³¹⁹ Merchant, p. 22.

³²⁰ Merchant, p. 2.

³²¹ Merchant, p. 4.

A narrative approach raises the question of what lies between stories and reality. There is a reality to the progressive story. There are people across the globe who survived despite having suffered extreme conditions, for example, tsunamis. There is also a reality in the Decline from Eden narrative. The environmental crisis and its connections to consumption, pollution, overpopulation and scarcity are critical issues confronting all of humanity. Through contrasting stories, we can see Progress and Decline in varying places at varying times. Progressives wish to continue the ascent to recover the Garden of Eden by reinventing Eden on Earth. Environmentalists wish to recover the original garden by restoring nature and creating sustainability. The two stories seem locked in conflict. Logically, each narrative repudiates human life; the mainstream story leads to a completely artificial earth; the environmental story leads to a depopulated earth. Forced to one extreme, the recovered Eden would be a completely reinvented, totally managed, artificially constructed planet in which shopping on the internet would replace shopping at the mall, the gated community the urban jungle, and greenhouse farms the vicissitudes of natural droughts and storms. Pushed to the opposite extreme, the recovery of the wilderness implies a human depauperate earth. The tensions between the two plots create the need for a new story that entails a sustainable partnership with nature.³²² Based on this premise, Merchant presents her suggestions for a Recovery narrative.

Merchant argues that as both these stories are about “recovery” although they are approached from different starting points, they do in fact merge. Both narratives are real and as such humanity is part of both of them. Merchant insists that a new narrative, if that’s possible, would provide the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, energy, security, healthcare and security in old age. These are basic human rights, fulfilling basic human needs. This forms the essence of democracy and is the provider of quality

³²² Merchant, p. 4.

human life. These are, Merchant says, compatible with environmental integrity and sustainability. That is the ideal outcome. The main question is how it can be done in a way that preserves humanity and the environment. Merchant states that as an environmental philosopher this is what she is aiming for with a new ethic which she calls "partnership ethic." By this she is referring to a partnership that recognises that men and women can be equal partners with each other and with nature. It does not entail a gendering of the earth as female; and it does not place all the blame on men for causing all the damage. She argues that in a historical sense we can admit that it was men who caused the damage, but as part of her partnership ethic, she argues that a history exists that is pertinent to dominant western culture where men have been the leaders in most social, economic and political institutions, constituting what we term as patriarchy. What the partnership ethic does not do is blame individual men living today for all the sins of the past and for all the institutions that have evolved historically which is what eco-feminism did. A partnership means working together, it means that nature remains active but is in equal interaction with humanity. It attempts to re-root humanity and nature in right relationship, producing a dynamic ethic. She strongly believes that a partnership ethic is the right way forward; a new narrative that is not the death of nature and not mechanistic science, but one of a sustainable partnership with nature and between human groups. This is part of the social reconstruction that is required. She hopes that as we continue to move through the 21st century, a different set of assumptions concerning production, reproduction, ecology and consciousness will emerge, founding a global ecological revolution. This would involve numerous things: green political parties, sustainable development or livelihood; the earth summit and attempts to reach things such as biodiversity treaties; efforts to identify and do something about global warming and ozone depletion. There are new concepts of deep ecology, radical ecology and social ecology. There is also the question of organic

agriculture and conservation where numerous approaches are being tried out. Some will work, some will not and some will be judged to be unfeasible. Therefore, it becomes a series of “fits” and “starts” but also transformations. But, says Merchant, it is a process that will eventually offer humanity and nature, a very different world.³²³

From the Palaeolithic period to the present time, nature has been the victim of human and social changes that have resulted in it being regarded, as far as humanity is concerned, as something to be abused. Some advances in technology and science have, environmentalists believe, speeded up the earth’s decline. But seemingly it has not prevented environmentalists from arguing for a Recovery narrative.³²⁴ But it must be one that will centre its focus upon the recovery of the earth.

Post-modern thinkers who view the fall as more than a mythological event, argue that we have failed to move upwards from the tragedy of the fall towards a more heavenly, edenic state of being, and that humanity has descended from that original state of unity and oneness with nature, to the tragedy of the destruction of nature. Merchant argues the point that whilst the meta-narrative of Recovery remains unaltered, the decline in which critics have cast prior history needs to be reversed in a radical way. Merchant further argues that what is required for a Recovery to take place is a new socio-economic mode of engaging with the earth, new multi-cultural narratives, new approaches to science and a new ethic of partnership between earth and humanity.³²⁵ When Merchant refers to ‘recovery’ in the narrative she sees it as an attempt to reclaim an original gender or equality partnership.³²⁶

³²³ Russell Schoch, “A Conversation with Carolyn Merchant”, *California Monthly*, 112 (2002) <http://www.mindfully.org/Sustainability/Carolyn-Merchant-ConverstaionJUn02.htm> [accessed 14th June 2010]

³²⁴ Merchant, p. 188.

³²⁵ Merchant, p. 189.

³²⁶ Merchant, p. 23. She goes on to explain the portrayal in the second Genesis account where the male is created first from dust and the female from the body of the male. Eve thus becomes second in creation. However, Merchant points out that some feminists argue that Eve is not derivative of Adam because he

In the move towards recovery and seeking a state of balance and identifying the prominent place of the feminine and the liberation of women, we must take into serious account the crucial and personal role played by Mary, Jesus' mother, in both the life of Jesus and in terms of salvation. We need to understand how her role connects not only with her son in terms of co-redemptive agent, but also the way in which her role is perceived in contrast to Eve.

For much of the gospel writings with the exception of Luke, Mary the mother of Jesus remains almost invisible. We seem to know little about her background. However, the apocryphal texts gathered together in *Lost Books of the Bible* allow us to access some details about Mary. We are informed in *The Gospel of the Birth of Mary* that an angel appeared to Mary's mother, Anna, who told her that she would give birth to a daughter who would be 'called Mary, and shall be blessed above all women' (3. 2). Therefore, Mary's own 'immaculate conception' highlights her already 'special quality' even before she conceived Jesus.³²⁷ In a further passage, the gospel mentions that Mary 'had the conversation of angels, and every day received visitors from God' (5. 2).³²⁸ It was at the time of the Annunciation that Mary was definitively introduced into Christ's mystery.³²⁹

In the first gospel of the *Infancy of Jesus*, certain events are reported by the high priest Caiaphas that whilst Jesus was still in the cradle he informed Mary that he was the Son of God. It becomes apparent throughout this particular gospel that Mary has

was not awake at her creation neither was he consulted about it! The role played by Eve is also subject to questioning: was she the weaker and more vulnerable one or could she be described as the 'First Scientist?' the one who was more curious and independent of the two. This presents an interesting point for discussion.

³²⁷ *The Lost Books of the Bible* (New York: Testament Books, 1979), p. 19. The lost books have been attributed to St. Matthew and were received as a genuine and authentic work by several of the ancient Christian sects. It can be found in the writings of Jerome a Father of the Church during the fourth century, from whence this translation is made. When the bible was compiled at the end of the fourth century, the texts found within this book were not included. They were allegedly suppressed by the Church for 1500 years and were shrouded in secrecy.

³²⁸ *The Lost Books of the Bible*, p. 21. Concerning the predestination of Mary,

³²⁹ Pope John Paul II, 'Redemptoris Mater', in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, ed. by J. Michael Miller, C.S.B. (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), p. 360.

more than an awareness of her 'special son' and also knew that others had understood it, too. For example, when a woman who had a sick son saw Mary washing Jesus, she asked that Mary look upon him, and Mary offered her some of the water used to wash Jesus. This was sprinkled over the woman's son who was sleeping and when he awoke, he had seemingly made a perfect recovery (9. 2-5). This appears to be just one of numerous accounts where it might be argued that Mary appears to possess a deeper understanding of her son's 'power'.³³⁰ Yet, there seems to be little emphasis in the gospel stories of the bible of the magnificent role she played in the whole drama of the incarnation.³³¹ As the birth of Jesus signifies a New Covenant, Nachev argues that Mary, as the first woman of the New Covenant, becomes the 'New Eve' and the true 'Mother of the living', a term given to her by Pope John Paul II.³³² Indeed, he understands Mary's faith at the Annunciation as inaugurating the New Covenant. Interestingly, John Paul II compares Mary to the Patriarch Abraham in that his faith constituted the beginning of the Old Covenant. As Abraham 'in hope believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations' (Romans 4. 18), so Mary having professed her virginity ('How shall this be, since I am a virgin' Luke 1. 35) believed that through the power of the Holy Spirit, she would become the Mother of God's Son.³³³ This effectively extends the role of Mary even further. As the holy mother, she assumes

³³⁰ *The Lost Books of the Bible*, p. 48.

³³¹ Joseph Paredes, *Mary and the Kingdom of God* (United Kingdom: St. Paul Publications, 1988), p. 248. Paredes argues that Mary can be seen as the personification of the old Israel exercising its role of spiritual maternity over the New People, the Church. The New People is invited to acknowledge the maternal womb from which it comes and to welcome the Old Testament into its spiritual world. Paredes is expressing a 'merging' of the two, placing the emphasis on the entire role and often overlooked significance of Mary.

³³² Antoine Nachev, *Mary's Pope* (Wisconsin: Sheed and Ward, 2000), p. 29.

³³³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973) p. 47. This publication states that by the year A.D. 200 the virginal conception of Jesus was present as a Christian doctrine, however, Walter Bauer argues that this was an unsettled period in terms of Christian thought where one notion might be accepted in one area whilst being rejected in another. There was no uniform structure and ideas may have 'competed' against each other. There has been much scholarly debate towards the authenticity of a virginal conception on the part of Mary and it is not my intention to expand further on this. It is certainly worth mentioning that Brown draws the conclusion that the notion of the virginal birth assists in emphasising the reality of the humanness of Jesus and his uniqueness in being God's Son. What is of additional importance is that the nature of the conception has given a *woman* a central role not only in the life of her son, but in Christianity.

universal significance.³³⁴ She is, according to *Redemptoris Mater*, ‘the woman’ spoken of by the Book of Genesis (3. 15) at the beginning and in the Book of Revelation (12.1) at the end of the history of salvation. This seems to be symbolic of her unique position where she is distinguished from her role as the mother of Jesus. At this point she represents all women and her prominent place in the plan of salvation. In effect, she became the ‘vehicle’ for the one who is to wipe out the sins of humanity.³³⁵ That is not to say that Mary thus becomes a part of the Trinity per se, Mary expresses her divinity not necessarily in metaphysical terms here, but she is showing it through her humanity. Just by initially submitting to the will of God at the very beginning, she demonstrates her own divinity through trust and by showing willingness to bring about her divine mission. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit represent the Trinity. This is Christian doctrine. Therefore nothing can actually be taken from the Trinity to allow her to gain access. But it is nevertheless arguable that she held a very special place at the side of her Son.

Thus, a new relationship between God and humanity is established through Mary.³³⁶ Mary takes up her place with Christ as salvific agent. What has been achieved through the relationship of Jesus and his mother is that *both* are to be understood through the incarnation. Divine motherhood was being fulfilled through the incarnation. Incarnation and divine motherhood become then, two mysteries intimately interconnected.³³⁷ This leads us to therefore argue that the time has come to fully recognise the true significance and role of Jesus *and* his mother towards uniting humanity not only to each other, but to God.

³³⁴ Parades, p. 252.

³³⁵ Miller, p. 378.

³³⁶ Antoine Nacheff, *Mary's Pope* (Wisconsin: Sheed and Ward, 2000), p. 29.

³³⁷ Nacheff, p. 22. The dogma of the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) concerning Mary as *Theotokos* (Mother of God) confirms John Paul's interpretation of *Gaudium et Spes*' theology of Incarnation: In turn, the dogma of the divine motherhood of Mary was for the Council of Ephesus and is for the Church like a seal upon the dogma of the Incarnation, in which the Word truly assumes human nature into the unity of his person, without cancelling out that nature.

This is an important step forward for humanity especially as this thesis deals with the unification of creation to its creator and a living cosmology that fully encompasses the divine Christ at its centre. Mary and Jesus became the initiators of this process. It is with some confidence then that we can approach the work of eminent professor Tina Beattie, in pursuing this line of thought further.

In *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate* Tina Beattie proposes an anthropology that 'acknowledges the glory of all humanity divinized in Christ'.³³⁸ This would entail a rediscovery by the Western Church of the Orthodox idea of *theosis*, which is grounded in the belief by the Greek Fathers that 'The human being is an animal who has received the vocation to become God.'³³⁹ So then, rather than continuing with what Beattie terms as a 'low anthropology' that serves to only emphasise the fallen, miserable human condition, it ought to be replaced with a 'high' anthropology authorised by the Church that places its stress upon the glory of human nature in the incarnation and that has been supremely perfected in Mary and Christ. This is integral to the thesis in terms of creating a more 'spiritualised' humanity. By this it means that if we are to formulate a 21st century spirituality that works in real terms, humanity must continue to make a concerted effort to deal with the fact that though we exist in a broken and divided world, humanity still has numerous opportunities to create a better one. The concerns of humanity must arguably lie in working towards a creation that moves away from the notion of 'fallen'. But the challenge does not stop there. Not only has humanity fallen, but it has apparently done so at the hands of a woman, according to the hermeneutics of the second Genesis account. So it is pertinent to ask then, given that the question of sexuality has plagued the female world for many centuries as a result, what might Beattie view as being an appropriate way to progress and move on? Beattie suggests

³³⁸ Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 186.

³³⁹ Basil of Caesarea, quoted by Gregory Nazianzen, *Eulogy of Basil the Great: Oration 43, 48* (PG 36,560) in Olivier L. Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (New City, 1993), p. 76.

that developing a theology of sexual difference that would incorporate the notion of a 'high anthropology', *could* in effect move us towards the recognition that a difference exists relating to the significance of sexuality in the order of creation and the order of redemption. Sexuality, states Beattie, belongs to part of the original goodness of creation, willed and created by God, revealing something of the nature of interpersonal communion that is revelatory of the Trinity. Such a revelation however, would not be invested in sexuality, but in *difference*. In this way sexuality would be redeemed as opposed to being in and of itself redemptive. The redemptive significance of the incarnation would lie in the creative communion between God and humanity, rather than in the masculinity of Christ or the femininity of Mary. This opposes Von Balthasar's notion of 'supra-sexuality', which places sexual relations into the Godhead and the order of redemption in a way that makes sexuality itself essential. Beattie thus proposes a theology of sexual difference that focuses on the redemptive significance of difference rather than of sexuality. From this point of view, masculinity is redeemed in the maleness of Christ and femininity is redeemed in the femaleness of Mary but if we examine it in light of the act of redemption, these are inessential attributes of Mary and Christ as redemptive agents. Mary is a participant in the redemption alongside Christ as the Mother of God and she experiences this as the new Eve to his new Adam. It is necessary that if we are to be saved according to the Christian narrative, that God should become human like us and it is therefore essential that he should have a mother. But the fact that the mother is female and her child is male is irrelevant. In recognising that humanity are fallen creatures who have become separated from God we are reconciled and redeemed by Christ's *humanity* and Mary's *maternity*. Mary thus offers human flesh, not female flesh to Christ and Christ redeems us by becoming human flesh and not by becoming male flesh.³⁴⁰

³⁴⁰ Alice Meynell, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus* (London: The Medici Society Ltd, 1923), p. 72.

As woman, Mary and Eve represent the original goodness of the female body, a person created by God that goes beyond the confining walls of patriarchy and outside the order of domination associated with the fall. So in the order of creation and redemption, this means woman as Eve/Mary and man as Adam/Jesus are merely generic symbols of man and woman together, equally made in the image of God. This constitutes the sexual dimension of the story of the incarnation.³⁴¹

In continuing to seek a more productive and positive imagery of Eve, many feminist theologians would argue that reference to Mary, mother of Jesus as the 'Second Eve' would be inappropriate and derogatory towards Eve. Once more it suggests a dualism of good versus evil, where Mary might be perceived as the 'heroine', overcoming evil on behalf of her gender. But this concept has generated much feminist criticism. The parallels drawn between Eve and Mary seem to only further emphasise good woman/bad woman characterisations which can trap women in a false dichotomy.³⁴²

As far as the Church is concerned, Mary is not representative of all women, but is the *exception*. Placing Mary and Eve in opposite categories does not rectify or clarify the situation and so the good and evil dualism presents a bone of contention for feminists and a seemingly impossible task for women in attempting to emulate Mary.³⁴³ What might be the basis for a 'New Eve?' Mary as the 'New Eve' appears to be supported by chapter 12 in the Book of Revelation. The "Woman Clothed in the Sun" has been interpreted in the Catholic tradition as referring to Mary.³⁴⁴ However, this is rendered problematical by the fact that in Revelation 12 it speaks of 'birth pangs', yet

³⁴¹ Beattie, p. 188.

³⁴² Maurice Hamington, *Hail Mary* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.125. Feminist biblical hermeneutics is vigorous in its development of methods that bring out the significance of women mentioned in patriarchal texts in a bid to discover new and liberating meaning in their struggles and victories. For further information on this see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 105.

³⁴³ Hamington, p. 126.

³⁴⁴ Vasiliki Limberis, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 120.

according to the Catholic tradition Mary did not suffer pain in giving birth to Jesus. Thus the Catholic tradition seems to be a contradiction in terms. Neither does there appear to be a clear biblical declaration of Mary as the New Eve. So why then has this title been attributed to her and what purpose does it serve? The mythological figure of Eve in many ways seems to have served the patriarchal Church by becoming its female scapegoat, her 'inferiority and weakness' being made apparent in the second Genesis account³⁴⁵ Not only that, women have been seen as the cause for evil in the world because of being regarded as secondary to man and being 'successfully' tempted by the serpent. Indeed, *The Book of Enoch* describes the fallen angels mating with the women and producing evil offspring that infested the earth and further claiming that the women were taught by the Watchers the evils of war and how to wage it, subsequently bringing it into the world. The myth of the Watchers was retold in *The Book of Jubilees* where the women were transformed into the seducers of angels, becoming increasingly blameworthy. But what it shows is the high level of sexism in patriarchal societies at that time. Despite the Watchers myth being replaced by the fall and in turn becoming the more dominant, it still maintained that women were the vehicle for evil. It should be pointed out here though, that as religious constructions, the biblical basis for characterising Mary as obedient and virginal and Eve as disobedient and sexual are weak.

Ruether argues that Rabbinical thought did not take the story of the fall seriously and it remains unreferenced in the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures as the source of evil. In the New Testament Gospel writers provide no mention of the fall.³⁴⁶ It was in fact St Paul who laid the foundations for focus on Eve as a result of describing Jesus as the New Adam.

³⁴⁵ Mary Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989), p. 55.

³⁴⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 51-52.

As Mariology developed, a further issue became apparent; the virginal aspect of Mary became prominent, where Eve was seen as being sexually corrupt. In order to give Mary the greater theological significance as the New Eve, it required continued focus upon Eve, providing a failure and success story for the Church. Mary as the completion of the redemptive cycle was popular thematically because the fall allowed Mary the opportunity to bring about salvation.³⁴⁷

The canonisation of the second creation account which, as we have seen, undoubtedly presents a misogynistic version of the fall, continues to create a heated debate amongst feminist scholars. It might be said the patriarchal Church views Mary as being pure because it cannot cope with Eve. Patriarchal hatred of women is clear, but so is the astonishing power of women because the patriarchal Church clearly demonstrates the hidden power of women through its own passionate vehemence.

Despite the controversy surrounding the second creation account, if we attempt to cast it in a positive light, Baring and Cashford argue that the experience of Eve with the serpent could be said to represent a birth of consciousness. In this instance then, blame is not an issue. What occurred became necessary in order for humanity to be aware of good and evil and to demonstrate responsibility. It could also be seen as a 'raising' of consciousness through eating from the tree of knowledge. But could it be argued that God's command for Adam and Eve to *not* eat from the tree was based on the concern that they were not yet ready for the knowledge to be revealed?³⁴⁸

However we attempt to justify it and search for reasoning it cannot be denied that Mary as the New Eve presents a seemingly impossible situation for women. Mary is the perfected model and Eve the evil deviant. Such a dualism only results in the

³⁴⁷ Warner, p. 147.

³⁴⁸ Anne Baring & Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (London: Viking, 1991), p. 553.

further disempowerment of women, alienating spiritual experience of the divine.³⁴⁹ This brings us to the question can a woman only be spiritual if she remains a virgin? What does this say to moral women who endeavour to be Christ-like, adopting Marian qualities? It suggests that the Church is not simply using Eve as a scapegoat it is also using Mary in the same way and at the same time keeping all women subordinate.³⁵⁰

Some feminist theologians such as Ruether and Daly for example, acknowledge that Mary is steeped in the Catholic male tradition and perhaps not redeemable from it and therefore the focus should be placed on recovering women's spirituality and revising the language used for divinity. Whilst these are valid points is this not also another way of suppressing Mary or regarding her as a hopeless case? Perhaps the role of Mary in relation to her son ought to be expounded more and even reinterpreted if we are to present a more balanced picture of creation, recognising the importance of equal balance between masculine and feminine.³⁵¹

The official views of Mary have been undeniably shaped by men from within a patriarchal framework. Women were denied bringing their own experience into this official portrait. As a result, the Marian symbol became that of the idealised woman. Women remain the silent victims as men pursued their own definition with emphasis on obedience and purity. This seemed to serve only the monastic or ecclesiastical male psyche rather than women's spiritual search.³⁵² If we take the Gospel of Luke, we are presented with a powerful example of a young girl's response to God's request. However, patriarchal Mariology does not see it this way. It does not view Mary's

³⁴⁹ Hamington, p. 147. See also Mary Daly's analysis of the Sado-Ritual Syndrome in *Gyn-Ecology: The Meta-ethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 130-133.

³⁵⁰ Hamington, p. 158.

³⁵¹ Hamington, p. 162.

³⁵² Johnson, p. 7.

response as being a free, independent and radical decision to take active part in the messianic adventure; it portrays her as being submissive to the will of God.³⁵³

Ruether then, suggests a liberation Mariology, using the Gospel of Luke as her “foundational” text. Mary is portrayed as having been free to say “yes” to the angel. Mary does not consult Joseph, suggesting her independence. She is co-operating with God’s plan rather than being a mere vessel for the incarnation. Ruether uses the language of liberation theology to support a new interpretation of Mary. For example, Mary represents Gods “preferential option for the poor” in Ruether’s socio-political exegesis of the Gospels. Ruether takes Mariology beyond a means of freeing women from subjugation, extending the idea to all subjugated peoples.³⁵⁴ However, whilst Hamington argues that there exists a great need for feminist theologians to reverse sexist interpretations of the bible, he states that Ruether’s approach raises some concerns. First of all he mentions the persistent problem of what he sees as being an inconsistent application of modern biblical criticism and hermeneutics. Biblical scholars point out that the infancy narratives probably never occurred as narrated, although this does not alleviate the power and significance of these stories. It does create problems for modern theologians, though. The approach that Hamington therefore takes is one of acknowledgement that the infancy narratives express the faith of the early Christians without necessarily reflecting factual information. A feminist reinterpretation of Mary’s role in Luke that takes biblical scholarship into greater consideration would rephrase Ruether’s exegesis. Mary played a key role in bringing about God’s salvation. Early Christians, according to Hamington, held Mary in such high regard because the fate of human redemption hung on her response to God’s call.

³⁵³ Johnson, p. 26.

³⁵⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), pp. 153-157.

Hamington also questions Ruether's "limited and tenuous" basis towards her development of liberation Mariology. He states that Mary is such an indistinct figure in scripture that utilising her few appearances as a basis for a more instrumental figure has questionable force. Ruether only discusses the single scene in Luke because as Hamington sees it, there is little else upon which to base Mariology. Hamington believes it is more useful to develop Mary as a symbol, to some extent independent of scripture, since it is what the tradition of the cult of Mary has done. To be fair to Ruether, Hamington states she does discuss Mary as a symbol of the Church, the oppressed and humanity. Hamington further comments that although his critique is aimed at greater clarification and precision of Ruether's argument, her project as a whole is vital to new understandings of Mary. He acknowledges that Ruether recognises that re-negotiating Marian imagery is not merely essential for redefining women's roles but is also central to redefining hierarchical relationships.³⁵⁵

If we try to show Mary as Ruether has suggested it might seem that she is indeed being liberated, but it could also mean that Jesus and God might also be viewed differently. But we can acknowledge that all three have been portrayed differently down the ages according to the social consciousness of the time and this remains important if we are to interpret her role in a more modern way.³⁵⁶

In seeking liberation and equality that can be related to, understood and put into practice in the present, we need to refer to the ways in which Jesus expressed his own humanity and divinity. He did, states Fabella, play a central role in the creation of Christology. This too can be problematic though, because the type of historical accuracy that is required to set out an exact way of being is not open to us, states Isherwood. In what ways, Isherwood argues, can knowing how a first century-Jew acted, assist us in the present day? We would have to generalise the answers to such a question and they

³⁵⁵ Hamington, p. 168.

³⁵⁶ Hamington, p. 178.

would be open to a great amount of interpretation. It is this path that Fabella chooses, despite her protests about exploring the historical Jesus. It seems that what she actually means by the historical Jesus is simply one who changed things in the here and now. Jesus' historical importance does not, for Fabella, lie in accurately verifying each action and saying but rather in our history. However, as far as Isherwood is concerned, Fabella is under the assumption that the way in which Jesus treated women was radically different from others of his time. Scholars are now of the general consensus that his actions were not as unusual as we previously thought. We are aware that there were wealthy women merchants and female rabbis who commanded respect and equality to a greater extent. So, says Isherwood, in this case it might be argued that Jesus was less than radical in his approach to women.³⁵⁷

Despite this, it is suggested that Jesus demonstrated what being human meant, and it is this quality of humanness that is required if one is to enter the kingdom of God. To behave in a truly human way the individual has to live in right relations with others to the exclusion of all power relations. Loving one another takes precedence over temple worship and serving others is more important than prestige and power. In Asia, states Isherwood, there is a great deal of interreligious dialogue but far more informal 'dialogue for life' where people:

share the life conditions, pain, risks, struggles and aspirations of the Asian poor (the majority of whom are of other faiths or even of 'no faith')...made us aware of our common search for a truly human life, our common desire for liberation from whatever shackles us internally and externally, and our common thrust towards a just society reflective of what we Christians term 'the kingdom'.³⁵⁸

If, argues Isherwood, metaphysics and infallibility of particular doctrines assumed centre stage such a dialogue would be severely hampered. But, the historical Jesus, who calls people to humanness, by-passes such problems as well as those of gender. Debates

³⁵⁷ Isherwood, p. 20. *We Dare to Dream*, ed. by Virginia Fabella & Sun Ai Lee Park, (Hong Kong: AWCCT, 1989), pp. 109-113.

³⁵⁸ Fabella, p. 5.

relating to the divine nature of Jesus cannot be allowed to hamper the transforming experiences that people struggle for as they express their humanity. This is of special significance for women in a society that has for such a long time limited their humanness by means of restrictive civil and religious practice. The demand of human rights might well be the Christological first step for many women. What is certain, argues Isherwood, is that Jesus has no relevance for women if he is detached from their lives under the weight of metaphysics. This would mean that he can never be static and would always be open to modification by circumstances.³⁵⁹

In terms of maleness and male identification of Jesus, Monica Melancton offers a clue as to how Indian theologians deal with such problems. Whilst acknowledging that this is part of the historical Jesus, it does not mean that it is an essential ingredient of the risen Christ who is dwelling within the redeemed order.³⁶⁰

This risen Christ transcends all particularities, so that in this way the maleness of Jesus can no longer dictate the femaleness of all women through time, and thus he becomes the symbol of a new humanity as opposed to a model of gender enactments. Although such an argument may well be what is required within the Indian context, it does present some problems. The idea that humanity is an androgynous mass underneath cultural overlays of gender enactment is one that has been severely criticised. Many feminist theologians argue that human nature cannot be described as androgynous because it most definitely is not, and that most of the differences we see displayed between the sexes have redemptive significance in themselves. We must further understand that in claiming Jesus to be the 'model of humanity', we have 'maleness' yet again turned into universal ways of being. Isherwood at this point raises an extremely interesting point in that she argues that from the perspective of traditional

³⁵⁹ Isherwood, p. 21.

³⁶⁰ Monica Melancton, 'Christology and Women', in *We Dare to Dream*, ed. by Virginia Fabella & Sun Ai Lee Park (Hong Kong: AWCCT, 1989), pp. 14-22.

Christology, a question appears regarding the degree of Christ's humanness, was he a man or not? If he was fully man, to argue that he was fully human negates the place of female experience in humanness. He did not know what it felt like to be a woman. If on the other hand, he somehow experienced being both male and female, then he was either transgendered or not fully human. Being human is clearly an experience and in our own day as in Jesus' day, was a gendered experience. But such an argument is not of the utmost importance in an Indian context where the landscape is one of rigid misogyny. Placed within that context, stress upon the humanity of Jesus rather than his masculinity is a crucial step forward.³⁶¹

Crucially at this point, in methodological terms, according to Gebara, developing a different understanding of the human person and a different experience of and discourse concerning God, it opens us up to a different understanding of our experience of Jesus. Here, Gebara talks about relatedness and in this relatedness she seeks to free Jesus from the hierarchical and dogmatic attire in which the church has clothed him for such a long time.

Pursuing this line of examination requires Gebara to think of Jesus as a man who was extremely sensitive to human suffering. And who, inspired by the prophetic and sapiential tradition of the Jewish culture to which belonged, tried in many ways to respond to certain forms of human suffering; in particular, pain, hunger and marginalisation. Jesus was insistent that people believe in themselves, and taught that their belief in themselves was an expression of faith in God's power. The actions of Jesus were aimed at the recovery of health and dignity: food and drink. His actions affirmed that certain physical needs cannot be satisfied by promises or by the future realization of some ideal world. It is this practical wisdom of Jesus, states Gebara, that needs to be rediscovered, lived out and understood in the context of the vital problems

³⁶¹ Isherwood, pp. 21-22.

we are encountering today.³⁶² She agrees with McFague that it is precisely the perspective of the *body* that will allow us to introduce the issue of ecological salvation.³⁶³ It is our actions that have put the earth in bondage that have damaged it, polluted and impoverished it. For this reason, it is the earth that is both the subject and object of salvation. We need to abandon a merely anthropocentric Christianity and open ourselves up to a more bio-centric understanding of salvation. To Jesus' humanistic perspective, we need to add an ecological perspective, Gebara argues. She believes that this new way of doing things is quite justified, because it maintains not only the most basic aspects of Jesus' perspective but also the understanding that we are a living body in constant evolution.³⁶⁴ Theology has repeatedly informed us that Jesus did not proclaim himself; using an eco-feminist perspective, we could argue that he proclaimed respect for the life of every being and abundant life for all. We could further say that Jesus' attitudes and behaviours constantly point Christians toward the building of new relationships, and that today they help us to build a positive relationship between human persons and the earth. It is this we need to insist on more strongly than ever, in order to rebuild the web of human relationships in all its dimensions.

It appears that when we speak of Jesus as a human being-as profoundly human-the sometimes forbidding divine halo we have always attributed to him in the Christian tradition seems to disappear. But if we no longer speak of the salvific uniqueness of Jesus the Christ, many feel we give up the power and uniqueness of our faith. A Jesus who can no longer be affirmed as a superhuman being seems to lose the power to move us. Sallie McFague states:

The scandal of uniqueness is absolutized by Christianity into one of its central doctrines, which claims that God is embodied in one place and one place only: in the man Jesus of Nazareth. He and he alone is "the image of the invisible God." (Cl. 1. 15). The source, power and goal of the universe is known through and only through a first-

³⁶² Gebara, p. 183.

³⁶³ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 158.

³⁶⁴ Gebara, p. 183.

century Mediterranean carpenter. The creator and redeemer of the fifteen-billion-year history of the universe with its hundred billion galaxies (and their billions of stars and planets) is available only in a thirty-year span of one human being's life on planet earth. The claim, when put in context of contemporary science, seems skewed, to say the least. When the world consisted of the Roman Empire (with "barbarians at its frontiers, the limitation of divine presence to Jesus of Nazareth had some plausibility while still being ethnocentric; but for many hundreds of years, well before contemporary cosmology, the claims of other major religious traditions have seriously challenged it.³⁶⁵

Gebara agrees with McFague that to affirm the incarnation or the bodiliness of the divine does not necessarily require that Jesus have some unique metaphysical character. Jesus is also our "Sacred Body." For this reason, the incarnation, the presence of the greatest of mysteries in our flesh, is more than Jesus of Nazareth. In this sense, we might say that Jesus is for us a metaphor of the divine presence, the unfathomable mystery, the unutterable in the human flesh in which we are all included. The incarnation refers to our own bodily reality. In other words, we apprehend in our own flesh, in our bodily experience, what we call the divine. The place in which we apprehend the mystery that underlies everything is our respective bodies. We state that we are incarnate, but we do not know how complex this affirmation is.³⁶⁶ When we speak of Jesus in his role as the Christ, the issue of power comes into question. It is not possible in these times, argues Lisa Isherwood, to argue that the power of Christ lies in the heavens and intercedes to make all things well if not in the present, at the end of time. Patriarchal power has been the agent of suffering too many times but any talk of empowerment and mutuality would not make power disappear. This has been tried and tested.

The power of the enfleshed narrative Christ is transformational and dynamic. But in order for such power to find its fullest expression, we are required to understand ourselves as fully enfleshed as the impotency of metaphysics is always a danger in

³⁶⁵ McFague, p. 159.

³⁶⁶ Gebara, p. 183.

Christian theology. It is more than possible, states Isherwood, that what the early Christian writers were conveying about incarnation was not a once and for all occurrence, but the knowledge that we must be fully in our bodies or we will not be able to fully explore our divinity. The early fathers, argues Isherwood, although influenced by Greek dualism understood that Jesus was most fully divine when he was fully human, that Christ became man in order that we all may become divine. Whilst she accepts their vision, she changes their emphasis. It was, she states, not the incarnation of the son of God that allowed believers to achieve union with the divine, normally after death had taken place, but the bursting forth of the divine that enables everyone to grasp the same power 'anyone who makes an opening as he did wants others to enlarge it'.³⁶⁷ Therefore, the task is to bring forth the power of Christ to the forefront and make empowered living the reality for everyone.³⁶⁸

But in terms of speaking of divinity, we have always been accustomed to thinking of the divine as a being and a power more radically different from our own experience. Thus it might appear that "Immanuel," who "pitched his tent among us" and "came down from heaven," could be diminished by this new interpretation. However, to speak of Jesus as God's "intermediary," or to speak of Jesus as the expression of the wisdom that dwells within us, does not deny Jesus' concrete practice as it is laid out in the Gospels.

The frame, states Gebara, does not change the picture. The picture itself, the life of Jesus as it was lived out, has its own integrity-despite the frames in which it has been placed by his contemporaries, by the early Christian communities, by conflicts in the time of the Roman Empire, by later tradition and by ourselves in the present day. The actions of Jesus on behalf of the oppressed, the sick, the outcast and victims of every

³⁶⁷ Joan Casanas quoted in Pablo Richard *The Idols of Death and the God of Life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1982), p. 122. Isherwood, pp. 128-129.

³⁶⁸ Isherwood, p. 129.

kind are undeniable. That, states Gebara, is what shows up in the most vivid colours in the painting of Jesus' life. These actions constitute the picture of Jesus' mission, and for this reason it is always present and up to date. Further to this, Gebara argues, the frame can never be more important than the picture. She believes that this is exactly what has happened in our theology. We have exaggerated the importance of the frame, which is no more than an accessory, often forgetting the actual picture, the painting, the words of life, the actions of Jesus.³⁶⁹

There may well be those who question why we need to return to the figure of Jesus today. Why not let it fade away and discover new reference points for the present? This course of action may even serve some feminist and rationalist intellectual groups who regard the figure of Jesus to be a stumbling block. But this is not really an option, nor should it be, because our relationship with Jesus is not only personal, it is cultural, too. Although there may be different positions on this issue, we should not separate ourselves from our history or Jesus as a point of reference. We cannot because he is woven into the fabric of history.

The tradition of Jesus should be kept alive, states Gebara, because a tradition only dies when there is no one left to place their faith in it and no more disciples to keep it alive. This is not the case with Jesus. To lose this tradition would be to lose a rich tapestry of ancient human wisdom. Jesus represents hope and for Gebara, it is in this way that she says we could speak of him metaphorically as Saviour; the symbol of the values that are best able to change our lives and lead us to justice and goodness. He is the Saviour inasmuch as he is a living example with which we identify, in order to conceive of our own lives as salvific.

Christian culture has always shown Jesus to be an inclusive symbol. One who served slaves, freed citizens, men, women, prostitutes and public sinners. To use the

³⁶⁹ Gebara, pp. 184-185.

term “symbol” means that it is a totality that is always open and inclusive, a reality whose immense richness allows it to be continually reinterpreted. To refer to Jesus as a symbol is not to diminish him in any way. It means that although he is Jesus of Nazareth, he is really more than Jesus of Nazareth. He becomes the possession of his community of followers, a collective construct representing a way of life. He is a path to the meaning of our existence.³⁷⁰

For the community of Christians Jesus is a symbol of members’ dreams, and of their greatest aspirations for humanity and for the earth. But this community has changed these aspirations to a certain extent. It has responded to the numerous situations and contexts of human history. We might say that Jesus is not the saviour of all humanity in the traditional, triumphalistic sense that has characterised the discourse of the Christian churches. He is not the powerful Son of God who dies on the cross and becomes the “king” who morally dominates the great variety of human cultures. Rather, he is the symbol of the vulnerability of love which in order to remain alive ends up being killed...and which then rises again in those who love him, in order to recover the vital cycle of love.

From this perspective, Jesus does not come to us in the name of a “superior will” that sent him; rather, he comes from here: from this earth, this flesh, this body and from the evolutionary process that remains forever present in this Sacred Body within which love resides. This love continues in him and through him and beyond him where it is turned into passion for life, and into mercy and justice. Here, Gebara is saying that in this sense, Jesus as an individual is not superior to any other human being. This is because he is made of the same earth, the same bodily reality that constitutes us all. In the meantime, he has, on account of his moral qualities, his openness and his sensitivity, come to represent the perfection of our dreams and the ideal realization of our desires. It

³⁷⁰ Gebara, pp. 186-187.

is precisely this that makes the difference. Gebara argues then that the difference is not ontological or metaphysical but ethical and aesthetic, because the difference is manifest in his humanity and in the great beauty of the attitudes he expressed and evoked in others. We can say then that Jesus is the symbol of all that we most love. Within this perspective, Jesus can no longer be regarded as the justification for hierarchical power.

However, there are those who will argue that you cannot change a hierarchical and patriarchal symbol this way, making it into something inclusive, democratic and non-sexist. Such an endeavour would be pretentious, for the reason that it would present an image of Jesus that falls outside the patterns to which we have become accustomed down the centuries. But we are very well aware that all traditions had their beginnings, even if they were at times confused and unclear. So if they had a beginning, then they also evolved: thus they are subject to constant transformations. And in their own ways, they appropriate the life experience of Jesus of Nazareth. They have transformed it, conceptualised it, and turned it into a science and a doctrine. Gebara is adamant that she is not prepared to accept positions that refuse to welcome the changes inherent in every tradition. Neither does she accept the notion that we do not have the authority to speak in our own way of our relationships with Jesus without cutting ourselves off from history. Further she does not understand why the antiquity of certain dogmatic and conciliar statements or their proximity to the historical times of Jesus needs to be regarded as the only criteria for the truth of statements about Jesus. It is not her intention to discuss or go into the classical arguments concerning the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. Gebara affirms that her purpose is only to demonstrate the possibility of reinterpreting the gospel tradition in light of the pressing issues that we are raising at the current time.

Conclusion

When we refer to the Cosmic Christ, it is clear that there are many factors to consider in what this term fully represents not only in terms of Christ himself, but for inclusive humanity, earth and the cosmos. By building a comprehensive picture of this, we are able to acknowledge that it becomes more urgent for humanity than ever to see the larger implications of what it means to be embodied and to express divinity through this. Then we may be able to bring about the changes that move us forward to a more loving creation-centered spirituality.

We turn now to examine the cosmological works of Hildegard of Bingen.

Chapter Three

The Move towards a Cosmology for the Modern day

June Boyce Tillman makes the claim that with the re-emerging interest in the work of Hildegard of Bingen, the age in which we live is able to reclaim its lost feminine. This is achieved partly through a return to pre-Enlightenment conceptual frameworks and partly because of Hildegard's own special position within these. Although, Boyce Tillman states, there are some, including scholars, who would dispute the legitimacy of applying a feminist approach to an age that knew nothing of feminist theorists such as Carol Gilligan for example, there are others who are able to identify some parallels.⁴⁷⁴

Boyce-Tillman argues from an essentialist position based on the work of feminist psychologist Mary Field Belenky in her book, *Women's Ways of Knowing*.⁴⁷⁵

Belenky argues that connected knowers believe that the most trustworthy knowledge is derived from personal experience rather than the pronouncements of authorities such as academic settings or family agencies. Connected knowers develop procedures for gaining access to other people's knowledge, at the centre of which is empathy. Other characteristics common amongst connected knowers are a wish to converse using empathy, a refusal to judge or a prizing of mutuality and shared insight, and the use of personal knowledge as a source of truth. It is marked by an effort to reclaim the self by integrating knowledge that she deems to be personally important with knowledge she has learnt from others. The position often includes 'passionate

⁴⁷⁴ Richard Woods, 'Medieval and Modern Women Mystics: The Evidential Character of Religious Experience', *Second Series Occasional Paper*, 10 (1997), p. 2.

⁴⁷⁵ June Boyce Tillman, 'Hildegard of Bingen at 900: The Eye of a Woman', *The Musical Times*, 139 (1998), 31-36, p. 31. Mary Field Belenky et al, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986)

knowing': 'the elaborated form connected knowing takes after women learn to use self as an instrument of understanding'.⁴⁷⁶

Further to this, strands of thought in Belenky's concept of connected knowing draw upon the idea of interrelatedness. The background to this idea in Hildegard's work was her fundamental view of the cosmos, which is most clearly reflected in the paintings of her visions. In Hildegard's art work we commonly see oval and circular shapes, and circles of earth, fire and water hold all together, with the winds blowing in at four points. These features may equally be regarded as reflecting the free-flowing interconnectedness of her thinking, which in turn is reflective of the pattern of the universe. Certainly for Hildegard, the idea of sin was related to a break in this relationship.⁴⁷⁷

Hildegard's artistry shows that she could be regarded as an individualist. We see clear evidence of this in the colours used in her paintings and in her use of huge feminine figures. Yet her underlying motivation for this is profoundly different. She consistently stresses her belonging to a divine tradition; her striving is for authenticity within a tradition not for innovation moving away from the preceding generation. Her basic desire is not the individualism of modernism but to belong.

It should therefore be understood that Hildegard was steeped in the tradition of the Bible and Benedictine spirituality. And here lay both her strength and weakness. In what way could she express her own unique spirituality and music, which she firmly believed came directly from God, in the context of the Christianity in which she lay her roots? Thus she drew upon the Wisdom writings of the Old Testament where the figure of Wisdom is traditionally feminine. Her rediscovery of the feminine aspects of the divine was crucial to her search for an authentic voice. The symbolic figures of her

⁴⁷⁶ Belenky, p. 141.

⁴⁷⁷ Boyce-Tillman, p. 32.

visions are not women in name alone, but are explicitly feminine, endowed with breasts and wombs, cradling offspring or giving birth.⁴⁷⁸

Hildegard equally draws upon the surrounding nature traditions of her time, for example, in the faces of the green person that can be seen on the pillars of the monastery of Disibodenberg where she spent much of her youth. This is clear in *O viridissima virga*, in which she likens the Virgin Mary to a greening branch in which the birds build their nests. She attempted to contain these ideas within orthodox theology. She was a traditionalist, but one who searched for an authentic female voice not outside it but within it.⁴⁷⁹

In terms of the mystical, we can relate this to the quality of empathy, central to Belenky's mode of connected knowing.⁴⁸⁰ This receptivity extends beyond the reading of purely verbal cues. It includes a valuing of the non-verbal. Tied in with Belenky's idea of passionate knowing, it leads to a desire to utilise a variety of media to express feelings and concepts. There were few art forms that Hildegard did not explore. Her nuns wore crowns and beautiful robes, which she considered justified because of their high calling as the brides of Christ.⁴⁸¹ In her music drama, *Ordo virtutum* the virtues are all female who attempt to guide the soul on a heavenly path, steering her away from the devil's charms.⁴⁸²

At this point then, we can examine the contribution Hildegard makes in terms of assisting a different living cosmology to emerge, one that is wholly appropriate for today, further developing a cosmological Christology for the 21st century.

In this respect, Hildegard's own cosmology is distinctly Christocentric and ecological. These two aspects make it crucial for a modern day living cosmology. For

⁴⁷⁸ Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), p. 7.

⁴⁷⁹ Boyce-Tillman, p. 33.

⁴⁸⁰ Nel Noddings, *Caring* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 30.

⁴⁸¹ Nancy Fierro, *Hildegard of Bingen and Her Vision of the Feminine* audio cassette (Colorado: Sounds True Studio, 1995).

⁴⁸² Boyce-Tillman, p. 34.

Hildegard, Christ is the active Word operating within a fully interrelated, interconnected cosmos. The greening power of Christ as the Living Word and the greening power of creation are inextricably linked. Humanity is also a part of this, divinely connected to Christ and creation through God and Hildegard stresses that it is the actions of humanity that can produce positive or detrimental effects upon the earth and in turn, throughout the cosmos. Nothing escapes and all is affected. Greenness then is not merely restricted to a metaphor, it becomes fact. The Cosmic Christ maintains a central place. Hildegard emphasises the importance of Christ in terms of the re-awakening and flourishing of creation and humanity.

In a bid to allow a cosmological Christology to resurface and to place it within a more meaningful framework, the writings of Hildegard of Bingen in this instance are of great significance because her cosmology dealt with two issues: firstly the theological aspect that humanity, Christ, God and creation are inextricably linked, as previously stated. Secondly, from an ecological perspective, she saw in her visions the damage that human action had inflicted upon creation through neglect and lack of stewardship. Both of these aspects were in Hildegard's view, interrelated. She placed Christ at the centre of creation as the active Word and this in turn presents us with her idea of a living cosmology. In an increasingly secular world, ecology's connection to theology and creation may not be apparent and may therefore be regarded as two separate issues. It is therefore necessary to explain that as far as Hildegard was concerned, she saw little if any distinction between the two, regarding them as being parts of the cosmic Whole.

A key term Hildegard often made reference in her writings was 'viriditas'. This term is taken from the Latin meaning green and truth. To her it was a way to describe the presence of the divine in everything green. Hildegard speaks of the "exquisite greening of trees and grasses." She states that all of creation and humanity is "showered with greening refreshment, the vitality to bear fruit." She sees creativity and greening

power as being intimately connected.⁴⁸³ For Hildegard, the Holy Spirit is greening power in motion, making all things grow, expand and celebrate. For Hildegard, salvation or healing is the return of greening power and moistness. This is celebrated in her opera, *Ordovirtutum*. She states, “In the beginning all creatures were green and vital; they flourished amidst flowers. Later the green figure itself came down.” Thus Jesus is called ‘Greenness Incarnate.’ “Now bear in mind”, she says, “that the fullness you made at the beginning was not supposed to wither.”⁴⁸⁴

Relating to humanity, Hildegard contrasts greening power or wetness with the sin of drying up which is recorded in vision twelve of *De Operatione Dei*. Hildegard writes, “Just like hay which is trampled underfoot and burned up in a fire. They have become separated from the fruitful grain which is faith with works in the knowledge of the scripture.” In Hildegard’s vision there are three columns that appear next to some swords. In the centre are pieces of dry straw, hay or chaff. According to Fox, these represent dried up Christians who are scattered and cut down by “the most just Divinity of the Trinity.” They have been cut off from the waters of faith. Hildegard frequently urged the church leaders to stay wet, moist and green. To one churchman she wrote, “When a person loses the freshness of God’s power, he is transformed into the dryness of carelessness. He lacks the juice and greenness of good works and the energies of his heart are sapped away.”⁴⁸⁵ Hildegard also describes the soul, likening it to the sap of a tree. She further describes the intellect that exists within the souls as being like the ‘greenery’ of a tree’s branches and leaves. Such word play by Hildegard can serve to show that greenery, greenness and greening power are in fact similar. But the difficulty lies in her use of allegory which at times, can prove complicated in its unravelling.

⁴⁸³ Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1985), p. 30. Originally taken from *Hildegard Von Bingen, Brief-wechsel* (Salzburg: 1965).

⁴⁸⁴ Fox, p. 32

⁴⁸⁵ Fox, p. 64. Originally taken from *Scivias. Hildegard Von Bingen, Welt und Mensch*, trans. by Heinrich Schipperges (Salzburg:1965).

However, when she does refer in her work to this idea of 'greenness' relating it to humanity, creation and the soul, it merges well with contemporary spirituality which concerns itself with the interconnectedness between humanity and creation, moving beyond the barrier of time, an important point if we are to relate to Hildegard's work in a modern setting. So thus when the reader of the text is attempting to genuinely understand what the text is saying, but is confronted with their own perceptions, preconceptions and indeed misconceptions, they ought to still have the awareness that the text is trying to tell them something. Even though there may be a discrepancy between what they think the text means and what it *actually* means. This is especially relevant to the term 'greenness'.

'Greenness' for Hildegard is not just referring to nature itself; she also utilises this image to describe the spiritual life of grace and virtue. Peter Dronke states that Hildegard's 'greenness' is the earthly expression of the celestial sunlight; greenness is the condition in which earthly beings experience a fulfilment which is both physical and divine; greenness is the blithe overcoming of the dualism between earthly and heavenly. This suggests oneness between the two; we might even describe this as a joining together of the two; heaven on earth, in fact. This is an interesting concept because it dismisses the notion of dualism; the removal of the idea of the separate and the separated. Viriditas in nature's order is connected with the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸⁶ This divine knowledge in plants was why they were able to be used in healing because they

⁴⁸⁶ Fiona Bowie, *Hildegard of Bingen* (London: SPCK, 1990), p. 32. Peter Dronke *Tradition in Innovation in Medieval Western Colour-Imagery*, (Leiden: Brill, 1974), p. 84. (First published in *Eranos Jahrbuch* XLI (1972), pp. 51-106). Further information regarding the relationship between the colours and the virtues in Hildegard's work is can be found in 'Die Bedeutung der Farben im Werk Hildegardis von Bingen' by Christel Maier in *Fruhmittelalterliche Studien*, 6 (1972) in particular see pp. 280ff and 285. *The Book of the Rewards of Life*, trans. by Bruce W. Hozeski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. xiii. The idea of 'viriditas' literally meaning greenness, symbolically connotes growth in Hildegard's thought. The importance of the virtues is explained by means of using this term. According to Hildegard and thinkers of that time, life from God was transmitted into plants, animals and precious gems. People, in turn, consume plants and animals and acquire gems, thus obtaining 'viriditas'. People then give out 'viriditas' by practicing the virtues. *Liber Vitae Meritorum* in *Analecta Sanctae Hildegardis Opera Spicilegio Solesmensi Parata*. Analecta Sacra 8. 1882.

brought, through their medicinal use, the divine to the individual. Hildegard believed that the moist, juiciness of the plant was a clear indication of their health and that this could also be reflected through the person showing that either fullness or lack of viriditas would indicate their state of health.⁴⁸⁷ Hildegard sees that “the soul is the freshness of the flesh, for the body grows and thrives through it just as the earth becomes fruitful through moisture.” Hildegard uses incredible imagery in her descriptions. Fox argues that she has been influenced from Scripture, first of all, where the prophet Hosea writes, “I am like a cypress ever green, all your fruitfulness comes from me.” (Hosea. 14:9). However, much of her use of the term ‘greening power’ is a result of her meditations on the images of humanity as vines and living branches. (John. 5). Of course she was also greatly influenced by where she lived. The Rhineland might be described as a lush, voluptuously green valley, deeply blessed with rich soil, flourishing fruit and vineyards.⁴⁸⁸

An example of this can be demonstrated by the following extract from *Book of Divine Works Vision Seven: 7*:

From this time forward we human beings-generation after generation-have declined in power with respect to those who lived before the Flood. And as the earth changed, our altered powers were weakened because we followed the old deceiver who had exchanged his former splendour for the baseness of the serpent.

As the greening power of earth has steadily declined, as Hildegard would have it, and we are witnessing this ecologically today, so has the power of humanity. It no longer possesses the strength it once had. This decline in greenness she believed resulted in the lack of greenness after the Flood had taken place and which had already caused a weakness of the earth. Thus humanity has been affected too. But further to this, more weakening had occurred due to the influence of the serpent-in effect, the angel who had fallen from grace.

⁴⁸⁷ <http://lib.fo.am/viriditas> [accessed 16 September 2009] (para 1 of 4)

⁴⁸⁸ Fox, p. 32.

The greening power of both earth and humanity is a consistent theme in her work. In the following extract she speaks about the earth and what she insists is the cause of its fruitfulness, ‘The Earth is always muddy because of the summer’s warmth and the winter’s chill, and it is this mud that causes the Earth to become fruitful.’⁴⁸⁹ In Vision Four: 78, she states:

In the youthful, ripening period of life, we come into complete power. In old age, we are brought back to the period of fading, just as Earth in summer is adorned with flowers by its greening power and later transformed by the chill of winter’s pallor.⁴⁹⁰

Hildegard states that the ‘green life-force’, has been generally weakened and that there is an injustice, on the part of humanity towards humanity itself and towards creation, and therefore all inter-related parts of the cosmos should receive the right care and attention in order to reach their full and true potential. This weakening is a result of human nature failing to know its place within an organic and interrelated universe. For example, in vision ten in the *Book of Divine Works* she says:

And this what the Son says to the Father: “In the beginning all created things turned green. In the middle period flowers bloomed, but afterward the greening power of life lessened.” Seeing this, the manly warrior said: “I know this period well. But the golden number is not yet complete. Look up, however, to the Divine’s mirror. My body is exhausted, and my children have become weak.”⁴⁹¹

But it does not stop there. It is failure to know God and furthermore, to know ourselves. However Hildegard believed that all is redeemable. Conversions, repentance and realisations concerning our social environment can help to reverse the damage caused, but it would demand a much greater awareness than we presently have of the environmental problems that exist, and a willingness to try to put things right. It does not just involve the environment; there are also economic and political issues which would require serious consideration. We have already seen examples of this in chapter one.

⁴⁸⁹ Fox, p. 112.

⁴⁹⁰ Fox, p. 113.

⁴⁹¹ Fox, p. 231.

What Hildegard is calling us to do is open up the heart to appreciate the beauty of God's creation and the reality of life on earth. It seems a simple enough message but at the same time, a deeply profound one. This would require a total change of humanity's attitude towards each other and the earth from one that has been built on oppression and exploitation of the weak and vulnerable to one that extends a Christ-like love to each other and creation.

Growth and fruition as the work of Christ directs us not only to the greening power of creation (that is, the extent to which growth and fruition can take place and its richness) but also towards the potential of true human fecundity in the cosmos and in history. Hildegard thus presents Christ as the theological paradigm for our task, showing the mystery of the death and resurrection of one who is the Wisdom of God. All this represents the 'Christic dynamic of dying and rising in everyday life,' forged through grace by individuals in the community. This is how fecundity is brought about.⁴⁹² It signals the inner life of God. As far as Hildegard was concerned, this signified the most important reality, preceding and constantly supporting all other forms of fecundity. Hildegard's unusual Trinitarian images are a flamboyant eye of Love, whose pupil is a blessing Christ figure.⁴⁹³ Further, there is a three-edged purplish-black column, which represents the unity of the Father with his fruitful Word who redeemed us and with the Holy Spirit who helps us to give witness.⁴⁹⁴ This reality is the column of all good, which pervades creation and history, and its three edges function like blades that cut through all lack of faith, self-sufficiency and separation.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹² Renate Craine, *Hildegard: Prophet of the Cosmic Christ* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), p. 75. Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, Book Two 2:4, p. 190.

⁴⁹³ *Scivias* trans. by Mother Columba Hart & Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), *Scivias*, Book Two: 2, p. 162.

⁴⁹⁴ Columba Hart & Bishop, *Scivias*, Book Two: 7, p. 164.

⁴⁹⁵ Craine, p. 76.

Viriditas is so important in Hildegard's work because her cosmology is essentially holistic in nature. As the key aim of this thesis is to present a 21st century holistic cosmology, the transforming of Hildegard's texts becomes a major focus. Therefore the nature of the texts has to be considered. It is the transformational aspect that hermeneutically, is the most radical issue to contend with. Indeed, re-reading the texts through modern eyes becomes a challenge but one worth pursuing. It must become possible to take the reader beyond the twelfth century and the audience of that time who would have been the first to encounter Hildegard's writings. This enables the texts to be used in a creative way.⁴⁹⁶

Hildegard's ideas and beliefs in terms of viriditas are powerful. However, it needs to be considered what this term might mean in contemporary times. It would be inappropriate to assume that this term means exactly the same as Hildegard presented it and in some ways, it is quite different. The word 'green' today is more usually referred to in a secular way and thus very differently than the way in which Hildegard would use it. Green power is more likely to be defined in its broadest sense as 'environmentally preferable energies and energy technologies. It refers to renewable energy derived from natural sources that replenish themselves over short periods of time. Such resources include the sun, wind, moving water, organic plant and waste materials (biomass) and the earth's heat (geothermal).'⁴⁹⁷ Use of the term 'green' today tends to refer to tackling climate change, recycling, greenhouse gases, pollution and toxic waste, etc. All of these are hugely important issues if humanity is to preserve itself and the planet but applied in this way, spiritual meaning is not necessarily attached. However, in an article in *The Independent* in 1992, we are able to begin to see that this is not always the case. The article described a Christian priest who had launched Britain's first festival of 'green' spirituality by examining how 'greenery' can help save us from the ecological and

⁴⁹⁶ Thiselton, p. 49.

⁴⁹⁷ <http://wri.org/guide-purchase-gree-chap2.pdf> [accessed 27 September 2009]

social crisis that threatens life itself.⁴⁹⁸ The speed at which humans have improved technology since the industrial revolution has attracted so many people to towns and cities, providing them with 'processed' natural resources that our innate ability to make all the connections between spending time in nature and recognising meaning in nature such as a tree blowing in the breeze, the sound of creatures and the habitats of animals and the understanding that we exist in a shared space, has become much more remote.⁴⁹⁹

The centre for Creation Spirituality at St James Church in Piccadilly, London, where the festival began, says its very existence is evidence of the 'huge growth of interest' in spirituality and its relationship to the environment. The failure of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1991 is one reason for this. But different faiths are also recognising shared attitudes to the environment. The World Wide Fund for Nature, for example, in the 1990's published a series of studies on the links between ecology and religion. Green spirituality has a long history, arguably dating back to the Ice Age, but the medieval church stigmatised nature worship as paganism and the post Reformation church emphasised dominion over nature. Matthew Fox, a Dominican theologian, began in the eighties to rekindle belief in nature mysticism and continues to do so up to the present time.

The Christian view in the festival was visible in the form of workshops on the concept of *viriditas* the term used by Hildegard of Bingen. However, the greening power of Christianity has been considered as heathenism by evangelicals but Francis Miller who works at the centre for Creation Spirituality believes that green Christianity offers a view of the divine within nature which can be shared with other faiths.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ www.independent.co.uk/ [accessed 27 September 2009]

⁴⁹⁹ Mike Weilbacher, 'Natural Selections,' <http://mikeweilbacher.blogspot.com/2008//power-of-green-.html>

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

In terms of Hildegard's visions expressing *viriditas*, or indeed lack of it, Hildegard's allegorical style of expression epitomises what medieval thought was all about. Barbara Mauermann demonstrates that treating a cosmic vision as an allegory of life was common in medieval Europe. She observed this by engaging in a comparison of the depictions of the cosmos by Hildegard and by Honorius Augustodenensis. In this instance, Mauermann discovered many basic shared elements and characteristics between the two. Hildegard and Honorius were not alone in presenting the universe as a macrocosm with the human being as the microcosm. The Greeks for example, had highly developed ideas that the individual was a microcosm of society, that society was a microcosm of the cosmos, and that the cosmos operated in accordance with a basic harmony of the spheres. The Greeks also believed that the various realms influenced each other and that such influences could be calculated. The emphasis by Honorius on four quadrants, on four elements, and on the association of winds, directions and temperatures with virtues and vices, represents a reliance on common medieval themes that draw heavily upon Greek and ancient sources, in particular Plato's *Timaeus*.⁵⁰¹

Despite the fact that Hildegard was born ninety-eight years after the turn of the first Christian millennium, millennialist views still strongly informed theological thought throughout her lifetime. Her own reading of Scripture focused on the eschatological and the apocalyptic. Her schema of epochs from creation up until the end times placed her own time very near the end time. Although there is a certain calmness with which she reflects on the cosmos, there is also urgency present to deliver her message about preparing for God's judgement and being open to God's love. Liberchut

⁵⁰¹ Dennis Doyle, 'Vision Two of Hildegard of Bingen's *Book of Divine Works*: A Medieval Map for a Cosmic Journey', *Pacifica* 20 (2007) 142-161 (p. 146). *Allegorical World-Picture of Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art* ed. by Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke (London: The Warburg Institute School of Advanced Study University of London, 1998).

and Dronke have been instrumental in uncovering Hildegard's "literary debts" and creating critical apparatus for her works.⁵⁰² Dronke notes:

The problems of ascertaining the extent of Hildegard's reading and the sources of her language and style have remained for the most part unresolved; their resolution still confronts us with formidable difficulties. This is largely because writing as a prophet and not as a litterata, Hildegard never cites any learned texts explicitly-only the Bible.⁵⁰³

However, when we begin to enter into Hildegard's visionary world she awakens us to symbolic consciousness. This is considered by Mircea Eliade, a Romanian historian of religion, writer and philosopher, to be Hildegard's major contribution, believing that it is the proper road to ecumenism and spirituality.⁵⁰⁴ "The symbol, the myth and the image are of the very substance of the spiritual life...they may be disguised, mutilated or degraded, but they are never extirpated."⁵⁰⁵ For the reader who allows himself or herself to be led into Hildegard's rich world of symbolism, Eliade suggests that the person, "who understands a symbol not only 'opens himself' to the objective world, but at the same time succeeds in emerging from his personal situation and reaching a comprehension of the universal."⁵⁰⁶

Paradox and personal experience, systematic imagination and diverse levels of meaning, cosmos and world patterns, are all expressed by symbols. Entering into the world of Hildegard's symbolism awakens the rich treasury of Christian history. The century in which she lived was "saturated" with a symbolic consciousness. We cannot comprehend Hildegard unless we understand the "symbolic mentality" of her times.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰² International Society of Hildegard Von Bingen Studies
<http://www.hildegardsociety.org/faq.html#feminine>
 [accessed 12 March 2007]

⁵⁰³ *Hildegardis Bingensis, Liber divinorum operum* ed. by A. Derolez and P. Dronke Corpus Christianorum Mediaevalis 92 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), p. xiii.

⁵⁰⁴ Fox, p. 19.

⁵⁰⁵ *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader*, ed. by Wendell C. Beane and William G. Doty (New York: Harper Collins, 1976), II p. 354.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 351.

⁵⁰⁷ Fox, pp 20, 21.

Chenu, a Roman Catholic theologian, states; “The same people read the Grail story and the homilies of St. Bernard, carved the capitals of Chartres and composed the bestiaries, allegorized Ovid and scrutinised the typological senses of the Bible, or enriched their Christological analyses of the sacraments with naturalist symbols of water, light, eating, marriage.”⁵⁰⁸ What Chenu argues was at stake in all symbolising was “the mysterious kinship between the physical world and the realm of the sacred.”⁵⁰⁹ He goes on to say, “How can one write the history of Christian doctrines, let alone that of theological science, without taking into consideration this recourse to symbols...which continually nourished both doctrine and theology?”⁵¹⁰

To illustrate the sense of allegory and symbolism present in Hildegard’s work, we begin by examining a vision that appeared to Hildegard concerning cosmic balance. It should be stated that in her visions, it is humanity that has caused the problems. It is not a question of the earth becoming unfit of its own accord. I propose to analyse how those things which today might be termed as natural disasters, were in the eyes of Hildegard, attributable to humanity.

In Hildegard’s *Book of Divine Works*, the phrase “divine works” has numerous overlapping meanings, not least of which is that planets, stars and cosmic winds are themselves works of God and always express God’s will. It is the grace of God and human free will that shall in the end, determine the course of human life. It is the human being who is to be regarded as the “divine work” *par excellence*, each one containing the various forces of the cosmos that must remain balanced if salvation is to be achieved.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁸ M.D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 5.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 91.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 101.

⁵¹¹ Doyle, p. 161.

We begin by examining Vision One:

First Vision: On the Origin of Life, Matthew Fox, *Book of Divine Works* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), p. 9.



‘The figure wears a garment that shines with the brilliance of the sun. This is a sign of the Son of God who in his love has assumed a human body unstained by sin and

beautiful as the sun.’ This vision begins with the divine essence revealing itself as Love, as Trinity, as the Incarnate Son, and as the source of all life. To proceed further we will look at the next part of this vision:

Just as the sun shines sublimely over all creation, at such a height that on one can encroach upon it, so no one can grasp the Incarnation of the Son of God in its essence-except through faith. In its hand the figure carries a lamb as brilliant as the light of day. For love has revealed in the deeds of the Son of God the gentleness of a true faith that outshines everything else-as this love chose martyrs, confessors, and penitents from the ranks of publicans and sinners, as it converted atheists into righteous believers, and turned Saul into Paul, so that all of them could fly into the harmony of heaven.⁵¹²

The symbolic use of the sun clearly demonstrates the love of God and of his Son for humanity, focussing upon not only those who belong to him, the martyrs and confessors, but those who have strayed from him and whom he gathers to himself to take charge of and in whom he instils his essence which on its own cannot be comprehended except through the gift of faith. The imagery in this section of the vision depicts the gentle love of the Son in the form of a lamb. Not only does this vision represent the already faithful and also the converted to the light of God’s love through faith, but the faith of the Son himself in his Father.

In Vision One:12 (above) and Vision One:13, Hildegard visually expresses that all that exists has been created and sustained by God and that everything created by God is good. She states:

The figure treads upon both a frightful monster of a poisonous dark hue and a serpent. For true love, which follows in the footsteps of the Son of God, tramples upon all injustice that is convoluted by the countless vices of dissension. Injustice is also dreadful in its very nature poisonous in its temptations, and black in its abandonment. In addition, love destroys thus the old serpent lying in wait for believers. For the Son of God has destroyed this serpent by the cross.⁵¹³

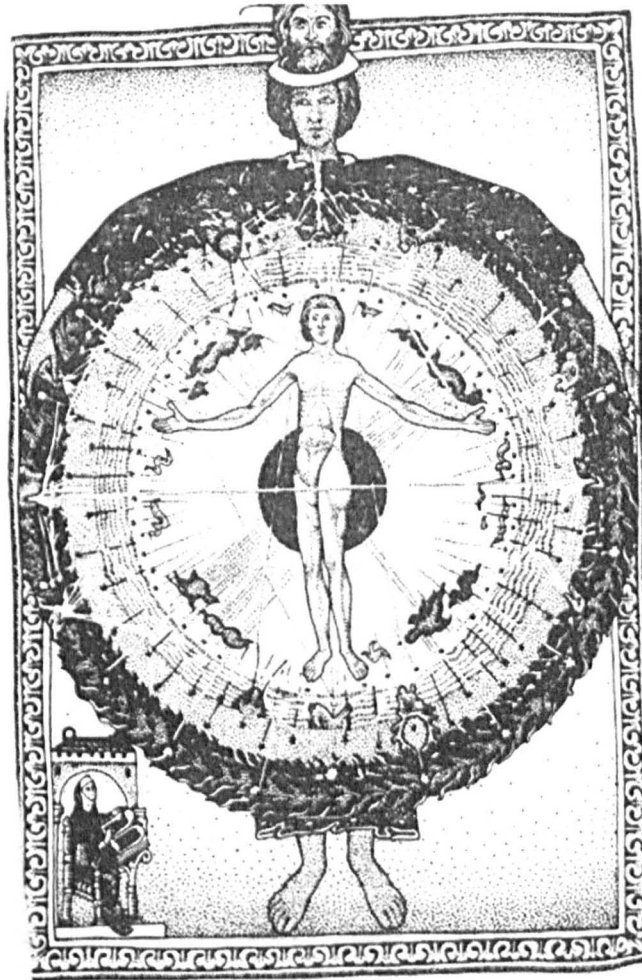
This is clever, evocative imagery concerning the devil, where the Son of God is ‘trampling’ all over the serpent showing no mercy but a powerful determination to

⁵¹² Fox, p. 17.

⁵¹³ Ibid, p. 17.

destroy him. Doyle writes that this trampling of the serpent by Christ is symbolic of true love.⁵¹⁴

Second Vision: On the Construction of the World, Matthew Fox, *Book of Divine Works* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), p. 23.



⁵¹⁴ Doyle, p. 153.

Vision Two is quite literally an opening up of the figure in Vision One and serves to demonstrate that not only is Hildegard expressing a map of the cosmos in this instance but also a form of table of contents for the rest of the book. As God perceives the universe and all of its happenings in one eternal insight, so Hildegard's cosmos contains all that ever happens at once in one vast landscape. This mutual interpenetration of themes also corresponds with the common pattern of medieval exegesis. Each passage throughout Scripture is interpreted as bearing simultaneously a literal, moral, allegorical and eschatological meaning. The cosmic forces representing the end of time are present at all times, and the winds that they generate keep the universe in motion.⁵¹⁵ The Christ figure opens up to reveal a map of the cosmos with a human being at its centre. This appears as a somewhat androgynous being, made in the likeness of God and bearing a strong resemblance to Christ. This vision can be read as a map for those who are undertaking the spiritual journey of life. Medieval geographical maps of the world are full of symbolism and allegorical meaning, where they express not only geography but also religion and culture through symbolic representation. In a similar way Hildegard's cosmic map expresses an allegory of the meaning of life.

Vision Two: 1 begins:

Then a wheel of marvellous appearance became visible right in the centre of the breast of the above mentioned figure which I had seen in the midst of the southern air. On the wheel there were symbols that made it look like the image I had seen twenty-eight years ago-then it took the form of an egg, as described in the third vision of my book *Scivias*. At the top of the wheel, along the curve of the egg, there appeared a circle of *black fire*.⁵¹⁶

In this vision taken from the *Book of Divine Works*, Hildegard refers back to the vision mentioned earlier, of the world as an egg which she first presented in *Scivias*. This represents the transformation of the world-image, recognising that the cosmos is

⁵¹⁵ Doyle, p. 157.

⁵¹⁶ Fox, p. 22.

harmoniously proportioned by concentric circles.⁵¹⁷ The egg represents unity. This is a fundamental truth of the universe that Hildegard constantly insists on. Fox argues that Hildegard's vision of the egg produces the implication of the universe as being organic and alive. An egg is the beginning of something, a new being, and a new creation. In this vision, Hildegard celebrates the potential of the cosmos, its unrevealed beauty and healing, its hidden mysteries of delight and grandeur.⁵¹⁸ Hildegard's term *medietas* is indicative of the human being in creation, which is akin to the place of the Son in the heart of the Father. This marks the start of Hildegard's description of what can be termed as 'wheels within wheels.' In effect the cosmic wheel, a series of circles all different in their appearance and which contain numerous significant images. This is an extremely complex vision to understand. This is also a very lengthy vision to include therefore I have chosen to examine the following extracts:

At the top of the wheel, along the curve of the egg, there appeared a circle of *luminous fire*, and under it there was another circle of *black fire*. The luminous circle was twice as large as the black one. And these two circles were so joined as to form but a single circle. Under the black circle appeared another circle as of *pure ether*, which was as large as the two other circles put together.⁵¹⁹

The circle of luminous fire represents divine light and love. The circle of black fire represents divine judgement, whilst the circle of pure ether represents purification. The person who lives a balanced life based on good works, virtue and atonement, which would equate to a life that is in harmony with the cosmos, will be lifted up and will pass through judgement into the divine light.⁵²⁰

In the next part of this vision Hildegard states:

In the middle of the giant wheel appeared a human figure. The crown of its head projected upward, while the soles of its feet extended downward as far as the sphere of sheer white and luminous air. The fingertips of the right hand were stretched to the right, and those of the left hand were stretched to the left,

⁵¹⁷ Columba Hart & Bishop, p. 93.

⁵¹⁸ Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1985), p. 36.

⁵¹⁹ Fox, p. 22.

⁵²⁰ Doyle, p. 160.

forming a cross extending to the circumference of the circle. This is the way in which the figure had extended its arms.⁵²¹

All of her visionary drawings contained the notion of 'cosmic law'. But it was her *Opus Dei-Book of Divine Works* that captured this so magnificently.⁵²²

This extract has been taken from Hildegard's *Second Vision: On the Construction of the World*, (see above) taken from her *Book of Divine Works*.

Hildegard recorded:

In the middle of the giant wheel appeared a human figure. The crown of its head projected upward, while the soles of its feet extended downward as far as the sphere of sheer white luminous air. The finger tips of the right hand were stretched to the right, and those of the left hand were stretched to the left, forming a cross extending to the circumference of the circle. This is the way in which the figure had extended its arms.⁵²³

In what way does Hildegard interpret the human figure in this vision? She expounds upon the relation of the microcosm and the macrocosm, and the moral responsibility that interdependence demands of humanity. This interdependency is prominent in this vision because it contains bold, symbolic imagery where Hildegard has included in this cosmic wheel the heads of animals breathing onto the human figure. She writes:

At the four sides appeared four heads: those of a leopard, a wolf, a lion and a bear. Above the crown of the figure's head, in the sphere of pure ether, I saw from the leopard's head that the animal was exhaling through its mouth. Its breath curved somewhat backward to the right of the mouth, became extended and assumed the shape of a crab's head with a pair of pincers that formed its two feet. At the left side of the mouth the leopard's breath assumed the shape of a stag's head. Out of the crab's mouth there emerged another breath that extended to the middle of the space between the heads of the leopard and the lion. The breath from the stag's head extended as far as the middle space remaining between the leopard and the bear.

All these heads breathed toward the above-mentioned wheel and the human figure.

[In like manner the exhalations of the other animals are described. After the leopard came the wolf, and lion, and the bear; after the stag and the crab, the

⁵²¹ Fox, p. 24.

⁵²² Stephanie Roth, 'The Cosmic Vision of Hildegard of Bingen', *Ecologist*, 30 (2000), p. 42. *Book of Divine Works* ed. by Matthew Fox (Santa Fe: Bear & Co, 1987).

⁵²³ Fox, p. 24.

serpent and the lamb. And all of them breathe concentrically toward the human figure in the centre.]⁵²⁴

For Hildegard, in this vision, the animal figures in this mandala stand for “powers of virtue” that keep humanity going and working in the universe. Thus, for example, the stag stands for faith and holiness. When humans experience suffering we are “like a bear in bodily pain” which cannot get rid of its pain but teaches us an “inner meekness, causing us to walk along the right path by exercising patience like a lamb and to avoid evil by behaving as cleverly as a serpent. At the four sides appeared four heads: those of a leopard, a wolf, a lion, and a bear. The leopard represents fear of the Lord, the wolf represents punishment of hell, the lion represents fear of God’s judgement and the bear represents bodily trials by afflictions.⁵²⁵ The giant wheel representing humanity forms the focal point of this vision. Hildegard exhibits a use of strong, powerful animals here; the lion, the leopard, the bear and the wolf, who assume a prominent place around the figure itself. The first three animals represent the animals of the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7 as well as features of the beast in Revelation 13. The fourth animal, the wolf, had been interpreted as the devil by both Augustine and Jerome in the story of the Good Shepherd from John 10, an exegetical association that continued throughout the Middle Ages. The wolf has further associations with the lion and the leopard in Isaiah 11:6 and as well as Jeremiah 5:6.⁵²⁶ The four apocalyptic animals are associated with themes of fear and affliction. A stag and a crab also make their appearance. The stag is symbolic of Christ and the crab, even though it is not biblical, represented faith and steadfastness. The serpent and the lamb are also present. The serpent represents cunning as we see in the creation account in Genesis. The lamb is noted a number of times in the New Testament. In Luke 10:3, Jesus sent the disciples out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Of course even more importantly and more pertinently, there are many references to the

⁵²⁴ Fox, p. 24-25.

⁵²⁵ Doyle, p. 158.

⁵²⁶ Doyle, p. 157.

lamb as a Christ figure in Revelation and the Gospel of John.⁵²⁷ These and the aforementioned are turned towards the human figure at the centre of the vision.

In order to clarify the meaning of this vision Hildegard claimed that ‘a voice from the sky’ explained the following: That God had composed the world out of its elements for the glory of God’s name. Everything that God has placed within the wheels is there to protect and strengthen the human being. The wheel which had previously appeared to Hildegard in the form of an egg is symbolic of God’s love: constantly circling and not consumed by age. It remains just as God has created it. The Godhead is like a wheel, a whole. It is not divided in any way because the Godhead has neither beginning nor end. No one can grasp it because it is timeless.⁵²⁸ God has strengthened it with the winds, bound and illuminated it with the stars, and filled it with the other creatures.⁵²⁹ The four primary winds are associated with the apocalypse, the terrible period of judgement at the end of time. In a profound way, Hildegard takes these fearsome apocalyptic forces and reconfigures them as instruments of God with which humanity can learn how to exist in harmony. Hildegard associates each wind with an energy that motivates the individual towards spiritual growth. Therefore, Hildegard does not view the strength of such forces as being negative. That “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” can be found in three places in the Old Testament. (Ps 11:10; Prov1:7; 9:10). These forces are able to carry the person whose goal is to follow God and to do what is good to achieve a spiritual state of harmony that will in turn bring about repentance. A cosmos that exists in harmony also represents therefore, an individual or community’s dynamic spiritual journey.⁵³⁰ Trust, loyalty to God, faith and hope are important issues in this vision. She is reminding humanity to be mindful of its inadequacies and that there is always a way back to God which offers rewards for

⁵²⁷ Doyle, p. 158.

⁵²⁸ Fox, p. 26.

⁵²⁹ Fox, p. 26.

⁵³⁰ Doyle, p. 160.

faithfulness. All the animal heads, apparent in the vision, breathe toward the wheel described above and toward the human figure. It is the winds which keep the universe in balance with their raging and which keep human beings aware of salvation with their blowing. For the universe could not exist nor could humanity live if it were not kept alive through the blowing of the winds. The coloured circles and animals framing the mandalas symbolise God's order for creation and their attributed qualities match the cosmic law. A circle of luminous red represents fire. Black fire represents the punishment of evildoers. Ether indicates pure atonement. Beneath this comes a zone of watery air; this symbolises the holy works of righteous individuals. This represents water. Closest to the centre is a sphere of clear air, indicating moderation. The centre represents the element of earth. It is the centre that plays a vital role in maintaining the balance.⁵³¹ Through creativity we become co-creators with God. We can see then, both strangeness and familiarity throughout this particular text and it is the latter according to Gadamer that we are seeking. If some familiarity appears in the text, we can start to expand it. Gadamer would argue that there are words with which the reader will be familiar with but if unaccompanied by an explanation, would they make any sense? Probably not in Hildegard's case, however, in order to begin to draw some kind of understanding requires the reader to move beyond the text itself, thus presenting an opportunity for expansion to take place.⁵³² This is of paramount importance if Hildegard's writings are to undergo a transformation that will enable modern day readers to have a fuller understanding of her cosmology. Gadamer argues that boundaries of horizons that exist between the text and the reader can be moved and therefore extended. What we mean by horizon is the wider scope or breadth of vision that will allow the reader to embrace her work in its own context with the additional capability of extending, expanding and moving her work forward. It is that breadth of

⁵³¹ Roth, p. 42.

⁵³² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 1989), p. 304.

vision that allows the reader to look beyond what is immediately present within the text.⁵³³

As far as the reader of Hildegard's texts is concerned, mere engagement with her work provides the opportunity for both understanding expansion and transformation. But this is also vital in moving us towards a new cosmology. It is through understanding that we can begin to put into practice. Of course the most obvious concern initially is language. Not only should the best possible translation that is available be used, but also the style of language and use of imagery, symbolism, metaphor and allegory must be contended with. The task for the reader can thus be a mighty one, but at the same time one that can be worthwhile. There are also a number of questions that can arise for the reader of Hildegard's work such as; what can I expect to achieve from the texts, am I making assumptions in any way, what messages is the writer attempting to achieve through her work. Such questions are both pertinent and relative towards an ensuing transformation. The thought process has already begun. However, it cannot be assumed that this is automatic. Hildegard's visions are so difficult to ordinarily understand that the reader must take into consideration not only the context of the time they are reading about but how that, if at all, relates to the time in which *they* are now living. A distinction will exist between the horizons of the text as opposed to the distinctiveness of the individual's own reader-horizon. The possibility then becomes available for a creative interaction of horizons to occur.⁵³⁴

Gadamer argues that as the reader moves through the text, a constant fore-projection is being made. This will be constantly revised as the reader moves through the text. In all these states of being, the reader is trying to understand the text. Fore-projections and fore-conceptions are constantly in motion when reading and this will assist with the process of eventually forming a unity of meaning and it is this that helps

⁵³³ Ibid, p. 304.

⁵³⁴ Thiselton, p. 8.

to move the text forwards.⁵³⁵ However, Thiselton argues that this can present problems. Entering a text with pre-conceived ideas allows the reader to form mis-conceptions and jump to conclusions that may not be altogether correct. That is why he uses the term 'horizon of expectation.' According to Thiselton, this is always subject to revision and change. Asking the right questions of Hildegard's texts thus becomes important, such as: how can we know this work is valid and authoritative, who are her sources, what are the key areas and issues, and so on and it is the answering of such questions that assist in leading us to a contemporary cosmology. It must be said though, that the work of Gadamer and Thiselton can support and indeed complement each other. Whilst Gadamer formulates the argument that the reader of the text may well approach it with some forethoughts, Gadamer is not weighted down by such a statement because he brings in a wider breadth of understanding through the introduction of his horizon of expansion. Similarly, whilst Thiselton argues that forming a network of assumptions may put what can be termed as a 'hermeneutical spiral' into operation, he instigates a horizon of expectation, allowing the reader to free themselves of the limitability of those assumptions and keep an open mind as to what the text is able to reveal through asking a series of questions. The central issue in hermeneutics concerning Hildegard's writings then, is the ability to confidently present the main issues and aspects present in her visions so that a modern reading community is able to comprehend the message and its distinctive element, in this case, that the message is holistic in nature.

When the reader engages with a text they are prepared for the text to be revealing in some way. In the case of Hildegard, there is an instant where she moves away from describing her more 'usual' experiences in order to reveal a little more of herself.⁵³⁶ For example, after the composition of two of her major works, *Scivias* and *Liber Vitae Meritorum* (Book of Merits), feeling with conviction that her greatest work

⁵³⁵ Gadamer, p. 269.

⁵³⁶ Gadamer, p. 271.

was still to come, she experienced a vision, preserved in *Vita*, where she describes a complete loss of consciousness. This was the only time she ever recorded such an experience on receiving a vision. She states:

At last in the time that followed I saw a mystic and wondrous vision, such that all my womb was convulsed and my body's sensory powers were extinguished, because my knowledge was transmuted into another mode, as if I no longer knew myself. And from God's inspiration as it were drops of gentle rain splashed into the knowledge of my soul.⁵³⁷

Here it is as though she has had a major insight into another part of her being, one that she was unaware of. This was a very profound event for Hildegard. In fact she makes a comparison at this point to the one in which St John received the inspiration: 'In the beginning was the Word...' Reflecting on the nature of that Word, 'sucking its revelation' as John had done (*revelationem suxit*), leads her to understand the complementarity of human and divine, 'Man with every creature, is a handiwork of God. But man is also the worker (*operarius*) of divinity, and the shading (*obumbratio*) of the mysteries of divine being.'⁵³⁸ The vision showed Hildegard how to explain the Prologue of John: 'And I saw that this explanation had to be the beginning of another piece of writing, which had not yet been manifested, in which many investigations of the creations of the divine mystery would have to be pursued.'⁵³⁹

It is here where Hildegard's use of the tree in her visions is very symbolic, revealing roots, trunk, and foliage. Eliade asserts that the tree is "symbolic of the centre of the world" expressed in terms of a world axis. This world-axis symbolism, like so much in Hildegard's work, goes back to pre-Neolithic times. At the same time the tree symbolises "the central point in the cosmos" including human nature itself. Once again in this vision we see Hildegard celebrating the fertility of the earth. The waters in this

⁵³⁷ Dronke, p. 162. Taken from *Essays Presented to G. I. Lieftinck*. I: *Varia Codicologica*, II: *Texts and Manuscripts*, (*litterae textuales* ed. J.P. Gumbert and M.J.M. De Haan) Amsterdam: A.L. Van Gendt, 1972.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ Dronke, p. 163. See footnote 79 for original reference.

vision are dominant, symbolising creativity. Wetness and moisture are important virtues to Hildegard. Without the moisture, there is no creativity and no fertility.⁵⁴⁰ She also uses the word moisture in relation to the human brain:

Since our brain is moist and soft, it is of itself cold. All the blood vessels and the whole organism bring warmth to the brain. Similarly, everything that shines upward in fire brings fire to the sun, which at times causes dew and rain to fall down upon the Earth, so that the Earth may not lose its warmth. And since the brain is moistened by wetness and strengthened by warmth, it preserves and directs the entire body, just as a combination of moisture and warmth causes the whole Earth to germinate.⁵⁴¹

Further in this vision she writes:

Afterward, I spoke within myself my small deed, which is humanity. I formed this deed according to my own image and likeness so that it would be realized with respect to myself because my Son intended to adopt the garment of flesh as a human being.

Meanwhile, the humanity is the guise in which my Son, clothed in heavenly power, reveals himself as the God of all creation and as the Life of life.⁵⁴²

Thus we are reminded that the light of God came into the world to ‘set its tent among us.’ (John 1. 14), one more creative and divine act in an already lavishly abundant divine cosmos. The divine Word, the incarnation of divine wisdom itself, “took on human flesh in his humanity” in order to bring “all creation to the light.” Hildegard emphasises in this cosmic wheel that our divinity is our creativity. Humanity is here to play an active role. According to Hildegard, the cosmic wheel cannot turn and accomplish its purpose unless humanity recognises its place within creation and its own creativity in a way that is full of life and enthusiasm.⁵⁴³

In the *Book of Divine Works*, Hildegard further describes the meaning of the Word of God. She states that the Word of God, which she believes is Christ, was with God from the very beginning. He is called the ‘Word’ she says, ‘because he awakened all creation.’ Whatever God expressed verbally, the Word brought it into being. When

⁵⁴⁰ Fox, p. 48.

⁵⁴¹ *Book of Divine Works* ed. by Matthew Fox, (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), p. 102.

⁵⁴² Fox, p. 129.

⁵⁴³ Fox, p. 49.

the Word resounds, he leads all creatures to the light. In this way, the Word and God are one. As the Word resounded, he committed himself to all of creation and awakened everything to life. So in effect, what these two statements are telling us is that Christ as the Word of God plays a central role in creation and that its manifestation and rich fruition comes from Christ.⁵⁴⁴ This is expressed more vividly by the following example: Hildegard experienced a vision regarding the beauty the earth had before the Flood took place. This could be described as Paradise where earth had a seemingly magnificent ability to grow. Again, the following quotations are taken directly from the *Book of Divine Works*. Hildegard states:

In the beginning before the Flood, the Earth had such a greening power of life that it produced fruits without human effort. But later human beings neither observed discipline in worldly matters nor did they revere God properly; they wallowed in their earthly lusts. Yet after the Flood, in the middle period of history-between the Flood and the coming of the Son of God-flowers bloomed from the fresh sap and through every other generative power in quite a new and different way. This was because the Earth was saturated with the dampness of water and the sun's warmth.⁵⁴⁵ And just as flowers bloomed more profusely than in the past, the knowledge of men and women grew in the Wisdom enkindled in them by the Holy Spirit until a new star appeared. And this star indicated the King of Kings.⁵⁴⁶

The second part of the above passage is indicative of the approaching incarnation of Jesus.

The two biblical mainstays of mysticism, the theme of the human image of God and creation through the Word are merged in Hildegard's symbolic interpretation of the created world. The *Book of Divine Works* shifts to symbols of universal harmony. God is identified with reason, with a life reassuringly constant. This is shown in Vision Two: 2 in the *Book of Divine Work*:

God has composed the world out of its elements for the glory of God's name. God has strengthened it with the winds, bound and illuminated it with the stars, and filled it with the other creatures. On this world God has surrounded and

⁵⁴⁴ Fox, p. 131.

⁵⁴⁵ Fox, p. 231.

⁵⁴⁶ Fox, p. 232. This is not the quote in its entirety but this particular portion is the part most relevant.

strengthened human beings with all these things and steeped them in very great power so that all creation supports the human race in all things.⁵⁴⁷

Not only does the universe appear more tranquil and regular in structure than it appears in *Scivias*, but the soul is said to be a reasonable spirit and the rhythm of the brain to be like the rhythm of the natural world. This anticipates the naturalism of Renaissance mysticism in which the human being is like nature since both are like God.

Vision Four: 2 (*Book of Divine Works*) states:

God, who has created all things, has arranged the higher aspect of creation in such a way that God could not hold on to and purify its lower aspect. In the human form, however, God wanted also to relate all these signs to the salvation of the soul. Thus you see how the firmament with its different images has the same density from its highest point to the summit of the Earth, just as the Earth has the same density at its diameter.⁵⁴⁸

At the core of this ordered and stable vision is Hildegard's explanation of the eternal Word: a notion of the musicality of all creation and mind much accentuated by her Latin:

Quando enim verbum Dei sonnit, idem verbum in omni creatura apparui, et idem sonus in omni creatura vita fuit. Unde etiam de eodem verbo rationalitas hominis opera sua operatus, et de eodem sono opera sua sonando, clamando et cantando profert, quia per acumen artis suae in creaturis citharas et tympana sonando sonare facit...⁵⁴⁹

As the Word of God resounded, this Word appeared in each creature, and this sound was the life in every creature. Hence also from the same Word, the human reason effects its works, from this same ringing, calling or singing sound bringing forth its works, as in the creature, it lets cithara and timpani sound resounding through the acumen of artistic gifts. The cosmic wheel depicted in the *Book of Divine Works* which is her fourth vision, explains the celestial influence of man, animals and nature. She was

⁵⁴⁷ Fox, p. 26.

⁵⁴⁸ Fox, p. 82.

⁵⁴⁹ *Patrologia Latina* 197, 890D-891A.

not alone in using the concept of the cosmic wheel: Plato had also used this shape to organize his teachings concerning the origins of life, calling it the ideal body of the cosmos, the Mother of Becoming. He described this shape as a sphere, composed of 120 identical triangles that “contain” the five dynamic elements of creation: Fire, Earth, Air, Water and Aether (life energy).⁵⁵⁰ Although it was perhaps not intentional for Plato to think in terms of circles, nevertheless, this is what he presented: fifteen interlocked circles which created his spherical containers of 120 identical triangles.⁵⁵¹ Hildegard demonstrates the activities of man within the natural cycle of the seasons, corresponding to their natural qualities (wet, dry, hot, cold), elements (fire, air, earth, water) and temperaments (choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic). When humanity sins, it will disrupt cosmic harmony. Nature also then becomes too wet, too dry, too hot, and too cold. In her second vision on the construction of the world, man is placed at the heart of creation with which he shares a special relationship. In this centre is a ball representing Earth. The entire drawing contains circles within circles and as such is it the contact these circles have to the centre of the earth, which provides the greening freshness of life and the fertility needed for the Earth’s support. Through his blessing, God infused humankind and Creation with Divine love duly establishing his covenant. Righteousness and justice are its guarantors. Hildegard’s work is both unique and grounded in tradition. According to Schipperges, her theories of nature cannot be traced to contemporary sources. Christ, God’s Son the ‘Second Adam’ re-established this oath, which according to Hildegard involved the protection of nature.⁵⁵²

Nevertheless, her originality was congruent with contemporaneous ideas. Certain aspects of her thought on nature in particular, place her in twelfth century

⁵⁵⁰ Francis M. Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 54.

⁵⁵¹ <http://www.missionignition.net/bethe/plato.php> [accessed 11 September 2009] Plato’s *Timaeus* (Massachusetts: Focus Publishing, 2001).

⁵⁵² Roth, p. 42. *Book of Divine Works* ed. by Matthew Fox, (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), visions: 4:11 and 2:3.

Renaissance. She was in step with its new fascination and nature, a nature how viewed in its entirety *qua* universe, personified as the all-animating life-force and interpreted by paralleling microcosm and macrocosm.⁵⁵³

We have reached a point in history where it could be argued that her work could assist in understanding that this is an age-old story for humanity; disregard for each other and for the environment. Understanding this can enable her cosmology to be used in a positive way.⁵⁵⁴ Through her visions she is directing humanity towards a holistic understanding of the self, religion and the earth. Again, the term holistic is another important aspect in terms of applying Thiselton's hermeneutics; that is recognising creation as being a 'whole'. The word holistic encompasses creation in its entirety this was the way forward for Hildegard.⁵⁵⁵

Hildegard of Bingen through her visionary theology certainly presents us with a difficult challenge, recognising that we have lost a sense of an organically ordered cosmos turning ecology into a spiritual task and spirituality into a powerful agent of social reform.

Hildegard's comprehension of her mission rested not only on her spiritual experience, but also on the conviction that hers was a *muliebre tempus*, an 'effeminate age' in which men have grown so womanish that God must call women to do men's work. Her first prophetic book, *Scivias* therefore begins with a divine injunction to the visionary. Although she is but a weak, mortal 'ashes from ashes', she is to proclaim the word of salvation, for the masters and doctors to whom it was instructed have grown slack.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵³ Heinrich Schipperges, *Die Entientehre des Paracelsus: Aufbau und Umrib Seiner Theoretischen Pathologie* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1988), pp. 49-52.

⁵⁵⁴ Fox, p. xiii.

⁵⁵⁵ Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Passionate Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), p. 99. References to justice can be located in *Book of Divine Works* ed. by Matthew Fox (Santa Fe: Bear & Co, 1987), p. 299-300. In this instance, Hildegard has composed a letter of response to Prior Albert's dismay at her leaving to move to Rupertsberg.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 2.

To illustrate this Hildegard states:

Let those who see the inner meaning of Scripture, yet do not wish to proclaim or preach it, take instruction, for they are lukewarm and sluggish in preserving the justice of God....Therefore pour out a fountain of abundance, overflow with mysterious learning, so that those who want you to be despicable on account of Eve's transgression may be overwhelmed by the flood of your profusion.⁵⁵⁷

Later in the same work, on speaking through Hildegard again castigates priests for refusing either to preach or to practise what is right. Alongside the divine voice is Hildegard's anger at the misogynist attacks she must face: God instructs her to declare his fiery work even though she is 'trampled underfoot' by the male sex 'because of Eve's transgression'.⁵⁵⁸ Although Hildegard admitted the generic frailty of her sex, she refused to let men use either her own or Eve's feminine weakness as an excuse to ignore their own spiritual and moral weakness.⁵⁵⁹

In all of this, there is a strong emotional element attached which evokes another horizon. We cannot help but react to the intricacy and depth of Hildegard's visions. The pain of humanity's continuous and at times unnecessary sufferings constantly provide a difficult battle for Hildegard and her teachings because she believes that humanity is not listening. There are many components to her cosmological visions. They might seem to offer a timeless message, yes, but they are full of despair and isolation, too. This appears to be an all too sad a reality for readers of her work and for myself as a researcher. She is constantly seeking to challenge any individual brave enough to embark on her cosmic journeying. Yet there is also joy in this, too. At the heart of it all lays the important idea of right relationship with God and with each other. This is vital for a modern spirituality.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁷ *Scivias* I.I, ed. by A. Führkötter, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 43-43A (Turnhout: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1978), p. 8.

⁵⁵⁸ Führkötter, p. 112.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁵⁶⁰ Dreyer, p. 139.

What follows examines the dramatic event of the fall, the part humanity plays and the role assumed by the devil. Following this we proceed to examine the concept of the Living Light, and the part it played in her cosmology.

The visionary illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen, reflects a great deal of originality in its design. These illuminations are powerful expressions of a vision that, whilst personal, nonetheless reflects both the human-centered and earth-centered cosmology of the Middle Ages. What makes her work particularly distinctive is that it shows a Christian universe radiating with the divine energy of original creation and reiterates through its cycles and seasons the primary purpose of existence, the fulfilment of divine love. As both scientist and seer, she has constructed a cosmology that supports her theology uniting the realms of first and secondary cause, spirit and matter, heaven and earth, body and soul, rational and inspired thought.⁵⁶¹ Hildegard writes that the concept of light was very important in relation to her visions because it was by means of this that she believed she received direct communication from God. In her book *Scivias* she states:

It happened that, in the eleven hundred and forty-first year of the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, when I was forty-two years and seven months old, heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart and my whole breast, not like a burning but like a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch.⁵⁶²

She was not only concerned with imbalance and cosmic disorder but how that might have been initiated. In Book One of *Scivias*, Hildegard presents her vision of creation and the fall in a highly compressed and allegorical form.⁵⁶³ It depicts the presence of evil in the world through the fall of the angel of light into the abyss and the subsequent

⁵⁶¹ Marsha Newman, 'Christian Cosmology in Hildegard of Bingen's Illuminations', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 5 No.1 (2002), p. 1.

⁵⁶² Hozeski, p. 59.

⁵⁶³ Barbara Newman et al, 'Hildegard-*Scivias* synopsis
<<http://www.oxfordgirlschoir.co.uk/Hildegard/sciviassynopsis.pdf>> [accessed 11 September 2009]

deception imposed upon Adam and Eve by Lucifer. She sees a huge pit from which a foul smelling stench captures Adam.⁵⁶⁴ The iconography is unusual and difficult to understand. For example, in this text Eve appears as a shining cloud full of stars because she is the “mother of all living things,” and her unborn children are meant to replace the fallen angels.⁵⁶⁵ This vision deals with Adam and Eve at the moment of their fall. The depiction of this vision is incredibly miniature in the St Rupertsberg manuscript.⁵⁶⁶ This image compresses what would normally be two distinct scenes, the creation of Eve and the temptation, into a single miniature. But despite its unusual features, the image is remotely derived from the familiar creation of Eve iconography:

Then I saw as it were a great throng of living torches, very bright, kindled by a bolt of a fiery lightening from which they acquired a glowing splendor. And behold! There appeared a lake, very broad and deep, with a mouth like a well belching forth fiery smoke and a terrible stench. From the lake, too, came a hideous cloud of mist, which billowed out to touch something like a vein with deceiving eyes. Through it, cloud breathed upon a shining cloud, filled with stars upon stars, which issued from the beautiful form of a man in a region of light. Thus, the foul cloud cast the shining cloud and the human form out of that region.

After this a luminous splendour surrounded the place; and all the elements of the world, which had formerly lain in great peace, became turbulent and displayed frightful terrors.⁵⁶⁷

We find at the centre of this particular scene, midway between heaven and hell, the mother of all living makes her appearance. *In lieu* of the conventional woman that emerges from the side of Adam, Hildegard envisioned Eve as a bright starry cloud to which the artist gave the aspect of a tender green leaf. *Viriditas* for Hildegard meant more than a colour; the fresh green that recurs so many times in her visions represents the principle of all life, growth, and fertility flowing from the life-creating power of God.⁵⁶⁸ To quote Peter Dronke this *viriditas* is “the greenness of a paradise which

⁵⁶⁴ Newman, p. 56.

⁵⁶⁵ Newman et al, p. 1.

⁵⁶⁶ Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom* (California: University of California, 1987), p. 100. See *Scivias*, ed. by Adelgundis Führkotter and Angela Carlevaris, CCCM vols. 43-43a. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978).

⁵⁶⁷ Columba Hart & Bishop, p. 73.

⁵⁶⁸ Newman, p. 102.

knows no Fall,” “the earthly expression of the celestial sunlight.”⁵⁶⁹ Hildegard sees this vision as, “Eve with her innocent spirit, taken from the innocent Adam and pregnant with the whole multitude of mankind in her body, shining in the foreordination of God.”⁵⁷⁰ In the miniature, only the iconographic context hints at the meaning and enables us to recognise the enigmatic form as woman.

The stars within Eve’s body represent the children to be born of her, radiant as the angels that shine like living stars above her. At a glance the drawing reveals that the bright cloud is a potential heaven on earth. Both the image and the vision represent, in a highly condensed and graphic form, the widely held belief that humanity was made to replace the lost angels in heaven.⁵⁷¹ In juxtaposition with the scenes of Satan in hell and the good angels confirmed on high, torches kindled by a flash of lightening, the star spangled-cloud suggests that the children of Eve will replace those stars that have fallen.⁵⁷²

Through providing her own version of the Fall Hildegard introduces her own themes into the account we see in Genesis.⁵⁷³ Indeed, Hildegard largely exonerates Eve.⁵⁷⁴ She blames the fallen state of humanity most definitely and unquestionably on the devil who seduces an innocent woman, rather than as perceiving Eve as disobeying God. It was Lucifer who brought evil into the world and who was jealous of the harmonious state that existed between Adam and Eve and sought to disrupt it. One of Hildegard’s contemporaries, Bernard of Clairvaux, also believed in an ‘active’ devil. The following is an extract from a letter written by Bernard of Clairvaux to the abbot of St. John at Chartres:

⁵⁶⁹ Peter Dronke, ‘Tradition and Innovation in Medieval Western Colour-Imagery,’ *Erano Jahrbuch* 41 (1972) pp. 82, 84.

⁵⁷⁰ Columba Hart & Bishop, p. 77.

⁵⁷¹ Newman, p. 102.

⁵⁷² Newman, p. 103

⁵⁷³ Newman, p. 56.

⁵⁷⁴ Newman et al, p. 1.

Stolen waters are sweet; and for whosoever knows the devices of the devil, it is not doubtful that the angel of darkness is able to change himself into an angel of light, and to pour upon the thirsty soul those waters of which the sweetness is more bitter than wormwood. In truth, what other can be the suggester of scandals, the author of dissension, the troubler of unity and peace, except the devil, the adversary of truth, the envier of charity, the ancient foe of the human race, and the enemy of the cross of Christ?⁵⁷⁵

In the second vision in *Scivias*, it states that the devil only knew that the tree was forbidden because Eve informed him. Eve whose soul was pure and innocent was ‘invaded by the Devil through the seduction of the serpent for her own downfall.’ And why was it this way? Because the devil knew that the woman was more vulnerable and susceptible than the man and because Adam loved her so much, he would do anything she asked of him. Therefore, the devil knew that if he conquered Eve, he would also conquer Adam.⁵⁷⁶ Despite this, Hildegard argues that God has placed the light in all of humanity. Therefore it is within the power of the individual to be guided back having strayed from God. The will is the light of men and as the light penetrates all things, the will abounds in what it desires. In this desire, which a person takes to be his light, he often walks in the darkness of the evil deeds he wishes to carry out. But the darkness cannot overcome the will to the extent that it can take the knowledge of good away. It cannot keep a person from knowing what is good, even if good is not carried out.⁵⁷⁷

Peter Dronke, who carried out a series of critical studies based on the letters of Hildegard, states that the Berlin manuscript Lat. Qu. 674 contains a series of 56 letters, written by Hildegard of which the vast majority remain unknown. The copyist was not concerned with personal or historical aspects, but rather wished to make of each letter a

⁵⁷⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, letter XXI (circa A.D 1128) <http://www.ccel.org/bernard/letters.XXIV.html> [accessed 11 September 2009]

⁵⁷⁶ Columba Hart & Bishop, p. 77.

⁵⁷⁷ Commentary on the Johannine Prologue: Hildegard of Bingen,’ trans. by Barbara Newman, *Theology Today*, 60 (2003), 16-33 (P. 26).

treatise or homily.⁵⁷⁸ The following letter an extract in the third in the series and has probably been excerpted from a longer letter and refers to Lucifer:

‘The mountains ascend and the fields descend to the place you have established for them.’ That is: the ascent of the mountain means God’s might, and the descent of the field means his potential; and in these two parts he places and divides all things, for he has set the heaven into the height, and his own light—that is, the earth-beneath him, and he has ordained this placing in the whole of creation. Pride contradicted this, and claimed the likeness of equality with God, which cannot be, so it was accounted as naught by him—for if a man were without his wings of arms and hands, the human form which is in him would be accounted as nought. The Godhead prepared heaven and all its hidden places, and built up all creatures in their lands, and the earth sustains them. But pride’s effort at building lacks both head and wings, and Pride can scarcely stand even on one foot, and cannot walk.⁵⁷⁹

More than possibly any other writer of the twelfth century, Hildegard consistently returns to the theme of the war in heaven: God versus Lucifer, the epitome of pride. She understands this war to be the universe’s primal threat, and in doing so she inevitably invests it with something of the quality of Manichaean myth: in so far as Lucifer was not a puny rebel but a towering one and that the battle was a real issue with no foregone conclusion.⁵⁸⁰

In the first part of the above extract, Hildegard starts with an original allegorization of a verse from Psalm 103, the high hymnic praise of the creator of the cosmos. The mountains that rise signify his power and might; the fields sloping downwards, his latent capacity. Together, the actual and latent powers, Hildegard sees as being responsible for the making of heaven and earth. The mountains are heaven and the fields are earth. Hildegard also equates earth with the divine light. Dronke makes the suggestion that she was stimulated by the phrase in Psalm 108, ‘Amictus lumine sicut

⁵⁷⁸ Dronke, p. 183. Although a marginal entry shows that the MS belonged from an early period to S. Maria de Palatolis (Pfalzel bei Trier), it is not known whether any part of the MS was copied there. The hand that copied the *Vita*, the letters, and the ‘Berlin fragment’ in this MS, goes back to the start of the thirteenth century.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 183-184.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 184.

vestimento’-‘clothed with light as a garment’-and extended this by seeing the earth as God’s garment: of course, not one that he wears, but one that he spreads beneath him.⁵⁸¹ Later when Hildegard refers to ‘the earth sustains’ all creatures, we can see how appropriate it is that here the earth should also mean God’s light. The phrase, ‘has ordained this placing in the whole of creation (atque hoc in omni creatura fecit)’, is compressed and enigmatic, however it might suggest that the dividing into a heavenly and an earthly aspect extends to all that God brings forth. Hildegard then turns to the rebellion of Lucifer. He is Pride personified. Pride is a rival builder, who is set at naught (or reduced to nothingness). Pride then loses its essential character as an armless man, (note here the phrase ‘without the wings of arms and hands’, and its angel connotations) lacks essential human features. The condition of Pride-wingless, headless and limping, is at last made into a moral allegory. The last sentences of the extract imply a cosmological mythic perspective: there was a rival builder, but he was as unsuccessful in the ageless medium of bronze as in the earthly one of clay; he could not fashion any building, but only ravage those already built. The challenger was essentially destructive, not creative-what he achieved amounted to nothing, a production of negative effects. This gives new meaning to Hildegard’s opening allegory: both actually and potentially, the world is filled with the work of the victorious builder.

In *Scivias* Part One Vision Two, she records:

But Lucifer, who because of his pride was cast forth from celestial glory, was so great at the moment of his creation that he felt no defect either in his beauty or in his strength. Hence when he contemplated his beauty, and when he considered in himself the power of his strength, he discovered pride, which promised him that he might begin what he wished, because he could achieve what he had begun. And, seeing a place where he thought he could live, wanting to display his beauty and power there, he spoke thus within himself about God: “I wish to shine there as He does here!” And all his army assented, saying, “What you wish we also wish.” And when, elated with pride, he tried to achieve what he had

⁵⁸¹ Ibid, p. 141. Scotus Eriugena had called ‘the text of divine discourses (the Bible) and the sensible aspect of the visible world the two garments of Christ (duo vestimenta Christi)’. There is a remarkable archaic parallel to the notion of the earth as divine garment in the fragments of the pre-Socratic philosopher Pherekydes, however these were not accessible in Latin translation.

conceived, the jealousy of the Lord, reaching out in fiery blackness, cast him down with all his retinue, so that they were made burning instead of fair. Why did this happen?⁵⁸²

In response to this vision she records:

If God had not cast down their presumption, He would have been unjust, since He would have cherished those who wished to divide the wholeness of divinity. But He cast them down and reduced their impiety to nothing, as He removes from the sight of His glory all who try to oppose themselves to Him.⁵⁸³

Light and dark are a dualism Hildegard was very aware of and which to a great extent dominated her cosmology. At this point we proceed to see how the concept of light in her work is examined.

Hildegard's inner life had always been a mystery that she felt reluctant to discuss. In her personal memoirs forming part of her official biography, the *Vita*, she does not place any focus on her mystical experiences, or a deep sense of vocation. She reports that she had what she describes as a peculiar temperament, which doomed her to chronic ill health, yet at the same time, allowed a propensity for visions that she experienced from early on in her childhood. She believed that the things she could see were not visible to those around her. She was convinced of her ability to foretell the future. Her visual field was filled at all times with a strange luminosity that she later referred to as, 'the reflection of the Living Light.'⁵⁸⁴

For example, Hildegard writes, 'wretched I- and fragile creature that I am-began then to write with a trembling hand, even though I was shaken by countless illnesses. While I set about my task of writing, I looked up again to the true and living light as to what I should write down.'⁵⁸⁵ In this light she perceived various figures from human forms to elaborate architectural models, which she was able to interpret with the

⁵⁸² Columba Hart & Bishop, p. 74.

⁵⁸³ Ibid, p. 74.

⁵⁸⁴ Columba Hart & Bishop, p.11.

⁵⁸⁵ Fox, p. 6.

assistance of what she described as a heavenly voice. For example, in her *Book of Divine Works* Vision One: 1 based on the Origin of Life, she records, ‘And I saw within the mystery of God, in the midst of the southern breezes, a wondrously beautiful image. It had a human form, and its countenance was of such beauty and radiance that I could have more easily gazed at the sun than at that face.’

On more rare occasions she came into contact with a greater brightness, which she called the “Living Light.” Her encounter with this light suggested a direct encounter with God.⁵⁸⁶ However, there was some reluctance on the part of Hildegard to record the visions initially. She said:

Although I saw and heard these things, I nevertheless refused to write them because of doubt and evil opinion and because of the diversity of other people’s words, not so much out of stubbornness, but out of humility, until I became sick, pressed down by the scourge of God. I was sick for a long time with many different illnesses. Eventually, with the testimony of a certain noble man and a young woman of good wishes, I started to write what I had searched out and come upon secretly. As soon as I did that, I became healthy with a received strength, and knowing-as I said-the profoundness of the narration of books, I was able to bring my work to completion with difficulty, taking ten years.⁵⁸⁷

She begins to describe more fully the living light as the Mystery of God as showing God’s intent and the human potential to receive and manifest it. Christ as the eternal Word, the ‘Dawn of Justice’ is imaged as the historical Jesus, who has in turn become the Christ of faith. As the cosmic Christ, he is the manifestation and power of this ‘Living Light.’ The Son of Man, who came to earth as a servant, now enfolds the Kingdom in wings of divine justice. Christ, who is God’s Wisdom, is presented as a winged being like the Sophia icons in the Eastern churches.⁵⁸⁸

Hildegard’s mystical experience of the Living Light often exhausted her. Yet it brought her healing and relief, too. Hildegard was always reticent to describe her

⁵⁸⁶ Columba Hart & Bishop, p. 11. A fuller account can be found in a letter to Guibert of Gembloux “de modo visionis suae,” Ep. 2, ed. Pitra: 331-34.

⁵⁸⁷ Hozeski, p. 3.

⁵⁸⁸ Craine, p. 54.

visionary experiences. Light conceptions where the seer speaks of a bright, incorporeal “heaven” within the soul, of a light which speaks and words that illumine, of a translucent medium which reflects both creatures and the living Light itself, are typical of the light-metaphysics and epistemology inherited from theologians such as Augustine on the one hand to Pseudo-Dionysius on the other. For example, Augustine compares the corporeal light in which the heavenly bodies shine to a certain spiritual light, “incorporeal and proper in itself,” in which may be perceived the similitudes of bodies through the mediation of angels. But “still other is that light by which the soul is illumined so that it may perceive all things with a true understanding, either in itself or in the light. For that light is God himself.”⁵⁸⁹ It is possible that Hildegard would have known this passage, which appears to be an exact description of her “living Light” and its reflection, from Augustine’s Genesis commentary. Further, in Augustine’s *Confessions*, he writes:

I entered with the eye of my soul, such as it was, I saw the Light that never changes casting its rays over the same eye of my soul, over my mind. It was not the common light of day that is seen by the eye of every living thing of flesh and blood, nor was it some more spacious light of the same sort, as if the light of day were to shine far, far brighter than it does and fill all space with a vast brilliance. What I saw was something quite, quite different from any light we know on earth. It shone above my mind, but not in the way that oil floats above water or the sky hangs over the earth. It was above me because it was itself the Light that made me, and I was below because I was made by it. All who know the truth know this Light, and all who know this Light know eternity. It is the Light that charity knows.⁵⁹⁰

The way that Hildegard describes her experience of the light could not be taught or learned. Hozeski argues, and the way in which Hildegard speaks of it, it might serve as a reminder of Augustine’s theory of illumination.⁵⁹¹ For example Hildegard writes:

⁵⁸⁹ Barbara Newman, ‘Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validations’, *Church History* 1985, 163-175 (p. 168). Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 12.30-31, *Corpus scriptorium ecclesiasticorum latinorum* (Vienna, 1866-), vol. 28, pt.1, p. 425.

⁵⁹⁰ Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), p.p. 146-147.

⁵⁹¹ Hozeski, p. 19.

The light that I see is thus not spatial, but it is far, far brighter than a cloud that carries the sun. I can measure neither height, nor length, nor breadth in it; and I call it “the reflection of the Living Light.” And as the sun, the moon, and the stars appear in water, so writings, sermons, virtues, and certain human actions take form for me and gleam within it.⁵⁹² There is, in Augustine’s theory of illumination, an indirect but all the same unmistakable dependence on Plato quite apart from his own testimony that “none come nearer to us than the Platonists.”⁵⁹³

It cannot be known for certain just how much if at all, Hildegard was influenced in her visionary writings by Augustine and even though Hildegard occupied a central place at the crossroads of twelfth century culture, the question of “sources and influences” has always presented difficulties for students of her work. One answer to this question has seemingly already been addressed: Hildegard’s prophetic persona demanded that she present herself to be a “simple and unlearned woman.” Although her writings demonstrated that she was well-versed in both spiritual and theological writers, she almost never cited her sources. In addition to this, her distinctive literary style makes it difficult to recognise quotations, with the exceptions of scriptural texts. As it was the case that the exegetical tradition in which she worked was cumulative and conservative, anyone of a number of writers might be cited with equal plausibility as the source for the interpretation or doctrine in question. It was in exceptionally rare cases that we are able to point confidently towards an individual writer for example, the *Shepherd of Hermas* in *Scivias* III.8. Certainly in *Scivias* the most persuasive influences are the Bible and its commentaries, the Benedictine Rule, the Liturgy, along with the works of people such as Augustine, Jerome and Bede. Further, Hildegard’s monastic heritage is also clearly evident. She was steeped in Divine Office especially in relation to her idea

⁵⁹² Hozeski, p. 18.

⁵⁹³ Aurelius Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. by M. Dodd’s assisted by G. Wilson and J.J. Smith in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, vol 2, ed. by Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 168.

of heaven which can be read in *Scivias* III.13. This vision places emphasis not upon on the mystical union nor the vision of God but rather the unending liturgy of the saints.⁵⁹⁴

It was the Neoplatonic tradition which had a strong influence on her cosmology, especially through authors such as Alan of Lille with whom she seemed to have an affinity and who possibly may have come to her attention through John Scotus Eriugena. Although it is possible that she may have only had knowledge of this author indirectly through Honorius Augustodunensis, who popularised his work. In terms of her contemporaries, Honorius stands closest to Hildegard. He was a prolific author and was also a Benedictine. Of course she was also very familiar with the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux. Despite Hildegard's conservatism nothing she ever wrote can be mistaken for the work of another author. Her writings are charged with an urgency regarding her prophetic mission, shaped by her powerfully original visionary gift.⁵⁹⁵

Certainly for both Augustine and medieval Augustinians, such light-speculation is, with rare exceptions, a mixture of metaphor and metaphysics. In other words, for Augustine and medieval Augustinians, such light speculation is usually a blend of the supernatural and otherworldly, which can only be expressed in human language. What might be envisaged is a mystical ascent that involves only brief moments of ecstasy as opposed to Hildegard's experience of continuous illumination.⁵⁹⁶

At the age of sixty-five, Hildegard had an amazing, overpowering vision of the Living Light. Hildegard writes:

⁵⁹⁴ Hozeski, p. 44.

⁵⁹⁵ Hozeski, p. 45.

⁵⁹⁶ Newman, p. 168. Taken from Richard of Saint Victor, *Benjamin Minor*, trans. Grover Zinn, *The Twelve Patriarchs* (New York, 1979), p. 130. For Further reference on Augustine's Genesis commentary see Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 12.30-31 For analysis of Hildegard's visions in Augustinian terms see Kent Kraft, "The Eye Sees More than the Heart Knows: The Visionary Cosmology of Hildegard of Bingen" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1977), chap. 2. The theology of Dionysius did particularly influence the mainstream theology. The Benedictines paid little attention to it. Whilst Dionysius did not exert a great influence in this respect, it was important for Scholasticism though hardly felt at all within the scope of spirituality. That said, it did appeal to lone spiritual writers in the Latin west; one such example is the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*.

It was in the year 1163 of the Incarnation of our Lord, when the oppression of the See of Rome under Henry, the Roman emperor, was not yet ended. A voice from heaven resounded saying to me:

O wretched creature and daughter of much toil, even though you have been thoroughly seared, so to speak, by countless grave sufferings of the body, the depth of the mysteries of God has completely permeated you. Transmit for the benefit of humanity an accurate account of what you see with your inner eye and what you hear with the inner ear of your soul. As a result, human beings should learn how to know their Creator and should no longer refuse to adore God worthily and reverently. Therefore, write this down-not as your heart is inclined but rather as my testimony wishes. For I am without any beginning or end of life. This vision has not been contrived by you, nor has it been conceived by any other human being. Instead, I have established all of it from before the beginning of the world. And just as I knew the human species even before its creation, I also saw in advance everything that humanity would need.⁵⁹⁷

Upon hearing this, Hildegard says that she began to write with a trembling hand, even though she was shaken by countless illnesses. While she set about her task of writing, she looked up again to the “true and living light” as to what she should write down. She goes on to say that for everything she had written in her earlier visions and came to know later she saw the heavenly mysteries while her “body was fully awake and while I was in my right mind.” She continues:

I saw it with the inner eye of my spirit and grasped it with my inner ear. In this connection I was never in a condition similar to sleep, nor was I ever in a state of spiritual rapture, as I have already emphasised in connection with my earlier visions. In addition, I did not explain anything in testimony of the truth that I might have derived from the realm of human sentiments, but rather only what I have received from the heavenly mysteries. And once again I heard a voice from heaven instructing me and it said, “Write down what I tell you.”⁵⁹⁸

The result seven years later was her Book of Divine Works in which this quotation was included. This was a cosmological book showing the close connection between the world, humanity and God. There was a definite difference between this book and her first one. Her theology was distinctly becoming a cosmology showing that God’s love

⁵⁹⁷ Fox, p. 5.

⁵⁹⁸ Fox, p. 5.

now becomes explicit in the incarnate Word of God. To illustrate this active participation of Christ the following extract is taken from the Book of Divine Works:

“Equality lives in the Son.” In what way? Before time, all creatures were in the Father he organised them in Himself and afterwards the Son created them in fact. How is that to be understood? It is similar to the situation among human beings when one carries the knowledge of a great work in herself and then later through her word brings it to the light of day, so that it comes into the world with great acclaim. The Father puts things in order; the Son causes them to be. For the Father organised everything within and the Son brought everything to fullness in deed. He is the light from the light, the light that was in the beginning before all time, in eternity. This light is the Son who flashes forth from the father and is He through whom all creatures come to be.⁵⁹⁹

Craine suggests that in Hildegard’ writings the Word had always been present in God’s eternal counsel, revealed in the Incarnation and passion of Jesus, the Christ. According to Hildegard, due to his life, death and resurrection his transformative energy is actively at work throughout the entire cosmos. Through the Incarnate Word, all creation can be brought into the fullness of creation. This Trinitarian love of God inflames the depth of the human psyche to encourage discernment of the right pathway to enable Christ and the human being to give birth to actions of love and manifestations of fruitfulness.⁶⁰⁰

What we have discovered thus far about Hildegard is that she was indeed a very gifted mystic, able to receive the Living Light, the voice of God and interpret the visions she was presented with. The picture we are presented with of Hildegard is one of virtuosity, one who cared passionately about God, Christ and humanity and where in the last instance she was keen to show the error of our ways and urge us to follow the path back to God. However, contrastingly, Miriam Rita Tessera questions the honourable intentions of Hildegard concerning in particular, the crusades and asks the

⁵⁹⁹ Fox, p. 278. The extract forms part of a letter written by Hildegard to Bishop Eberhard II of Bamberg. The basis of her letter is a reply to an explanation he requested from her regarding what might be termed as a theological thesis. He asked for an explanation of the following: Eternity lives in the Father; equality in the Son; and in the Holy Spirit the union of eternity and equality.

⁶⁰⁰ Fox, Vision One: 1, p. 8.

question, was Hildegard ‘Crusading against the Saracens or Crusading against Deadly Sin?’⁶⁰¹

On the day before his departure for the Holy Land in 1177, Philip of Alsace, count of Flanders, took it upon himself to contact Hildegard of Bingen by letter, the purpose of which was to ask her illumination and advice about his crusade undertaking, knowing that Hildegard was rumoured to be a prophetess.⁶⁰² He wanted to know what she could tell him from her visions concerning the state and fate of his own soul. Relying upon the biblical authority of St James’s epistle, (James 5. 16), Phillip requested Hildegard’s intervention because he was aware that his condition as layman prevented him from achieving a more perfect way of living; nevertheless he also wished to show his *pietas*, one of the virtues required in the ideal prince that the count tried consciously to embody throughout his lifetime stating that: ‘I love Christ’s servants and friends with all my heart and I willingly honour them in all ways with highest reverence.’

In his letter, Philip was insistent on the importance of Hildegard’s role of *ancilla Christi*, mediating between the divine will and the *peccator et indignus prince*, who is stained with his own fault and asks for the Lord’s mercy thanks to the prayers of the abbess. It is significant that the count mentioned the very bad *fama actuum meorum* just after having announced his departure for Jerusalem: since 1175, it is in fact rumoured that Philip of Flanders had taken the cross to expiate the atrocities he committed during the war against England. He was also charged with the death of his brother Matthew, which occurred during the siege of Driencourt ‘because he himself, count of Flanders and Vermandois, who was very powerful in rousing those wars, could have much influence on restoring peace’. Furthermore, on 12 August 1175, Philip had the knight

⁶⁰¹ *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. by Susan B. Edgington (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 77. ‘Philip Count of Flanders and Hildegard of Bingen: Crusading against the Saracens or Crusading against Deadly Sin? Miriam Rita Tessera, p. 76.

⁶⁰² *Ibid*, p. 76.

Walter of Fontaines beaten to death because he was said to be Countess Isabel's lover: the count was pitiless towards the corpse and ordered it to be exposed to public scorn. As Hildegard made reference to this well-known event in her answer, Philip's letter of enquiry, preserved in the Riesencodex, is to be regarded as authentic, even if partly adapted.⁶⁰³ Primarily, the count's journey to the Holy land in 1177 was intended as a penitential pilgrimage carried out as a military *servitium divinum* in the East lasting one or two years, in accordance with Pope Alexander III's innovative view. Notwithstanding this, Philip shaded the penitential significance of his crusade and replaced it with a chivalrous idea of crusading which belonged to the tradition of the counts of Flanders. Despite his reasoning in calling upon Hildegard's guidance which was to ask her advice on 'what I ought to do to exalt the name of Christianity in these days and to bring low the terrible savagery of the Saracens', and 'would it be useful for him to stay in that land or return?' The count's view mirrored the notion of the Christian re-conquest that originated from the reform papacy, guided by God to deliver the countries once belonging to the Christian faith from tyrannical Saracen oppression. However, Philip conceived this idea of crusade in a secular way, shared with contemporary French epic poems, where Christendom was a 'geographical, social and cultural being' rather than a purely religious one. In short, Philip cared little about the 'libertas Ecclesiae' and furthermore, turned to his own advantage the theological reading of the crusade as an enterprise ruled by God's will, which were recurrent in the Gregorian papacy's letters. As a result, the *iter Ierosolimitanum* changed into an occasion for personal prowess and knightly pride, deeply rooted values in the crusading tradition of Philip's family.⁶⁰⁴

In accordance with the history of humankind previously narrated by Hildegard, in her response to Philip, she brings in the redeeming cross the *signaculum crucis* able

⁶⁰³ Ibid, p. 80.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 81.

to secure God's mercy for the sinful count: You too, take refuge in the living God with the sign of the cross because of all your negligences and sins and all your unjust judgements. The sign of the cross was related to both the spiritual power of Christ's cross and to the material sign of the cross tokening Philip's crusader vow. According to Hildegard, crusading deserves to be praised for its penitential significance because the crusade was an extraordinary event where God's infinite mercy was offering to men to save themselves as it was announced in Bernard of Clairvaux's well-known epistle 363 when he preached the second crusade.

Having reminded the count of the remission of sins, Hildegard now prompted Philip to hold out against the infidels ready to destroy the *fontum fidei*, which was the earthly Jerusalem, and also the source and symbol of Christian faith: 'And if the time shall come when the infidels seek to destroy the fountain of faith, then withstand them by God's grace, as hard as you are able.' She urged the count to reflect on *infidelitas*: this condition, embodied in the pagans' fighting against Christ and his church as instruments of the devil, was a visible symbol of the sinful condition marking humankind as a whole after the fall of Adam, and marking every human being who was determined to depart from God by his own will. Crusading against the Saracens would thus benefit not only humanity but the count himself, whereby the count's own troubled soul could be expiated and able to return to God.⁶⁰⁵

This now leads us into examining the *place* of humanity within creation, concentrating upon Adam and Eve and their relationship not only with each other, but with the cosmos. Conveying the relationship between Christ, humanity and the cosmos and the recognition of the sacred in all aspects of creation it is arguable that this becomes more urgent in Hildegard's theology than possibly any other mystic. In this

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, pp. 83-84.

section we will begin to see the deeper dimension of her thinking in relation to sin, redemption, the Word and the ultimate goal of cosmic stability.

Creation, states Hildegard, begins with the love of God and within it contains all manner of things. She sees humanity's fall and redemption through the incarnation of God's Son. Her vision of creation then, is one which holds a foreknowledge of the drama concerning the fall and our subsequent redemption, but finds in this its own essential meaning. Her vision of creation is deeply Christocentric and anthropocentric.⁶⁰⁶ These elements are reflected in the *Book of Divine Works*.

Hildegard asserts that it was always God's intention to create humanity. Humanity stands in the midst of the structure of the world. Similarly in her vision of the 'cosmic wheel' which supports all creation, humanity lies at the centre. She emphasises in *Scivias*, that the fall of Adam and Eve bore repercussions for creation in its entirety.

She states:

The devil did not know that the tree had been forbidden to Adam and Eve, but the devil found this out through regretful questioning and through their answers. This form breathed forth into a clear region a white cloud which contained a large number of stars in itself and which had sent forth down through itself the fair form of a man: this signifies that in this garden of pleasantness, the devil-through the seduction of the serpent-approached Eve in order to get her cast out from the garden. Eve had an innocent soul which she had taken from innocent Adam. Adam carried in his body the brightness necessary for all of the multitude of the human race-according to the pre-ordered plan of God. Why did the devil approach Eve? Because the devil knew the tenderness of a woman was more easily conquered than the strength of a man. The devil also saw that Adam's love for Eve was burning so strongly that if the devil was able to conquer Eve, whatever she might say to Adam, Adam would do the same. And the cloud threw the form of the man out of itself: this signifies that the same ancient seducer, expelling Eve and Adam from the seat of blessedness by treachery sent them into the darkness of destruction. How did the devil do this? Clearly the devil seduced Eve first, so that she rather than Adam was able to lead the other creatures to disobedience, because she had been made from his rib. Because of this, a woman hurls a man down more quickly, when he easily takes her to himself, not shrinking back from her words.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁶Bowie, p. 26. See *Book of Divine Works*, ed. by Matthew Fox (Santa Fe: Bear & Co, 1987), p. 62. See also pp. 131ff.

⁶⁰⁷Hozeski, p. 18.

Hildegard believed that God had asserted his will in the creation of both sexes, shaping them in different ways and from different material to give them their distinctiveness.⁶⁰⁸

In the first creation account we are informed of the following, ‘So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (Gen 1. 27).’⁶⁰⁹ Therefore, Hildegard made the point that woman is as much a part of the creator’s design as man is and this understanding remained unaffected by the Aristotelian tradition that the female of the species is an accident of nature and the result of a ‘corruption of integrity’.⁶¹⁰ But the Fall ‘transformed man and woman in body and mind’. Before the Fall they were immune to disease. In the perfected state, Adam had every skill and limitless power of perception. Sin however, rendered weak the bodies designed for immutability, disturbing their sexual functions. Earlier authors had been puzzled by the nature of human sexuality in paradise. St Augustine stated that sexual reproduction would have occurred then but ‘without the infection of lust’ and ‘under the authority of the will.’⁶¹¹

Hildegard suggests it was after the Fall that Adam and Eve discovered that they possessed the capacity for conception and childbirth. She argues that sexual union in Paradise would have been ‘in moderation’ and ‘without the present sexual embrace.’ So the act itself would be very different from how we understand and practice it today. She seems to be suggesting then that the union would not actually be of a sexual nature, and that it would only take place from time to time. This appears to imply that although procreation is God’s wish, the action itself would somehow be of a ‘purer’ nature.⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁸ Bernard W. Scholz, ‘Hildegard Von Bingen on the Nature of Woman’, *American Benedictine Review*, 31 (1980), p. 366. *Scivias* German trans. by M. Bockeler, *Hildegard von Bingen: Wisse die Wege*, 5th ed. (Salzburg, 1963).

⁶⁰⁹ *The Holy Bible*, NRSV (London: Harper Collins, 1997), Genesis 1. 27.

⁶¹⁰ Scholz, p. 367. This quote derives from ‘*Isidori Etymologiarum Sive Originum Liber*’, XI, 2, 20, trans. by William D. Sharpe.

⁶¹¹ Scholz, p. 366. This is to be found in *Sancti Aurelii Augustini De Civitate Dei* 14, 20, 23, CCSL 43, xiv, 2 (Turnhout 1955) pp. 443, 445.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*

Concerning Hildegard's thoughts on the physiological difference of woman, Scholz argues that according to Hildegard, the first sin turned the blood of Adam's children into poisonous foam from which new life emerges and women became subject to menstruation. Before the Fall, woman was like primeval earth yielding its green without effort. Now woman is akin to a 'barren field that must be broken open by the sharp edge of the plough so that the seed can be sown; she can fulfil her role only under painful labour and with much patience.'⁶¹³

Hildegard made a case for woman being biologically different from as opposed to being inferior to man, accepting the ancient association of the male with strength and the female with softness derived from Cicero and Varro. In Genesis 2. 7 and 2. 22, where we see a description of the different ways in which Adam and Eve were created, providing Hildegard with an explanation for the distinctiveness between man and woman. As man was created from soil into human form, he thus transports the creative energies of the earth in his bones, flesh and veins. Woman however was not made of earth but of Adam's flesh. In this way she does not possess the solid core of earth that the male does. Adam being earth born was awakened to life with the rest of animate creation, undergoing a complete metamorphosis. Eve was born of the flesh and did not have the experience of such a transformation.⁶¹⁴

At no point did Hildegard question the subjection of woman to man in her writings, this being a fundamental aspect of the social and political order of the time.⁶¹⁵ When God united man with woman, it was his intention to bind both strength and weakness. Like the moon, which receives its power from the sun, woman must be devoted to man and be prepared to serve him. Mary the mother of God was made subject to a male guardian and remained subject to him. Hildegard views this merely as

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁵ Scholz, p. 369.

being respectful. She does however present a case for mutual dependency. Man and woman were therefore meant to complement each other.⁶¹⁶

However, it was John Chrysostom who described women as a “necessary evil, a natural temptation, a domestic peril, a deadly fascination, and a painful ill.”⁶¹⁷ St. Paul stated that, “women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.” (1Corinthians 14. 34)⁶¹⁸

On a more positive note, Abelard in a letter to Heloise emphasised the roles played by women in the Old and New Testament, and in early Christianity, arguing Christ’s authority for the monastic vocation of women and identifying modern abbesses with early deaconesses. He makes a point of repeating Heloise’s description of women as the weaker sex, but only to show what they are capable of. Abelard thus refers to ‘holy women who renounced the world,’ giving up their homes and possessions to follow Christ. He refers to the devotion demonstrated by female followers and how Jesus honoured their devotion. He points out that in the gospels only women ministered to Jesus, taking care of his daily needs. He mentions Mary washing his feet with her tears and wiping his feet with her hair. He states:

Behold that a woman anoints the holy of holies and believes him to be such; him whom the prophet [Daniel] had foretold in words, she proclaims with deeds. What is this kindness of the Lord, I ask, what merit/authority of women that he offered his head as well as his feet only to women to be anointed? What is this prerogative of the weaker sex I beseech, that a woman should anoint the highest Christ with anointed from his conception with all the *unguents* of the Holy Spirit and as if consecrating him with bodily sacraments as king and priest, that is making him bodily the anointed Christ?⁶¹⁹

Abelard continues by expressing that ‘women gave the first examples of the religious profession in Anna and Mary, but they played other roles in which they were not

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, p. 369.

⁶¹⁷ ‘*Malleus Maleficarum*’, (The Hammer of Witches), a treatise on witches written by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, published in 1487.

⁶¹⁸ *The Holy Bible*, NRSV (London: Harper Collins, 1997).

⁶¹⁹ Joan Ferrante, ‘Medieval Women Latin Letters’, *Epistolae* (Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning), <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/182.html> [accessed 18 March 2009] Muckle, “The Letter of Heloise on Religious Life and Abelard’s First Reply” MS 17 (1955) ep.6, p.253-81

inferior to the strength of the virile sex.’ For example, ‘Debora as judge when men were deficient, Judith destroying the enemy like David with Goliath.’⁶²⁰ It was a woman who gave birth to Christ and a woman whom God chose to take his body from. Abelard argues that the birth of Christ gave more honour to the female body than circumcision does to the male. He explains that Christ’s instruction to the woman of Samaria demonstrated that her virtue was more pleasing as her nature was weaker and through her many were converted, whereas the magi, although illumined by the star, converted only themselves. This is a letter of great length, which highlights many other examples of the strength of the female sex.⁶²¹ Yet although this might be the case, as woman arguably caused man’s downfall it is by woman that evil is overcome. Woman brought death upon humanity but Mary through the incarnation, defeated death. Woman then, becomes a necessary instrument in the redemption plan.⁶²²

In Hildegard’s *Book of the Rewards of Life*, she expresses how man and woman are able to signify the divinity and humanity that were united in the Son of God. As the life-Bearer, she views woman as being symbolic of the humanness of Christ in a deeper sense whilst maintaining a fundamental interdependence with man. She is able to assist him to become who he *can* be whilst at the same time, being all that *she* too, can be.⁶²³

Craine argues that Hildegard existed in a culture that associated woman with the sinful body. This severely depleted her role in creation as well as redemption. However, Hildegard paid little attention to this idea.⁶²⁴ Throughout her visionary writings, the female is never depicted as being lesser than the male. The portrayal is always one of equality and complementarity.

⁶²⁰ Ibid, p. 253-81.

⁶²¹ Ibid, p. 253-81.

⁶²² Scholz, p. 372.

⁶²³ Hozeski, p. 98.

⁶²⁴ Craine, p. 92.

Although Hildegard writes that it was the intention that man and woman should complement each other, they must also support each other. She believed that in marriage, there is mutual dependence. The woman ought to be passive in certain ways such as where love and sex are concerned and should respond only to the male initiative and not herself become the initiator. But Hildegard had a different opinion to that of the tradition of her time where woman was thought to be more sensual than the man, believing that a woman's sexual passion needs to be awakened by man.⁶²⁵

Hildegard saw human sexuality as a natural function, symbolic of the supernatural love and union between husband and wife and a legitimate source of pleasure if used for procreation in marriage.

She wrote that through human sexuality the devil has a chance to put out his snares and is able to boast that his power is to be found in the manner in which man is conceived and that man is in his hands. Satan senses that we seek our own pleasure rather than the joy that children will bring. She held traditional views concerning the Augustinian idea that the stain of original sin is transmitted to the foetus through the parent's sexual passion.⁶²⁶ There is not just the question of how God intended the relationship to be between man and woman to consider, there is also the connection and relationship between body and soul to take into account. Throughout life on earth they are destined to be united.⁶²⁷ Craine highlights the necessity of recognising the image of God and our own symbolic likeness to that image in the following way: We have forgotten our true origin, says Hildegard. Hildegard explains the power of body and soul in Vision Four: 104, *Book of Divine Works*:

If we behave correctly, the elements will keep to their appointed path. But if we succumb to evil deeds, we will draw down upon ourselves elementary forces with punishing blows of fate. Of course, the body deals with the soul according

⁶²⁵ Scholz, p. 376.

⁶²⁶ Scholz, p. 379.

⁶²⁷ Craine, p. 83. *Book of Divine Works*, Vision Four: 2, p. 82.

to the body's own desires, and God judges us according to our work-either for praise or for retribution.⁶²⁸

This is connected to an awakening on the part of the soul and body together, working inter-actively. We must reach into our souls which are like a field and “root out the useless grasses, thorns and briars” to see the beauty that glistens in that soil. However, this takes work on the part of the individual. This passage indicates that if the individual diverts from the path of righteousness, it leaves it self open to the snares of the devil. Therefore, the human must work diligently so that the soul becomes abundant in its nature as a result of the hard work produced by the physical body.⁶²⁹

She goes on to state:

In this connection, the soul flows through the whole body along with the power of thought, speech, and breath like a wind blowing through a house. As long as the body cooperates with the soul, the body will stay rooted to the spot and be so heavy that it cannot free itself from its close attachment to the Earth. But if the body is renewed by its living soul,-something that will take place on the Day of Judgement-it will become so light that it can fly off like a bird on pinions. So long as the soul abides within the body, it experiences God because it comes from God. So long as it performs its service within creatures, it cannot see God.⁶³⁰

Here, Hildegard expresses the importance of the soul and its movement through the body, using the allegory of wind being blown through a house. Everything here is in a flowing state. However, she seems to make a contradiction by saying that although the body must cooperate with the soul, which one would imagine represents perfect harmony, it does not initially appear so in this case because Hildegard goes on to say that the body will remain rooted to the spot, as though chained. *But* while the body is on earth, both body and soul have a purpose in living and must work accordingly to achieve that purpose and therefore it is a good thing for the body and soul to be rooted to earth in order that the purpose can be accomplished. When judgement day takes

⁶²⁸ Fox, p. 127.

⁶²⁹ Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1985), p. 99.

⁶³⁰ *Book of Divine Works*, ed. by Matthew Fox (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), p. 127.

place, the soul will be able to express itself in its truest state. But while the soul performs its function within the body, it is unable to see God.

She goes on:

But if it is taken outside its bodily abode and appears before God's countenance, it will know its own essence as well as whatever adhered to the soul while it dwelt within the body. Since the soul will recognise the splendour of its own worthiness, it will ask to have back again its bodily abode so that the body, too, can attain an awareness of its own splendour. Therefore, the soul will eagerly await in time to come the Day of Judgement. For then, of course, it will be free of its dear garment, the body. If the soul should receive the body back, it will behold God's splendour in perfection along with the angels.⁶³¹

What Hildegard is describing here is the soul in its own glory. It is only when the soul is freed from the body that it will be able to see its own fruitfulness. At that point it may once again be joined with a body so that the body itself can radiate the light that shines from the soul and will thus become apparent to the eye of the beholder. The soul freeing itself from the body then is hugely symbolic in terms of its return to perfection and glorification. It is in this instance that it takes on its own sense of brilliance. This is the soul in its perfected state.

Hildegard through this vision is expressing the necessity of the soul to the body and the inter-relatedness of the two. She realises that the relationship between the two remain a mystery, but God shows her how he intended the two to work together. Expanding further on this, it is also clear that humanity does not necessarily recall its intended relationship with God and this presents two problems in effect. In the *Book of Divine Merits* IV 14, Hildegard explains that humanity is too caught up in its humanness, rather than an equal measure of the physical and the spiritual. It is the understanding of the function of the human body in assisting the soul whilst on earth that is lacking in the individual. She states that pleasures of the material world are too inviting. The material world serves a function that is to help the soul to grow. Material effects are merely there to be used as instruments in this task. So she takes to task those

⁶³¹ Fox, p. 127.

who do not sit with the Holy Spirit and who desire only 'physical and fallen things,' by casting aside the 'fleshly desires' one can manifest itself everywhere'. By this she means that the person who recognises the spiritual qualities of the self and is at least for much of the time, able to behave in a way that is spiritual, can manifest this spirituality in an external way. This would also allow others to be affected and influenced by it.

Hildegard sees no pleasure in possessions; to her they have no value.⁶³² It is not an easy path for the soul or indeed the body, as Hildegard points out, and there are many things to be aware of in our own human behaviour, however, in order that we can work with God for the good of the world, there must be a unity of body and soul working in harmony together.⁶³³ Not only are body and soul meant to work in partnership but also male and female are meant to be true partners. Man and woman exist in a specific historical context, relationship and body. They were not created as solitary beings, but as beings that would recognise that they are made of each other-drawn together in a bond of friendship and complete surrender to one another. Hildegard understood the interdependent relatedness of men and women.⁶³⁴

Hildegard understood that in order for the body and soul to function properly, it required certain things to be in place in order to promote moderation and balance.

In her third vision, part 1 (*Book of Divine Works*), she discusses the humors (choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholic) that make up the human being and shows how these qualities can be affected when they are in conflict with each other. She explains how the various qualities of the wind and air can affect the humors and that sometimes, the wind for example, can produce the effect of weakening the individual, whilst at other times it might strengthen it. She states that the winds are integral to maintaining worldly balance and that this is also influential in the human being. She says that the

⁶³² Hildegard of Bingen: *The Book of the Rewards of Life*, trans. by Bruce W. Hozeski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 182.

⁶³³ Craine, p. 86. *Book of Divine Works*, Vision: Four: 2, p. 82.

⁶³⁴ Craine, p. 90.

breath of the winds can alter the humors and this can produce ill health or good health.⁶³⁵

Clearly the physical/mental and emotional states of the individual were important to her. Hildegard understood the necessity for balance, without this, it is not merely the person who suffers, but it will also produce a negative effect on the cosmos. Therefore for Hildegard, viriditas and fecundity are important aspects of maintaining balance across the created order, not just within nature. The sinfulness of humanity produces a devastating effect on all sources of life where the Word of God is placed at the very centre. This is further explained in *The Book of the Rewards of Life* where Hildegard describes a vision she had where she saw a very tall human figure that stretched out from the heavens down into the abyss. The figure is shining with brightness, so bright that Hildegard states she was unable to fully look at it. The figure is the Word of God made manifest through the Incarnation and who stands mighty in the centre of creation, controlling the winds about him. This is representative of his power within creation itself. There is a fiery cloud and in its midst is a fiery crowd who had been blessed by God and who were united. Hildegard then describes a storm cloud sustained by the figure in which the blessed dwell. They are being shown images of sinful behaviour which they must respond to. Gradually darkness begins to build where many lost souls are visible. These are the ones who have been seduced by the devil and who are crying out. The main theme of this vision then is the consequences that face those who turn away from God and who are drawn away from him, according to Hildegard. The figure remains blazing with light, watching those who have been deceived move away from him.⁶³⁶

⁶³⁵ Fox, pp. 57-58.

⁶³⁶ Newman, p. 69.

Conclusion

We now have a more informed idea of the nature of some of Hildegard's visions through which she has full recognition of the drama presenting itself through creation that includes the incarnation, sin and redemption. The fall proved to be a drastic event for humankind. She views this as becoming rectified when humankind takes its place before God in place of the angels who fell from grace. There is also the recognition that human goodness has become distorted as a result of the Fall. The balance of both nature and humanity is important because it reflects as a whole and is not restricted to merely the individual. Hildegard understood this. Her visions illustrated the full apocalyptic picture of humanity. The urgency was there in her writings for humanity to recognise the importance of understanding the whole cosmic portrait and the place of the Cosmic Christ within it. Equally at the heart of this lies the call for the masculine and feminine to be rebalanced. Without this, humanity will remain embedded in its apocalyptic scenario.

We now follow on with the theology and cosmology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Chapter Four

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and his Cosmology

The posthumous fame acquired by Teilhard de Chardin was, unfortunately, acquired at the expense of any proper appraisal of him as a French theologian of the first half of the twentieth century. His identity, whether as theologian, philosopher, mystic or scientist, has been passionately contested, according to Grummet. The phenomenon of 'Teilhardianism', as the body of 'orthodoxy' that was created by many of his most ardent disciples has been termed, should be distinguished from the theology of Teilhard himself so that the latter can be subject to proper scrutiny.⁶³⁷ Even Jacques Maritain draws a clear distinction between the faith and religious experience of Teilhard himself and the ideas propagated by the 'literature of propaganda and its enraptured ecclesiastical retinue'.⁶³⁸ Unfortunately, states Grummet, Maritain goes on to make a number of criticisms of the latter, leaving little space for discussion of the former.⁶³⁹

Grummet states:

One of the reasons Teilhard can seem difficult is his metaphysics. Neither philosophers nor theologians are used to picturing the world in such apparently abstract ways, while natural scientists are reluctant to move beyond the verifiable. But Teilhard believes that metaphysics is inextricably linked with politics and morality. From his privileged standpoint as at once theologian, philosopher and scientist, he draws on these three discourses to articulate a Christian metaphysics for a new generation.⁶⁴⁰

Although the Church regarded Teilhard as a heretic, Viney argues that there are two facts regarding Teilhard that are beyond dispute: his unfailing loyalty to the Church and his unflagging commitment to evolution. It is this very combination of beliefs that

⁶³⁷ David Grummet, *Teilhard de Chardin: Theology, Humanity and Cosmos* (Paris: Peeters, 2005), p. 1.

⁶³⁸ Jacques Maritain, 'Teilhard de Chardin and Teilhardianism', in *The Peasant of the Garonne: An Old Layman Questions Himself about the Present Time* (London: Chapman, 1968), p. 116.

⁶³⁹ *Letter to Auguste Valensin*, 26 May 1925, trans. by Claude Cuénot, *Teilhard de Chardin: A Biographical Study* (London: Burns & Oates, 1965), p. 33.

⁶⁴⁰ David Grummet, 'Pierre Teilhard de Chardin for a New Generation Conference', *Teilhard Perspective* 43 (2010) 1-16 (p. 6).

resulted in the turmoil experienced by Teilhard in July 1925, when, as a condition of fidelity to Rome, he was instructed to sign a document listing six teachings of the Church on matters that brought it into apparent conflict with theories of evolution. It remains unknown in precise terms what these six propositions were. But Teilhard may have experienced considerable difficulty as he weighed his vows as a Jesuit against his integrity as a scientist. He signed the paper. Teilhard was further prevented from speaking publicly on religious or philosophical subjects. For example, he was forbidden by Rome to write or teach the discipline of Philosophy and he was not allowed by Rome to accept a teaching post in the College de France.⁶⁴¹ But Teilhard seemed determined. However, it was not only Teilhard's ideas concerning evolution that worried the Church, but the wartime essays that he sent to his cousin Marguerite Teilhard-Chambon collated in *Ecrits du Temps de la Guerre* (1916-1919). These came to the attention of his religious superiors due to their unorthodox theology, casting doubt on the doctrine of original sin, the existence of Adam and Eve and the notion of creation *ex nihilo*.⁶⁴² Luckily for Teilhard there was not sufficient alarm raised to prevent him from taking his vows post-war. The seeds of his official troubles with the Church became evident when he wrote "Note on Some Possible Representations of Original Sin". He writes:

The earthly paradise can no longer be understood in these days as a specially favoured reservation of some few acres. We now see that everything in the universe holds together physically, chemically, and zoologically, too integrally for the *permanent* absence of death, suffering and evil (even for a small fraction of things) to be conceivable outside a *general state* of the world different from our own. The earthly paradise is intelligible only as a *different way of being* for

⁶⁴¹ Rev. Fr. John W. Flanagan, 'A Periscope on Teilhard de Chardin' (1993) www.traditioninaction.org/Questions/web_sources/B_303_periscope%20on%20Teilhard.pdf [accessed 10 March 2011] (para. 7 of 15)

⁶⁴² Donald Wayne Viney, 'Le Philosophie Malgré L'Eglise: Teilhard's Underground Journey to Process Metaphysics' (2006) www.sbg.ac.at/WhiteheadConference/abstracts.Viney-Teilhard-Le_Philosophie_malgr_l_Eglise.pdf [accessed December 2008] (page 3 of 24)
The English translation of *Writing in Time of War*, omits seven of the essays that were included in the French edition; the missing essays can be found in Teilhard's *The Heart of the Matter* and *Hymn of the Universe*.

the universe (which fits in with the traditional meaning of the dogma, which sees in Eden 'another world').⁶⁴³

He continues to say that in the current world, we are being 'irresistibly driven to find a new way of picturing to ourselves the events as a consequence of which evil invaded our world'.⁶⁴⁴ We will discuss his thoughts on the question of evil at a later stage.

Flanagan, a member of the Catholics Priests Association, argues that Teilhard's thoughts along the lines of evolution are dangerous because it promotes a rejection of the belief in the historical reality of Genesis, including (and in particular) the rejection of the existence of Adam and Eve, which Flanagan describes as "utter theological devastation". In a bid to further criticise the implications of Teilhard's thought in this instance, he vehemently states that if Adam and Eve did not exist, then there can be no such thing as Original Sin. With no Original Sin, there is no need to be redeemed from it. If there is no need for a Redeemer, then there is no need for Jesus Christ to become man and die on the Cross for our sins. The final consequence of Teilhardian evolutionism, he argues, is: 'if there is no such thing as the Sacrifice of the Cross, then there is no such thing as the Sacrifice of the Mass. A "memorial meal" will do nicely. Flanagan argues that evolutionism divorces its believer from the Catholic Faith.⁶⁴⁵

What may have made him seem even more removed might have been the fact that he was open to considering religion belonging not just to the West but to the East in a bid to make a move towards some kind of unity. In *Towards the Future*, Teilhard explores his thoughts towards what he refers to as The Road of the East and The Road of the West, clearly showing the ways in which his line of thinking was influenced by the mysticism of the east. The first current of true mysticism of which traces are extant in recorded history, and whose thought remains influential today, is that which

⁶⁴³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), pp. 46-47.

⁶⁴⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 45.

⁶⁴⁵ Flanagan, para. 1-6 of 15.

originated in India five or ten centuries before the Christian era. The results of which show that at any given moment, the finest portion of humanity reached a unanimity of belief in the essential unity of nature, a unity which could be achieved only by a release of tension in the universe. The multiplicity of beings and desires is no more than a bad dream, from which we must awake. We must suppress the effort to find knowledge and love, which means personalisation, because it tends to give consistence to what is a mirage: and *thereby* (and this is the key word in the argument) as a *direct consequence* of the disappearance of plurality, we shall see the basic design of the picture emerge. When silence reigns, we shall hear the single note. Phenomena do not disclose the substance to us: they mask it. In over simplified terms, this is the 'Eastern solution' of the perfect life, that is, the return to unity.⁶⁴⁶

He further states:

The distressing spectacle of the multiplicity of the world and of its present state of disorder, which in the end forces us into an impassioned faith in the possibility of reducing that fragmentation to unity-in that lies the common source of the various philosophical currents, and the various attitudes to prayer, whose successive emergence, much more than the creation of any empire or the discovery of any energy, is the dominating event in human history. Without mysticism, there can be no successful religion: and there can be no well-founded mysticism apart from faith in some unification of the universe.⁶⁴⁷

The unity between men and women is equally important in Teilhard's view of implementing a move towards complete unification as we briefly consider any influence process thought may have had on Teilhard.

The idea of creative union is not in itself incompatible with the idea of "creation out of nothing." Teilhard says that god is "self-sufficing" and initially "stood alone." He denies the need for a pre-existing sub-stratum" on which God operated and holds that matter is not eternal. De Lubac argues that Teilhard's "creative union" takes place moment by moment *within* the process and that one may still consider the *whole* process

⁶⁴⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future* (London: Collins, 1975), pp. 41-42.

⁶⁴⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 40.

as created *ex nihilo*.⁶⁴⁸ But Teilhard does treat the on-going process as opposed to an instantaneous beginning as the most creative stage of God's work. He appears to assume that the cosmic process has a convergent and unifying character; therefore he extrapolates to a primeval state of "pure multiplicity," whose relation to the prior unity of God remains un-problematical.⁶⁴⁹

Whitehead shares Teilhard's themes of continuing creation and unification, but explicitly rejects "creation out of nothing." He holds that time is infinite. There was no first day, no act of origination, only a continuing bringing-into-being in which past, present and future are structurally similar. "God is not *before* all creation but *with* all creation."⁶⁵⁰ However, no ready-made materials were given to God from some other source, and nothing can exist apart from him. As Cobb suggests, whitehead attributes to God a fundamental role in the birth of each new event, though there is no event which he alone determines absolutely.⁶⁵¹

Teilhard argues that we have reached a point in history where "man and woman on whom life has laid the charge of advancing to the highest possible degree the spiritualization of the earth-will have to abandon that way of possessing one another which has hitherto been the only rule for living beings" in order to rise together so that their complete giving would coincide with their meeting the divine.⁶⁵²

Devaney argues that there is no simple process available here. Feminism and process thought can engage in a worthwhile conversation here because both are able to make common assertions and share fundamental presuppositions. Both unquestionably reject traditional Western ways of conceiving the self, the world and God. Both assert that Western humanity has primarily had the understanding that the world dualistically

⁶⁴⁸ Ian G. Barbour, 'Teilhard's Process Metaphysics,' in *Process Theology*, ed. by Ewert H. Cousins (New York: Newman Press, 1971).

⁶⁴⁹ Robert North, *Teilhard and the Creation of the Soul* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1967), p. 116.

⁶⁵⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 39.

⁶⁵¹ John B. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), pp. 211-12.

⁶⁵² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (London: Collins, 1965), p. 80-82.

and patterned reality hierarchically. Being, within this traditional vision, has been elevated over becoming, stasis over dynamic activity, independence and self completeness over inter-dependence and relatedness. Further to this, primary differentiations have been made between God and the world, men and women and humanity and nature. In each case, one side of the dualistic model has been understood as subject, with intrinsic value and power, while the other has been an object valued solely in relation to the subject.

Proponents of feminism and process thought view this dualistic and hierarchical vision of reality as existentially and intellectually inadequate. Many feminists trace this idea of reality to what we consider the oldest and most fundamental dualism—the hierarchical differentiation between women and men. And all feminists see in this hierarchical differentiation, regardless of historical origin, continued justification for women's oppression. Analogously, adherents of process thought see the inadequacy of this hierarchical interpretation of reality in numerous ways; it coheres poorly with the presuppositions of an age circumscribed by the claims of modern science, of quantum theory and counters numerous contemporary assertions of psychology and political theory, for example. Most importantly, Devaney points out, it fails to adequately respond to the existential concerns of our time, to questions of order and value in a time fragmented by world conflict, continued oppression, the constant threat of ecological disaster and the prospect of final global destruction.⁶⁵³

Devaney states that feminism and the experience of women can contribute much to process thought. Although process thought has criticised traditional ideas, it has ignored female experience. Women can contribute in two ways that are unique. Firstly, our experience can test the applicability of process categories: through analysing female experience we can judge how well the vast metaphysical categories of process thought

⁶⁵³ *Feminism and Process Thought*, ed. by Sheila Greeve Devaney, (New York: Edin Melle, 1981), pp. 2-3.

reflect and express specific concrete experience. Secondly, such analysis of women's experience can further creatively expand the development of process thinking. Because the female dimension of experience has not previously been addressed by process thinkers, its inclusion will serve to enlarge this philosophical movement.⁶⁵⁴

Further, as far as Teilhard is concerned, it has been the quest of man (and woman) to seek to understand the mysteries concealed in matter infinitely great and infinitesimally small, but Teilhard prophesied that in the future there would be a pursuit of the science of spiritual energy. He linked this to the human drive to pursue a world unity and even though he envisaged a somewhat scientific approach, humanity will be seeking to discover God, whether consciously or unconsciously.⁶⁵⁵ In fact, Teilhard seems convinced that humanity will 'merge' with the Whole and that we will begin to think more in the present, being less concerned with the past or the future. He argues that the most important thing is that God allows us to discover our true selves in order to bring about the transformation that he seeks for us.⁶⁵⁶ This transformation requires an internal consciousness on the part of all individuals to join together in morality and ideals.⁶⁵⁷ The action required of us to bring this about Teilhard argues, in continuing along the path of evolution, is hope.⁶⁵⁸ There can be no place for the poor in spirit, nor the sceptics, the pessimists or those who are weary. Teilhard argues that our hope for unity can only be achieved if we work together.⁶⁵⁹ For the Christian then, love of God and one's neighbour become a truly practical aspect of life and the individual must aim towards a spirit of togetherness and unification with all things. Teilhard describes a sense of the earth opening up and exploding towards God and the sense of God taking root and finding nourishment downwards into the earth. He talks about a personal

⁶⁵⁴ Devaney, p. 2- 6.

⁶⁵⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, p.33.

⁶⁵⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 53.

⁶⁵⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 54.

⁶⁵⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 67.

⁶⁵⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 68.

transcendent God and an evolving universe no longer two hostile centres of attraction but an entering into hierarchic conjunction to raise the human mass on a single tide. This then, is transformation. It is the spiritual evolution of the universe.⁶⁶⁰

Teilhard's famous work, *Phenomenon of Man*, is without question, difficult to comprehend, not merely in what it is attempting to argue, but in the way that Teilhard expresses himself and in the complex terms he uses. The thesis of his book starts from the position that humanity in its totality is a phenomenon to be described and analysed like any other phenomenon: it and all its manifestations, including human history and human values, are proper objects for scientific study. Teilhard's second and most fundamental point is the absolute necessity of adopting an evolutionary viewpoint. Though for certain limited purposes it may be of use to regard phenomena as isolated statically in time, they are in fact, never static: they are always processes or parts of processes. The different branches of science that combine to demonstrate the universe in its entirety must be regarded as one gigantic process, a process of becoming, of attaining a new level of existence and organisation which can properly be referred to as a genesis or evolution. For this reason, Teilhard uses *noogenesis* to mean the gradual evolution of mind or mental processes and repeatedly stresses that we should no longer speak of a cosmology but of a *cosmogensis*. In a similar way, he uses the term *hominisation* to denote the process by which the original human stock became and is still becoming, more truly human and thus the process by which potential man realised his ever increasing possibilities.⁶⁶¹

In Teilhard's approach, he extends his evolution terminology by using terms such as *ultra-homonisation* to denote the future stage of the process in which humanity will have so far transcended itself as to demand some new appellation. In his approach he is inevitably drawn to the conclusion that phenomena (including humanity), are

⁶⁶⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 75.

⁶⁶¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), p. 12.

processes: they can never be evaluated or even sufficiently described solely or mainly in terms of their origins, they must be defined by their direction, their inherent possibilities and indeed limitations and their deducible future trends. Teilhard quotes Nietzsche in that man is 'unfinished and must be surpassed or completed' and proceeds to deduce the steps required for his completion.

Teilhard made reference to the term *noosphere* meaning the sphere of the mind. In *The Heart of the Matter* he describes this as being 'like a halo' around the biosphere.⁶⁶² Teilhard describes this as the 'Earth's living envelope'.⁶⁶³ Teilhard argues that a feature of the *noosphere* which most attracted his attention was what he called 'its surface tension'. He described this as being a unique example in the field of humanity's observation of a living magnitude, planetary in dimensions, which is strictly and exclusively self-totalizing. He says that at the bottom we see as we do in every 'sphere') ubiquity and solidarity; but above there is something more, there is organic unity of operation. The oneness of humanity stretched like a veil over the confused multitude of living beings, he states. This astounding singleness in cohesion was in itself sufficient to catch and fascinate Teilhard's passion for the Cosmic-apprehended-in-its-extreme-forms. But he saw it as being only the break-through which illuminated in three stages the very nature of the stuff of the Noosphere considered from the point of its underlying structure.⁶⁶⁴ The first stage introduced Teilhard to the idea of human planetarity (the existence of a Noosphere and the disposition of its contours). The second disclosed to him in a more explicit way, the critical transformation undergone by the Stuff of the cosmos at the level of Reflection. The final stage led him to the recognition of the

⁶⁶² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of the Matter* (London: Collins, 1978), p. 36.

⁶⁶³ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 29. Teilhard took the term 'biosphere' from its inventor, Eduard Suess, an Austrian geologist. It basically means the place where all life dwells. Biosphere helped lay the basis for paleogeography and tectonics: the study of the architecture and evolution of the earth's outer rocky shell.

⁶⁶⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 32.

Noosphere's accelerated drift towards ultra-human states, under the influence of psycho-physical convergence.⁶⁶⁵

Deep down, says Teilhard, there is in the substance of the cosmos a primordial disposition, *sui generis*, for self-arrangement and self-involution. As we proceed, we discover that a certain degree of vitalised Matter's physico-chemical arrangement brings a critical point 'of Reflection', which releases the entire train of the specific properties of the Human. Finally, as a result of Reflection, we find a demand for, and a germinating principle of, complete and final incorruptibility, which permeates the very marrow of the Noosphere.⁶⁶⁶

Teilhard's metaphysical argument starts where the scientific one leaves off. In as much as evolution is the fundamental motion of the entire universe, Teilhard argues, that is, an ascent along a privileged and necessary pathway towards higher consciousness. This supreme (higher) consciousness assimilates to itself all humanity's personal consciousness embodied in 'Omega' or the Omega Point; in Omega 'the movement of synthesis culminates'.³⁹ Now Omega is 'already in existence and operative at the very core of the thinking mass'. So, states Medawar and very cynically, 'if we have our wits about us' we should at this moment be able to detect Omega as 'some excess of personal, extra-human energy', the more detailed contemplation of which will disclose the Great Presence. Although already in existence, Omega too, is progressing. States Teilhard, 'all around us, one by one, like a continual exhalation, "souls" break away, carrying upwards their incommunicable load of consciousness where we then reach the stage of a 'harmonised collectivity of consciousness equivalent to a kind of super-consciousness'.⁶⁶⁷ Medawar makes a point of noting that Teilhard has 'dared' to write an equation as 'explicit as 'Evolution=Rise of Consciousness' but he

⁶⁶⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 30.

⁶⁶⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 33.

⁶⁶⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man* trans. by Bernard Wall (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 272.

does not go as far as writing 'Omega=God'; but in the course of 'some obscure pious rant' according to Medawar, Teilhard proceeds to tell us that God, like Omega, is a 'centre of centres', and at one point refers to 'God-Omega'.⁶⁶⁸

Medawar describes the *Phenomenon of Man* as being written in an 'all but totally unintelligible style'. He argues that it is 'anti-scientific'. He states that Teilhard 'practiced an intellectually unexact kind of science in which he achieved moderate proficiency,' 'has no grasp of what makes a logical argument, or of what makes for proof. He does not even preserve the common decencies of scientific writing, though his book is professedly a scientific treatise.'⁶⁶⁹ Medawar makes a serious attempt to discredit Teilhard. Other critics were equally busy in their attempt to discredit Teilhard's ideas. Two books were published prior to Teilhard's death which according to Viney used Teilhard's *clandestins* to launch criticisms. The first of these is by an unnamed author entitled, *L'Evolution Redemptrice du P. Teilhard de Chardin*. However, Jeanne Mortier who had been in charge over many years of keeping Teilhard's papers in order says that she learned the author was L'Abbé Luc Lefèvre, founder of *Pensée Catholique*. *Pensée Catholique* was unfriendly towards the ideas of Teilhard and it was in fact the same publisher that issued *L'Evolution Redemptrice*. Although the author does not directly cast aspersions on Teilhard's character, the author does state that Teilhard's thought is expressed with 'almost Luciferian pride'. The author reassures the reader that Christianity has no need of evolution either as an objective reality or as a type of explanation. Introducing the idea of evolution into Christianity runs a strong risk of altering dogmatic truths.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁸ Medawar, para. 15 of 19. Pierre Teilhard, p. 257.

⁶⁶⁹ Medawar, para. 17-18.

⁶⁷⁰ Viney, p. 7. *Clandéstins* was a series of essays written by Teilhard which were mainly distributed to friends. Louis Cognet's *Le Père Teilhard de Chardin et la Pensée Contemporaine* (Paris: Au Porulan, 1952)

Teilhard de Chardin, *L'Evolution Redemptrice* (Paris: les Edition du Cedre, 1950).

During the year 1952, a second book criticising the work of Teilhard appeared. In Louis Cognet's *Le Père Teilhard de Chardin et la Pensée Contemporaine*, he attempts to make it clear that he wishes to avoid the hostile reception directed at Teilhard's work in *L'Evolution Redemptrice* where he viewed the author as being 'intent on collecting firewood in preparation for a heresy tribunal.' However it should be stated that Cognet's book does not actually present a discussion of Teilhard and contemporary thought. Rather it is an extended argument that Teilhard has seriously compromised traditional Catholic teaching with his ideas on for example, the fallen nature of creation due to human sin and the role of the devil in the economy of evil, both of which are pertinent to this thesis.⁶⁷¹ Teilhard responds thus:

But what an *enfant terrible* [Cognet] is in the frankness with which he pushes the logic of original sin and Christian catastrophism as far as it can go! This categorical affirmation that humanity (historically) reached a high point in some terrestrial paradise and that, since then, Christianity is by nature backward-looking...But at least he is frank and logical to the end-at which point one recoils, as before a bad joke.⁶⁷²

Teilhard further remarks, "It's a shame I can neither explain nor answer him".⁶⁷³

The concerns over Teilhard's work are indicative of the Church's somewhat reluctant attitude regarding the area of evolution. On October 22nd 1996, John Paul II in an address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences confirmed what Pius XII had said previously in his encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950) about the compatibility of evolution and Catholic doctrine, adding in words reminiscent of Teilhard that 'new knowledge has led to the recognition of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis'.⁶⁷⁴ However he continued, 'rather than the theory of evolution, we should speak of several theories of

Anon, *L'Evolution Redemptrice du P. Teilhard de Chardin* (Paris: Librarie Du Cedre, 1950).

⁶⁷¹ Viney, p. 8.

⁶⁷² *Letters From My Friend: Correspondence between Teilhard de Chardin and Pierre Leroy 1948-1955* (New York: Paulist/ Newman, 1979), 131.

⁶⁷³ *Letters From My Friend*, 130.

⁶⁷⁴ *Humani Generis*, 'Encyclical letter Concerning Some False Opinions which Threaten to Undermine the Foundations of Catholic Doctrine', 12th August, 1950.

evolution.’ And here he warned against ‘materialist, reductionist and spiritualist interpretations’ that are clearly unacceptable to the Church. Teilhard would surely agree with this.⁶⁷⁵ However, the Vatican remained serious in its endeavour to ban his works from the public domain.⁶⁷⁶ The reaction of the Vatican and indeed his counterparts did not stop him from writing down his thoughts and ideas relating to a new theology and cosmology. Teilhard believed that his own life was showing him something unique. Seeing God as Christ in all things united together the cosmic, the human and the Christic. This was a powerful vision that was connected to experiences that were of a deeply mystical nature. These experiences occurred over a great number of years.⁶⁷⁷ He remained deeply interested in evolution, his view of which was a thoroughly mystical one and one that would dominate much of his thinking as we have already seen. Evolution was vital. He saw it as being a necessary condition of all further scientific thought. Yet at the same time, it was also psychic and spiritual.⁶⁷⁸ To Teilhard, it was sacred. He stated:

“To say that Christ is the term and motive force of evolution, to say that he manifests himself as evolver is implicitly to recognise that he becomes attainable in and through the whole process of evolution.”⁶⁷⁹

The attraction of “matter” and “cosmic life” remained still powerful, but it was only in the later stages of his life he began to perceive the oneness of nature on a much

⁶⁷⁵ *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. by Robert John Russell et al (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1998), pp. vi-viii, 2-9. This work presents the full address of John Paul II.

⁶⁷⁷ Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 8. Teilhard records what he believed to be a lifelong experience of the mystical. He describes that the world ‘gradually caught fire for me, burst into flames’. He goes on to say that as a result his whole life formed a ‘great luminous mass, lit from within, that surrounded me’. He describes, ‘crimson gleams of matter, gliding imperceptibly in to the gold of Spirit’. He speaks of the ‘Diaphany of the Divine at the heart of a glowing Universe’. He speaks of the ‘Divine radiating from the depths of a blazing matter’. Teilhard de Chardin, *Heart of the Matter* (London: Collins, 1978), pp. 15-16.

⁶⁷⁸ Sion Cowell, ‘The Cosmo-Mystic’, *The British Teilhard Association* <http://www.org.uk/teilhard-de-chardin/cosmo-mystic/> [accessed 15 April 2011]

⁶⁷⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Letters from Paris 1912-1914* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), p. 105.

greater scale. It has previously been mentioned that to Teilhard, spirit and matter were no longer two separate realities but two states. To further exemplify this, the dualism of spirit and matter, body and soul, dissolved before him “like fog before the rising sun.” Matter and spirit were two aspects of one single reality. Spirit, he said, slowly emerges from matter where it eventually takes precedence over the physical and chemical, and it is ultimately in spirit, the highly complex, that all consistency resides. The unity of the world was of a dynamic, evolutive character pointing to spirit, which Teilhard experienced as the feeling of God’s presence everywhere. For him, the world reverberated with divine life. He referred to this as “sacred evolution.” This enormous realisation would lead him to his future work.⁶⁸⁰

It is clear from what has already been discussed, that Teilhard held what some might term as idealistic hope for humanity in that eventually it would reach a stage of total communion with itself, God and creation but equally, Teilhard was sufficiently discerning to recognise the rising tide of destructive forces threatening the planet. It was due to this recognition that he urged humanity with the following message:

Remain true to yourselves, but move ever upward toward greater consciousness and greater love! At the summit you will find yourselves united with all those who, from a different direction, have made the same ascent. *For everything that rises must converge.*⁶⁸¹

Everything must achieve unity as far as Teilhard was concerned. If we are to have fullness of life on earth, then both individuals and nations must achieve this unity, he said. He was against the hostility that gave rise to levels of destruction and wished to see his vision manifest whereby a spirit of co-operation was in place.

Teilhard stated that for him, the exalted, resurrected Christ and the believers united to him, is the Omega Point. Teilhard often referred to the “cosmic Christology” of the New Testament, particularly Ephesians 1. 8-10, where the universal divine

⁶⁸⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Heart of the Matter* (London: Collins, 1978), p. 27.

⁶⁸¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Building the Earth* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), p. 15.

purpose is affirmed as a plan to unite all things in Christ.⁶⁸² In *Let Me Explain*,

Teilhard states:

In truth, the more I have thought about the magnificent cosmic attributes lavished by St Paul on the risen Christ, and the more I have considered the masterful significance of the Christian virtues, the more clearly have I realised that Christianity takes on its full value only when extended (as I find it rewarding to do) to cosmic dimensions.⁶⁸³

But if one is claiming to reconcile science and religion then the metaphysical implications of even the most rigorous scientific hypothesis must be scrutinized in order to ascertain whether in fact this reconciliation is possible. This is all the more important in Teilhard's case, because, ambiguous and confusing as it is, his way of regarding the relationship between Omega and evolution is transferred directly to the relationship between Christ and evolution.⁶⁸⁴ Thus Christ, like Omega, has two facets, or halves. In respect of one half of himself he must be regarded as pre-existing and transcendent, though in this respect his relationship to evolution is left extremely vague. In respect of the other half of him he must be regarded, as has already been stated, as being involved in the evolutionary process, and in fact as the final synthesis in which the movement culminates. This notion of Christ's insertion in the evolutionary process necessarily compels Teilhard to formulate the idea of an evolving Christ, of a Christ who is incomplete and whose final form is being elaborated in time together with that of all other things. In fact it is precisely because Christ is still incomplete, still in the process of becoming, that the evolutionary flow itself is kept in motion. Through the Incarnation, Christ became the instrument, the centre, and the end of the whole of

⁶⁸² Teilhard de Chardin, p. 188.

⁶⁸³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Let Me Explain* (London: Fontana Press, 1973), p. 155. *The Holy Bible* RSV (London: Collins, 1971), Ephesians. 1. 8-10

⁶⁸⁴ Philip Sherrard, 'Teilhard de Chardin and the Christian Vision', *Sources in Comparative Religion* 4 (1970) http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com/public/articles/Teilhard-de_Chardin_and_the_Christian_Vision-byPhilip_Sherrard.aspx [accessed 16 April 2011] (para. 27 Of 37)

animate and material creation; He became its motive force. And since he was born, and ceased to grow, and died, everything has continued in motion because he has not yet attained the fullness of his form. He has not yet reached the peak of his growth. His Mystical Body is still unfulfilled. It is in the continuation of this fulfilment that lies the ultimate driving force behind all creative activity. All human action and endeavour serves to complete the Body of Christ, so that Christ fulfils himself gradually through the ages in the sum of this action and endeavour. Without this, without the evolution of collective thought, there can be no consummated Christ. He will remain for ever incomplete.⁶⁸⁵ Ultimately, and in a real sense, the whole evolutionary process is working towards the salvation of Christ. Ultimately, and in a real sense, only one man will be saved, and that is Christ, the head and living summary of humanity. It is the garment of his flesh and love that is being woven by the lives of the faithful on earth. It is he who is the term and the consummation of even the natural evolution of living things.⁶⁸⁶

For evolution, there must then be a final goal, according to Teilhard. In the end, for Teilhard, the Omega Point marks the culmination or completion of the process of the development of the Cosmic Christ. It is the final stage of evolution, the fullest accomplishment of the divine milieu in the Cosmic Christ. Omega is the moment when Christ is ready to present his fully developed being to the creator. For Teilhard, in the grand scheme of things, evolutionary transformation has gone about as far as it can to develop human beings physically, although some contemporary geneticists may not agree as almost ninety per cent of genes in the human genome are still dormant.⁶⁸⁷ Feminist Christology however, does not accept the idea of the Omega Point. Whilst it allows for movement, states Isherwood, it does not take the definitive final step in the

⁶⁸⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (London: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 319-324.

⁶⁸⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 136.

⁶⁸⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 136.

direction of risk by saying there is no fixed end point and that we therefore face an open future that reaches into eternity.⁶⁸⁸

The next great advance in evolutionary transformation and the return back to God will be found in the gradual socialisation of mankind. Because of the thrust of the divine milieu, the process will not cause humanity to devolve into a herd, but will rather produce a convergence of humanity toward a single society. Teilhard saw this evolution as already being in progress, by means of urbanization, technology, modern communications and multinational corporations. Teilhard saw increasingly that more and more links were being established between different peoples' politics, economics and habits of thought in an apparent upward spiralling progression. Theologically Teilhard saw the ultimate convergence point of evolution as marking the full divinisation of the Cosmic Christ. When humanity will have, along with the material world, reached a final state of evolution, exhausting all potential for further development, a new convergence between them and the supernatural order would be initiated by the Second Coming of Christ, the *parousia*. Perhaps, Savary suggests, the *parousia* indicated a completely new kind of sacred existence that would begin in "heaven" after the Omega point. For Teilhard, our best way of preparing for the *parousia* was to help bring about the *pleroma*, that is, the process involved in achieving the fullest development of the Cosmic Christ. It is a term that places the emphasis on process and development. If the concept of the *pleroma* were applied to an artists' painting, it would refer to the process and development of the painting, a summary of all that would go into its completion.⁶⁸⁹ What he ultimately appears to be aiming towards is

⁶⁸⁸ Lisa Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 125.

⁶⁸⁹ Louis M. Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Divine Milieu Explained* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), pp. 239-243.

the notion of a more purified state of consciousness that in turn becomes the perfected union of a spiritualised reality.⁶⁹⁰

Teilhard dedicated himself to the task of enabling humanity to see what he believed to be the true Christology, the authentic appreciation of the function of the total Christ. Effectively, whilst accepting and appreciating all the traditional pieties and devotions that focussed on the humanity of Christ, Teilhard would insist that these must not be thought of ‘out of context’, disassociated from that larger and fuller version of Christ ‘ever greater’, growing in humanity’s understanding of him as humanity’s knowledge of the universe grew and expanded.⁶⁹¹

Teilhard de Chardin wrote that humanity has entered upon the greatest period of change it has ever known. He believed that something is happening to human consciousness where a fresh beginning is being inaugurated. This fresh beginning for Teilhard suggests a move away from the negative aspects of human behaviour that has, he argues, manifested itself in destructive ways.⁶⁹²

He states that it is simply too easy to excuse what he terms as the ‘decadence of civilisation’ by inaction, arguing that such defeatism can be said to be the innate temptation of our time.⁶⁹³ What he is referring to here is what he sees as the destructive effects of materialism. He sees a world that has been consumed by power and greed to a point where it has produced a dominant effect upon humanity and it is this ‘inaction’ and ‘defeatist’ attitude and indeed acceptance, that the world is as it is and Teilhard sees reluctance on the part of humanity to change things for the better. And this for Teilhard is the ‘innate temptation’ he speaks of.

Teilhard argues that we have reached a point in history where “man and woman on whom life has laid the charge of advancing to the highest possible degree the

⁶⁹⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 271.

⁶⁹¹ Corbishley, p. 65.

⁶⁹² Teilhard de Chardin, p. 23.

⁶⁹³ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 24.

spiritualization of the earth-will have to abandon that way of possessing one another which has hitherto been the only rule for living beings” in order to rise together so that their complete giving would coincide with their meeting the divine.⁶⁹⁴

Teilhard’s greatest work, *Phenomenon of Man*, is without question difficult to comprehend, not merely in what it is attempting to argue, but in the way that Teilhard expresses himself and in the complex terms he uses. The thesis of his book starts from the position that humanity in its totality is a phenomenon to be described and analysed. The criterion of truth for any comprehension or theory of creation is this: to what extent is the theory able to offer us a coherent and meaningful vision of creation and at the same time, somehow activate us? Specifically, Teilhard argued, any understanding of creation that would undermine human effort ought to be subject to re-examination. It is crucial to make the ontological distinction between the Creator and the creature. Teilhard has no problem with this, in fact he reaffirms it. But from the point of view concerning human action and effort, Teilhard does have a problem with the scholastic theology of creation which suggests otherwise. A theology of creation that appears to detract from the value of humanity’s effort and progress in the world, Teilhard sees as being somewhat dangerous. Subsequently in reaction to the theology of creation that he learned in the seminary, Teilhard attempts to re-think the notion of creation in terms of his own system of thought.⁶⁹⁵ He calls his theory of creation the theory of “creative union”.⁶⁹⁶ This cannot exactly be described as a metaphysical doctrine, but more of a sort of empirical and pragmatic explanation of the universe. The term ‘union’ is dominant in Teilhard’s thought here because in its active sense, it means “to unite oneself or to unite others”; in its passive sense it means “to be united or unified by

⁶⁹⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (London: Collins, 1965), p. 80-82.

⁶⁹⁵ Robert L. Faricy, ‘Teilhard De Chardin on Creation and the Christian Life’, *Theology Today*, 23 (1967), 1-12 (p. 3).

⁶⁹⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* (London: Harcourt, 1971), p. 134.

another.”⁶⁹⁷ Teilhard was of the opinion that a gradual process of unification must have an end goal—a maximum point of unity. This is, of course, the Parousia; the maximum point of union of the universe with Christ. The key to Teilhard’s theory of creation then, is the relationship of the whole creative process to Christ.⁶⁹⁸

Teilhard was afraid that we might confine our perception of Christ to the first century. He believed that Jesus as the Christ moved way beyond the gospel event itself and even progressed from the thought of St Paul.⁶⁹⁹ He saw dangers in perceiving the Christian message in its undeveloped form as it was first delivered to Christ’s followers. He believed first of all that this could only serve to ‘stunt’ the growth of the believer who might become ‘trapped’ in the simple world of the first century as a means of escaping the twenty first century. It was his belief that Jesus could only give even his own disciples, limited information. When Jesus says, ‘none of you ask me where are you going?’ John 16. 5. To think of Jesus in the restricted terms of first century Palestine and to localize him in that experience is to undermine and even belittle the teachings of Jesus, which Teilhard felt expanded way beyond that time and as such was cosmic in scope.⁷⁰⁰

It seems as though Teilhard is certainly suggesting a process of evolution for the modern world that places Christ more fully in his cosmic role. His desire seems to be to break down any boundaries of time that would negatively influence humanity now. He argued that Christ had failed to be presented in terms of his cosmic function. Christ, he said, needs to be conceived of in such a way that constitutes him as the cosmic centre of

⁶⁹⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, ‘Comment Je Vois’, unpublished essay, 1948, pp. 17-21.

⁶⁹⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, ‘La Vie Cosmique’, *Ecrits Du temps De La Guerre 1916-1919* (France: Grasset, 1992), pp. 67-69.

⁶⁹⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (London: Harper Row, 1961), p. 105.

⁷⁰⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, pp. 13-14. *The Holy Bible*, NRSV (London: Harper Collins, 1997), John 16. 5

creation. It is the transformation of Christ that has been realized through his humanity that enables individuals to become Christ-like.⁷⁰¹

Yet Teilhard argues that in order to fulfil one's potential, we need human contact. There is a physical relationship that binds the individual to the universe, and just as he or she is a continuing process of development, so too is the entire cosmos.⁷⁰² Teilhard argued that Jesus as a human being was equally included in this. Taking this further, for St Paul and St John he is the centre of creation- the force which can subject all things to itself the origin and the term of the whole cosmic process-the Alpha and Omega. Hence, he has a relationship with all beings. Teilhard writes that just as there is something of the cosmos in each individual that is constituent of it, so there is something of Christ in every creature. It is, he argues, the responsibility of each person to develop the Christ element within us.⁷⁰³

Teilhard expressed that what Christianity needs to address in modern times is, 'what form must our Christology take if it is to remain in a new world?'⁷⁰⁴ He argued that having spent much of his time living in what he termed as the 'gentile' world, and that of the Church; it became apparent that we have reached a delicate point of balance where readjustment is essential. The Christology with which we are familiar is still expressed in exactly the same terms as it was a few centuries ago, which at that point was able to satisfy those whose outlook on the cosmos is now physically impossible for us to accept. What Teilhard suggests, therefore, is to modify the position occupied by the central core of Christianity. He sees this as bringing Christianity and evolution in line with each other: the transformation which has taken the universe from that of a static one to one of evolution.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,

⁷⁰² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Writings in Time of War* (New York: Harper, 1968), p. 253.

⁷⁰³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ* (New York: Harper, 1969), pp. 151ff.

⁷⁰⁴ *Christianity and Evolution* trans. by Rene Hague (USA: Harcourt, 1971), p. 76.

⁷⁰⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 77.

The Christ, whose features do not adapt themselves to the requirements of a world whose structure is evolutive, will become more and more elusive, if not eliminated altogether eventually. If we take the world as we see it today in light of reason, we can observe a universe that is organically emerging from a boundless time and space. Bearing this in mind, we then have to adapt our concepts of Christ to this ever expanding reality in order to comprehend him as moving with us in the evolutionary process.⁷⁰⁶

Teilhard continues to argue that it is time to return from a form of Christology that is more organic and takes more account of physics.⁷⁰⁷ Christ for Teilhard represents the cosmic aspect and function which make him organically the prime mover and controller, the 'soul' of evolution.⁷⁰⁸

Christ in his cosmic role must encompass the reality of the incarnation. Had God so wished it, Teilhard states, the incarnation could have entered the world without it involving suffering or labour. But would this have had the same impact that it did at that time and certainly since? To create means that God is able to unite himself to his work. By becoming incarnate, he is able to physically take full part in the world. Christ demonstrates the union between God, humanity and creation. This is crucial to a living cosmology.⁷⁰⁹

The transformation of Jesus into the Cosmic Christ is a foundational aspect of Teilhard's thought in moving towards his 'new theology', one that is recognisable and relevant in the twenty first century. This section contributes in providing a fuller construct to this end, examining further concepts that form a major part of Teilhard's living cosmic cosmology.

⁷⁰⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 78.

⁷⁰⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 89.

⁷⁰⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 180.

⁷⁰⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 182.

Savary states that some Christians may interpret the Cross as a symbol of limitation, sadness and repression. This might imply that the Kingdom of God can only be put into place through such means, according to this idea. But Teilhard prefers to view the Cross of Christ from the perspective of evolution. This can then be deduced as an evolutionary step, one that is incomplete in itself. Yet somehow it is leading towards a transformation somewhere up ahead. Through Christ and in Christ, Teilhard suggests that humanity must take this evolutionary step symbolised by the Cross. The suffering Christ is connected inextricably to the risen Christ. In a very real sense, it could be argued that humanity is undergoing a period of evolutionary suffering. But there is the reassurance from Christ that we shall collectively experience a sublime culmination equivalent to his resurrection. Perhaps Teilhard would say that the Jesus of Nazareth that we see on the Cross is in fact all of humanity in Christ, that is, the Cosmic Body of Christ.⁷¹⁰

Teilhard finds the evolving Christ, the Body of Christ that lives today far more attractive and absorbing than Jesus of Nazareth. The way Teilhard saw it, if he was to give his whole life to Christ in every sense he wanted to give it to the Christ that lives now, the evolving Cosmic Christ. Instead then of focusing on the Jesus of history, he focuses on the evolving universal Christ.⁷¹¹

Teilhard makes the suggestion that in the evolving Body of Christ, that has been growing and developing since the resurrection, that a third 'nature' coexists in Christ alongside his human and divine natures that were expressed during his incarnation. This nature is his cosmic nature. This is different from the other two natures where in his human nature he was Jesus of Nazareth and in his divine nature, the second person of the trinity. This cosmic nature, Teilhard believed, is characterised by its ability to

⁷¹⁰ Louis M. Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Divine Milieu Explained* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), p. 142.

⁷¹¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 122.

subsume and integrate into its “nature” all the various “natures” of creation, from the “natures” of the most inert and lowly rocks to the “natures” of the creatures with higher levels of complexity and consciousness. Therefore for Teilhard, as there was for St Paul by whom Teilhard was inspired, there are three natures in Christ. Christ is fully human, full divine and fully cosmic.⁷¹² Indeed, the notion of the Cosmic Christ is to be found in the very early Christian writings that formed the New Testament. Phillipians 2. 5. Can be regarded as such, for example. Also, John 1 emerged from the cosmic texts of *Sirach* 24. Such passages are hymns sung at liturgical gatherings; hymns to the Cosmic Christ. This was a basic doctrine to the earliest followers of Jesus, people who took great interest in the cosmos which may have been initiated through knowledge of pseudigraphical works such as the *Book of Enoch*.⁷¹³

St Paul drew upon the Wisdom literature and its concepts in order to express the cosmic significance of Christ, probably knowing that the letter to the Colossians would be interpreted in this way. In using the Greek word logos, the introduction of a new word did not automatically indicate the introduction of a new idea. Much of what we find in the Logos concept is to be found in the notion of Wisdom, which lay in the background of Paul’s thought.⁷¹⁴ John used the term Logos in his *Prologue* to the Gospel of John 1. 1 offering neither definition nor explanation. If we interpret the Logos doctrine against its background writings of Paul, we can see that it presents a doctrine of the person of Christ. This idea arose in answer to the problems of interpretation concerning the work of Christ to the gentile world. As such, the Logos doctrine then, is to be seen first and foremost as an assertion to the cosmic significance of the work of

⁷¹² Teilhard de Chardin, p. 123.

⁷¹³ Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (London: Harper One, 1990), p. 185. *The Holy Bible* RSV, Phillipians 2.5, Colossians, 1 Corinthians 8. 6, Gospel of John 1. 1, *Book of Enoch* trans. by R. H. Charles (London: Dover Publications). Jesus Ben Sirach *Wisdom Literature: Sirach 24* (200-175 B. C.)

⁷¹⁴ Allan D. Galloway, *The Cosmic Christ* (London: Nisbet & Son, 1951), p. 53.

Christ.⁷¹⁵ This notion of the cosmic work of Christ prevails throughout the New Testament writings.⁷¹⁶ Further to the cosmic nature of Christ, in 1 Corinthians 8. 6, Paul refers to a hymn or poem used by the Christian community to express the pre-existence of Christ.⁷¹⁷ It is this nature, the continued evolving Cosmic Christ, according to Teilhard that we must focus on.

The spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin attempts to show the meaning of a full integration with God and the universe. He explains the numerous ways we can help accomplish the total Christ's divine destiny. Teilhard sees it as being Christ's continuous divine task to mend a broken and divided world with the assistance of humanity.⁷¹⁸

Teilhard insists that love is the key component that will turn our fragmented world into one immense shining Being, the Body of Christ, glowing with divine energy. He believes that Christ himself had made his promise to humanity when he said, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28. 20).

Many of the cells of this Christ Body are unaware of their divine calling and remain unconscious of the fact that they are already living their lives as part of this cosmic body. Teilhard states that this Cosmic Body is meant to become fully conscious of itself in every cell of its being to the extent that every cell will be conscious of the Whole Body's magnificent destiny.⁷¹⁹ When this takes place, and the Christ Body realises itself as the divine reality it has always been meant to be, that will be when we have reached what Teilhard, as we are already aware, termed as the Omega Point.

Teilhard states:

Doubtless, at this point the Parousia will be realised in a creation carried to the climax of its capacity for union. The unique act of assimilation and synthesis

⁷¹⁵ Galloway, p. 54.

⁷¹⁶ Galloway, p. 55.

⁷¹⁷ Craddock, p. 84.

⁷¹⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 123.

⁷¹⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, pp. 130-131.

that has continued since the beginning of time will finally be revealed and the Universal Christ will appear like a flash of lightening amid the storm clouds of a slowly concentrated world.⁷²⁰

It could be said that Teilhard's approach challenges traditional Christian spirituality in that he believes that in opening one's eyes to this divine milieu, is to place all your effort and strength into loving and serving the evolving world.⁷²¹ Savary says if Teilhard was still living and was posed the question as to what the first principle of his spirituality is, he would be more likely to offer a startling response and say, "To love the *world* with all your mind, heart, soul, and strength." Through tradition, spiritual writers saw a conflict between loving and serving God and loving and serving the world. Love God and hate the world might be seen more as the norm, the world being seen as material. This was also initially what Teilhard was taught. But when he examined this conflict in a deeper sense, he came to the realisation that there only *appeared* to be a conflict. They were more like two sides of the *same* love. Teilhard experienced an integration of the two loves- God and the world-in his own heart. He loved God with a passion but he also loved creation with a passion too, and for him there existed no contradiction at all. In the Divine Milieu, he asks that readers explore the same process he underwent and offers reasons for doing so. He presents an invitation to love the world totally, because it is a world that God has created and loved so much that he sent his own Son to transform it. In John 3. 16, it is usually the latter half of the sentence where there is emphasis placed. But Teilhard says that the first half should also be stressed: "God so loved the world...." The Greek word for world is *cosmos*, which means all of creation, the entire universe.⁷²²

⁷²⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'Universalisation and Union', *Activation of Energy* trans. by Rene Hague (London: Collins, 1963), pp.vii, 84, 113ff.

⁷²¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 35.

⁷²² Savary, p. xvii.

Teilhard encourages humanity to do all that it possibly can to make the world a better place, because every atom and molecule of it, even in its currently fragmented state, is saturated with the divine spirit of God at every level, longing for fulfilment.

It is interesting to note here that Teilhard described his book as 'simple piety' and to him it probably was. Yet it is undeniable that it was radical. Savary states we are already aware that the Roman Catholic Church found his work to be heretical and most certainly, therefore, unacceptable.⁷²³ Yet for Teilhard, one of the most important, if not *the* most important aspect was to bring Jesus into a 21st century setting and to help humanity realise that love is all important in helping to unite humanity and heal the fragmentation. He was so passionate about this that his vision was one of consuming fire, kindled by the radiant powers of love, states King. His was a mystical vision, deeply Christian in origin and orientation. However, it broke the boundaries of traditional orthodoxies, be it religion or science, and grew into a vision whose intention is global.⁷²⁴

It was due to this breaking of boundaries that made Teilhard's ideas appear so radical, yet Teilhard's deepest desire was to see the essence of things, to find their heart, and probe into the mystery of life, its origin and its goal. At the centre of the world, in the rhythm of life and evolution is a divine centre. This is what Teilhard believed. And this divine centre was a living heart beating with the fiery energy of love and compassion.⁷²⁵ The symbolism of fire occurred many times in his writings throughout the years and this vision is never more radiant and empowering than in his description of his mystical experiences. This filled him with wonder, ecstasy and joy. It made him see the world burst into flames. It is this fire that he wished to pass on and kindle in

⁷²³ Savary, p. xviii.

⁷²⁴ Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin* (USA: Orbis Books, 1998).
 Ursula King, 'Rediscovering Fire', *The Magazine of Spiritual Ecology*, Issue #39 (2000)
 <http://www.earthlight.org/essay39_king.html> [accessed 9 December 2008] (para. 1 of 20)

⁷²⁵ King, para 2 of 20.

others. This vision of fire was one of spiritual transformation derived from both science and religion. The world of evolution which he studied in great detail in his scientific work forged a zest for being. His faith in the religion of Christianity allowed him to see the universal presence of Christ in all things.⁷²⁶

Deane Drummond states that thorough his love for all creation and for each element in creation, the risen Jesus makes himself present to all creation and to each element of it. He is everywhere, present to each part of the universe and to each person through his personal love for each. This idea has its origin in Teilhard's own religious experience.

It was during the time he served at the front, amid the horrors of war, that Teilhard had mystical experiences of Christ, possibly beginning around March or April 1916. He experienced the presence of the risen Jesus in the world through his love, an intimate presence-through-love in the whole of creation. These experiences showed him the mystery of God's presence through Christ in the world, changing Teilhard forever. This gave him a new vision of reality where he began to view things differently.

God was not 'up there,' above, in some way distant. He was here, in Jesus risen, thorough the intense love that radiates out from the heart of Jesus, present to everything created, and to all of creation together, and to Teilhard, through the love of the risen Christ for each creature and for all of creation.⁷²⁷

Teilhard kept note of his experiences and his reflections and they became the basis of essays. They were his first descriptions of his own Christian understanding of reality and of his spirituality. Indeed, he questioned whether he would ever be able to disclose everything he had seen, felt and thought during this incredibly transformative period.⁷²⁸ But he *did* manage to achieve an enormous amount of writing under such

⁷²⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy* (USA: Harcourt, 1972), p. 19-47.

⁷²⁷ Celia Deane Drummond, *People and Planet*, (London: Equinox, 2006), p. 130-131.

⁷²⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Writings in Time of War* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 11.

extreme circumstances and these works served to demonstrate the extent of this profound spiritual effect. He went for lonely walks in the woods, spending time reflecting on his experiences and what meaning they held for him. This resulted in a number of questions for him, for example, what was the meaning of his own life? Where was God on the fields of death and battle? What was humanity heading for? What was the role of the Christian faith in the immense cosmic process that is the evolution of life? With all this in mind, he began a series of journals, wrote letters, made notes and ultimately composed a series of essays.⁷²⁹ His first essays were written in farmhouses and woods, anywhere where there was some respite from the horrors of battle. In fact, it was the experience of warfare that clarified his ambition.

He wrote:

I don't know what sort of monument the country will later put up on Froideterre hill to commemorate the great battle. There's only one that would be appropriate: a great figure of Christ. Only the image of the crucified can sum up, express and relieve all the horror, and beauty, all the hope and deep mystery in such an avalanche of conflict and sorrows. As I looked at this scene of bitter toil, I felt completely overcome by the thought that I had the honour of standing at one of the two or three spots on which, at this very moment, the whole life of the universe surges and ebbs places of pain but it is there that a great future (this I believe more and more) is taking shape.⁷³⁰

In an extract from a further letter, he writes:

Not only does one see there things that you experience nowhere else, but one also sees emerge from within one an underlying stream of clarity, energy, and freedom that is to be found hardly anywhere else in ordinary life-and the new form that the soul then takes on is that of the individual living the quasi-collective life of all men, fulfilling a function far higher than that of the individual, and becoming more conscious of this new state.⁸¹

Finally, expressing his passion for life and for the earth:

I am writing these lines from an exuberance of life, and the yearning to live. It is written to express an impassioned vision of the Earth, and in an attempt to find a solution for the doubts that beset my action. Because I love the universe, its

⁷²⁹ Ibid, p. 24.

⁷³⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Making of a Mind: Letters from a Soldier-Priest 1914-1919* (London: Collins, 1965), pp. 119-120.

energies, its secrets, and its hopes, and because at the same time I am dedicated to God, the only origin, the only issue, and the only end. I want to express my love of matter and life, and reconcile it, if possible, with the unique adoration of the only absolute and definitive god-head.⁷³¹

The war clearly had a profound effect on Teilhard's thought and only served to clarify his interest even more in the natural sciences, which formed the specialities of his research. But he understood science in a more generalised sense: as any ordered unified effort of enquiry, and as the systematic knowledge that arose from such efforts.⁷³² To this extent then, his approach to an understanding of the universe, of an ordered cosmos, was larger and more comprehensive than that of traditional science.⁷³³

Teilhard's war-time letters to his cousin marguerite Teilhard-Chambon will have familiarised those who have read them with the early stages of Teilhard's thought.⁷³⁴ In the first essay *Cosmic Life*, we discover Teilhard's initial awakening to an astonished awareness of the world, a pantheistic vision and its urgent temptation, already overcome by his demand for unity in a transcendence. In the *Struggle against the Multitude* he delves deep into the problem of the one and the many, this is a theme to which he returns in *Creative Union*. In *Mons Univers* he outlines a synthesis of the relations between God and the world, and a similar search for some 'centration' of the universe can be found in *The Soul of the World* and *La Grande Monade*. The Christic theme had appeared as early as 1916, in *Christ and the World of Matter*. It is rounded off and completed in the *Mystical Milieu* and *The Priest*, heralding *The Mass on the World*. In *Mastery of the World and the Kingdom of God*, Teilhard examines the conditions and meaning of the apostolate that the church will have to adapt to the needs of the modern world.

⁷³¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'Cosmic Life,' *Writings in Time of War* (London: Collins, 1968), pp. 203-204.

⁷³² King, para 7 of 20.

⁷³³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Writings in Time of War* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 184.

⁷³⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 9. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Making of a Mind* (London: Collins, 1965).

In order to initiate a transformation of the world and humanity that Teilhard hoped for, he placed love at the heart of it. It is, says Teilhard, the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces.⁷³⁵ This arguably calls humanity towards a greater union, coming together collectively. It is, he states, the primitive and universal psychic energy, placed at the centre of the universe and to which all are ultimately drawn.⁷³⁶ Whilst Teilhard views love as something that draws us together, he equally argues that it can also serve to drive us away from each other. To be timid of it or even repulsed by it is to stifle one's own liberation by refusing to experience it.⁷³⁷

Without love, we might vegetate in isolation. Thus, the interaction between individuals brought about by love serves to merge us in this union Teilhard speaks of.⁷³⁸ Wildiers argues that this idea requires a more permanent state in which to exist because the individual may at one time feel in complete union with the cosmos, whilst at another time, may feel as though they were a stranger, lost in the infinity of space and time, seeking a spiritual home.⁷³⁹ He speaks of love in terms of dynamism, movement and growth. He firmly believed in what he described as the 'Christosphere.'⁷⁴⁰ According to Teilhard, states de Lubac, this referred to the sphere of spheres: the sphere of the Cosmic Christ who embraces, penetrates and sustains the totality of the cosmos.⁷⁴¹ Teilhard, says Towers, believed fully in Christ. Christ was born, suffered and died for us. He states that there will be a second coming, but does not indicate what form he thinks this might take. The Christosphere is, he says, in the process of developing.

⁷³⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, *Let Me Explain* (London: Collins, 1966), p. 66.

⁷³⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, *Building the Earth* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), p. 38.

⁷³⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 40.

⁷³⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 41.

⁷³⁹ N. Max Wildiers, *The Theologian and his Universe* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982), p. 191.

⁷⁴⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, trans. by Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 290.

⁷⁴¹ Henri de Lubac, *Images de L'Abbe Monchanin* (France: Aubier, 1967), p. 131.

Teilhard refers to this as Christogenesis. This idea demonstrates his deep appreciation of the mystical body of Christ and which all humanity is called to form.⁷⁴²

For Teilhard, the era of pure individualism is over. He believed that individual talents will be developed for the benefit of the community. It is in free and loving service to others where the individual can find not only himself, but God.⁷⁴³

From Teilhard's own understanding in order to become part of the spirit that will assist in building the earth must as Jesus stated, 'die and be born again!' In order to reach a higher plane of humanity-that is a greater state of human consciousness, there must be a complete transformation not only in the sense of values, but of action.⁷⁴⁴

In the religious sense, Teilhard seems to believe that if humanity had already gained a greater understanding of itself, then religion would not have lost its sense of purpose. He argues that the existence of religion has been interpreted as a psychological phenomenon associated with the childhood of mankind and that although it might have been at its maximum at the beginning of civilisation, over time it would fade and God would ultimately become excluded. But if humanity strives towards a higher degree of self-mastery, there might result, as the move towards greater union occurs, an increasing need for God where he would emerge in our consciousness as greater more necessary than ever.⁷⁴⁵

Teilhard taught that the ultimate spiritual energy that radiates from Christ, drawing all things to him and orders all things for him is *divine love*. It is this that eventually will bring all things into unification with God in Christ. This, states Teilhard, is the primal energy that was working from the very beginning of primordial matter, whereby there was in effect, a drawing forward and upwards along the axis of complexity-consciousness.

⁷⁴² Bernard Towers, *Teilhard de Chardin* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), p. 37.

⁷⁴³ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 290.

⁷⁴⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, p.43.

⁷⁴⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 44.

It is Teilhard's suggestion that the mystics of all ages have unconsciously intuited that the spiritual consummation of all things in Christ is still anticipated.⁷⁴⁶ Mysticism is *cognition Dei experimentalis*. It is the knowledge of God that, instead of being obtained from tradition, books and doctrines, stems from the individuals own life. In other words, it cannot be learned.⁷⁴⁷ In the end, for Teilhard, Santmire argues, the mystical gives way to the practical and we consider how it may be applied in the following ways: It is only by the action of self-conscious participants in the life of the exalted Christ that the final reign of God will be ushered in. For those who understand Teilhard's thought, argues Savary, and thus believe they experience an affinity with it, to simply hear about such revolutionary ideas are not enough. They want to know how to live them out. However, a seemingly missing link is evident whereby many writers have failed to translate his concepts into an every-day living spirituality. The spirituality that Teilhard presents throughout his work is one that is optimistic and that is firmly focussed on the future where once translated into daily attitudes and behaviour, the individual is shown how to live consciously and constantly in the divine atmosphere Teilhard calls the divine milieu. At first, he teaches how to see with new eyes not just the visible dimensions of God's love, but the invisible dimensions as well; then to see not only what is present but also what is to come.⁷⁴⁸ Teilhard encourages humanity to do all that it possibly can to make the world a better place, because every atom and molecule of it, even in its currently fragmented state, is saturated with the divine spirit of God at every level, longing for fulfilment.

The Divine Milieu demonstrates how you can spend your life living consciously, prophetically and with passionate enthusiasm both as a citizen of the universe and as a

⁷⁴⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'The Spirit of the Earth', *Human Energy*, (USA: Harcourt, 1972), pp. 32-34.

⁷⁴⁷ Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry* (Illinois: Augsburg Press, 2001), p. 45.

⁷⁴⁸ Savary, p. xvi. See also Ephesians. 1. 15-23.

citizen of the Kingdom of God. This can be achieved by integrating everything that you do or endure in the all-encompassing and ever evolving Christ.⁷⁴⁹

It is the gift of such a vision and indeed way of being, that transforms the way in which believers in Christ see the world, translating the theology of Christ into a lived reality. This new vision states Grummet, is certainly present in the *Divine Milieu*, which he describes as literally being a middle space of perception existing between the universe and God. The divine milieu presents us with a vision of the world is experienced in action and passion.⁷⁵⁰

Within the space of the divine milieu, Teilhard encourages humanity to do all that it possibly can to make the world a better place, because every atom and molecule of it, even in its currently fragmented state, is saturated with the divine spirit of God at every level, longing for fulfilment.⁷⁵¹

The claim for the writing of *The Divine Milieu* was that it was primarily aimed at those who were seeking and searching. Those ‘wavering’ Christians who have tended to find the current forms of traditional worship less than satisfying spiritually.⁷⁵²

Some may even tend to see the current form as dry, boring, restrictive and out-of-date. They may feel too, that the Church is somewhat too separated from the concerns of modern day life. Others may perhaps feel that they have to compartmentalise their lives into the “sacred” and “secular.” But such seekers appear to be united by the fact that they wish to make a difference to the world personally and professionally and to those ends Teilhard believes that he has found the way forward. He makes it clear that he is not aiming his work at the meek and mild but rather those who want to break beyond the boundaries. His ways are not for the quiet and

⁷⁴⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 45.

⁷⁵⁰ Grummet, p. 9.

⁷⁵¹ Savary, p. xviii.

⁷⁵² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 46.

unassuming. For Teilhard, he is addressing the active seekers.⁷⁵³ He endeavours to show how religion can be exciting and he does this by explaining that they must be involved with and in the world, by whatever means that will actively serve to make a contribution, be it the arts, science, law, medicine, education or politics. Nothing that is truly human remains outside of Teilhard's spirituality. Thus the people he is aiming at are those who have already become aware of the vast changes that have taken place over the last century: changes in technology, communication, law, biology, physics, etc, also, the changes that have occurred in our understanding of the world and of each other as a result.⁷⁵⁴

For Teilhard, the overall result of the whole evolutionary process will culminate in Christians joining with all people of goodwill in building up a world society of peace and justice; this is the building up of the body of Christ. Christ needs the results of human labour in order that he can reach his own fullness. When this occurs, suggests Teilhard, the Christ's highly intensified, infinitely spiritualised body will be the only surviving reality. Biophysical reality will disintegrate and die towards nothingness. But human reality will be transfigured and will be fully united into the fullness of Christ and will be a spiritual ecstasy. At this point the universal process will have reached its conclusion. The cosmic ascent of humanity will have attained its final goal, union with the universal Christ and through him union with God who at this point will be all in all.⁷⁵⁵ Can we thus argue that Teilhard may be described as a true mystic? Then yes, because he appears to be opening the way up for a new definition of mysticism to take place in the context that the Cosmic Christ is yet to become complete. Furthermore, Teilhard has made this an inclusive task for all humanity. Women have not been cast aside. Indeed, In terms of defining how exactly Teilhard's thought can be placed under

⁷⁵³ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 40.

⁷⁵⁴ Savary, p. 5.

⁷⁵⁵ Santmire, p. 53.

the heading of mysticism, we need only consult the radical interpretation of the classic definition of mysticism where she states that the definition as a perception of God drawn from experience has its origins with Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas. And because it has the dimensions of independence from hierarchy, it denotes that in practical terms, it is women-friendly. A certain zone of freedom applies here. Next to the ordered way to God that has been laid out by the church, the teaching authority of the office, and the scriptures administered by that office, there is an additional access to God that cannot be channelled but is, instead, experimental and tolerated at the margins of the institution. It is no coincidence, says Soelle, that this margin was the place preferred by women, who were barred access to the centres of sacred power. Here, women perceive God in unmediated ways, transcending the bounds of rational perception. At the same time, it is a perception that also changes the already known world of feelings, steeping them in a different light. It is at this point where they begin to search for their own language. Mysticism is a woman's matter, albeit not exclusively, but predominantly so in Christianity. It was the opponents of mystical thought who saw this most clearly; when they could not ignore great mystical thinkers, they liked to stress how "masculine" those thinkers had been. Soelle states that by interpreting this classic definition in such a way hermeneutically, she moves away from feminism's fundamental interpretation of Christianity as an unbroken patriarchal tradition of oppression. Thus she enters into a space where the contradiction to the spirit of androcentrism and men's domination becomes visible. As *cognition Dei experimentalis*, mysticism is such a place not only because women have occupied it again and again, but also because the religiosity of mysticism, its "substance," seeks to overcome the basic presuppositions of patriarchal thinking: power and dominance over the "other," be it the other sex, other nature, or other races and civilisations.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵⁶ Soelle, p. 46.

Teilhard de Chardin certainly recognised the need for humanity to come together in *unity* in building the earth. The more destruction he saw on earth, the more this became an urgent task for him.

Earthly harmony, he felt, must be achieved and he greatly encouraged humanity through his writings to “move ever upward toward greater consciousness and greater love.”⁷⁵⁷ He believed that religion could be instrumental in this because it offers the opportunity to have a collective experience wherein the existence of God becomes apparent and where God reflects himself personally on humanity.⁷⁵⁸

Although we might pride ourselves on living in a time of science and enlightenment, Teilhard argues that in some ways we are far from enlightened. We centre much of our activity upon materialistic pursuits. However, Teilhard envisaged a time when the masses will realise that true human successes are those that triumph over the mysteries of matter and life and where the spirit of discovery will override the spirit of war.⁷⁵⁹

In *Le Milieu Divin* Teilhard wrote that the problem of evil will surely remain one of the most disturbing mysteries of the universe. Understanding fully that God’s creatures suffer requires a pre-supposition from humanity of an appreciation of the nature and value of ‘participated being’ which we do not have. Teilhard attempts to explain that even though God has united himself to all of creation, and more specifically his creatures (he includes humanity here), what he terms as ‘original fault’ means that we are unable by our very nature to avoid altogether, the darker path in life. It is there always to entice, says Teilhard, and we sometimes fall prey to it and although we anticipate victory over evil we might not see this in action in our own lifetime.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 15.

⁷⁵⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 46.

⁷⁵⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 51.

⁷⁶⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Fontana Books, 1957), p. 85.

Humanity has wrestled with trying to understand sin, suffering and death in both a practical and intellectual way. This is nothing new. But Teilhard de Chardin stated the claim that the discovery of evolution is able to provide fresh evidence to explain the place of evil in the world and additionally also indicates an approach whereby evil might even be overcome.

The initial problem we face however is that there is no systematic treatment concerning the problem of evil in his writings.⁷⁶¹ In 1917, he stated that he was planning a study that would cover all major aspects of evil. Unfortunately it failed to materialise. But he did produce a number of brief tentative articles regarding different aspects of evil during the First World War and although he did not explore it systematically as a whole, it is still possible to construct a fairly detailed account of the place of evil in light of his thought. But he had his critics in this respect who argued that Teilhard has no doctrine of evil and deny that he was willing to recognise evil, implying that his vision of the world is an over-optimistic distortion of reality. One critic, Jean-Marie Dominach claimed that Teilhard did not sufficiently consider the place of evil and Christ's victory over evil on the cross.

Teilhard spoke of blindness to evil as a 'mortal flaw,' saying that evil increases with the advance of evolution, so that 'the more man becomes man, the more the question of evil adheres and aggravates, in his flesh, in his nerves, in his spirit.'⁷⁶²

Yet he also states:

As a result of deeply rooted habits, the problem of evil continues automatically to be called insoluble. We must really ask why....In our modern perspectives of a universe in the state of cosmogenesis, how is it that so many intelligent people obstinately refuse to see that, intellectually speaking, the famous problem *no longer exists?*⁷⁶³

⁷⁶¹ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 59.

⁷⁶² *Teilhard Reassessed*, ed. by Anthony Hanson (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970), p. 60. See 'La Personnalisme de Teilhard de Chardin', *Esprit*, 31 (1963), 353.

⁷⁶³ *Comment Je Vois*, Auvergne, Les Moulins, Par Neville, 1948. (Unpublished).

So here we are presented with two approaches; one that stresses the importance of evil and one which denies its existence. The first problem is concerned with the difficult issue of maintaining our belief in God's goodness in the face of evil. Teilhard maintains that evil is an inevitable accompaniment to creation, adding that, 'God seems to have been unable to create without entering into a struggle against evil'.⁷⁶⁴ It is hard to know where he got this idea from. It suggests that evil was already in place. Evil is not the will of God, but is something that he will ultimately overcome. Yet in spite of his love, God cannot simply get rid of evil at this stage in evolution. This is not due to any defect in God's power or in his love for us and concern for our well-being, but because of the nature of creation itself.⁷⁶⁵ These attitudes to evil form part of his thought, argues Hanson, and might appear contradictory but they need to be understood in their relation to the central and unifying concept of evil. Teilhard believed that the universe is developing through a convergent evolution and this is the unifying thread that runs throughout all of his writings. Although Teilhard expressed some ideas about evil, it largely remained a mystery to him. But evolution might be able to offer increased insight into the nature of this mystery.⁷⁶⁶ We have already mentioned complexity consciousness where evolution progresses along an axis of ascent where it becomes more and more complex and intensified. Hanson states that Teilhard suggested that as humanity is expected to progress along this line, reaching a higher stage of evolution, evil as a force of disintegration cannot conceivably continue to increase indefinitely into the future towards what Teilhard refers to as the Omega Point. It must, by its very

⁷⁶⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ* (New York: Harper, 1969), p. 80.

⁷⁶⁵ Hanson, p. 61. Hanson's own translation of an unpublished work by Teilhard de Chardin entitled *Comment Je Crois*.

⁷⁶⁶ Hanson, p. 62.

nature, either disappear or triumph over good, in which case its increase will result in the decrease of complexity and consciousness.⁷⁶⁷

There are three basic kinds of evil according to Teilhard: There is a form of evil that has a tendency towards disorder and disunion that can be found throughout the universe along with a tendency towards union and order. Here though, the question of its 'evilness' can be disputed; it only appears as a necessary condition for advance. As far as humanity is concerned, it would clearly appear as an evil.

Suffering and pain are a type of evil, experienced by both humanity and all living creatures. This kind of evil is in its origin, related to progress. Teilhard's primary concern was to show how suffering might be transformed and used in a constructive way, by offering it to God for the advance of the world and thereby create a more spiritual existence.

Moral evil is the human form of evil, where it has originated in humanity but its effects can be seen in nature. Moral evil can be said to follow from the fact of human freedom or self-evolution. It appears as a turning aside from the true line of advance. This cannot be said necessarily to be a guilty opposition to evolution, because it is often the result of a necessary experiment which unfortunately goes in the wrong direction, a consequence of ignorance, or of trying to find the right way and failing. Examining evil from the perspective of evolution, a pattern of development emerges. It originates from the disunity at the base of evolution, and in its most basic form is merely the tendency of the products of evolution to decompose or to develop in directions that do not allow for further advance. Disorder, states Teilhard, and the tendency to disunity are part of the material base on which evolution is built, and evil extends from there throughout creation. Pain and suffering are a transformation of this elementary form of evil at a higher state of being. Suffering can be an incentive to progress, a stage we must pass

⁷⁶⁷ Hanson, p. 63. See Dorothy Emmet, *Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 269; 'While evil is positive, it is also destructive, and in the end self-destructive.'

through in order to learn something or come to terms with something. However, Teilhard's analysis of evolution demonstrates that something that goes beyond evolution is necessary for its stability and indeed continuation. Whilst we cannot conclude that science or a philosophy based on science requires belief in God, Teilhard insists that a synthesis of scientific belief in evolution and the Christian doctrine of God can lead to new insights and strength for both. He therefore both integrates and accepts into his system not only a phenomenology but also a full Christian belief. The question of evil reappears here but in a slightly different way this time. Christian faith is not content to accept the fact that evil may have an easily explained existence within evolution. How can there be evil in God's creation who is seen to be an all loving, all powerful God? This is an old question we know, in the respect that it is a practical problem in an individual's life and a theoretical one where non-Christians might point to the question of evil as an argument against God. So now we need to consider evil in the light of faith.⁷⁶⁸

From a Christian point of view, this requires the understanding that through evolution creation is moving from an original state of nothingness characterised by complete disassociation towards complete personal union with God in Jesus. With this starting point, it may be possible to comprehend some of the 'why' of evil. We need to try to understand evil in its relation to the method of creation and the goal of creation. If creation were a once-for-all act of God in bringing into existence a completed work, then it could be argued that evil would be inexplicable. Therefore, creation can be said to an unfinished work or a work that remains in progress.⁷⁶⁹ Teilhard makes the point, states Hanson, that because God has given humanity the gift of free will and because he

⁷⁶⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'L'Evolution de la Responsabilité dans Le Monde', in *L'Activation de l'Energie* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), p. 215.

⁷⁶⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Introduction à la vie chretienne*, 1944. This is Hanson's translated version.

is a loving, guiding God, he does not exert any force upon creation and as such does not intervene directly to divert the progress of his creation. For Teilhard God directs creation through divine love and by the working of the incarnate Christ as the Omega present in the midst of evolution. God then, does not directly compel but urges and where he depends on the reactions of his creatures for the furtherance of their creation then states Teilhard, 'evil appears necessarily and as abundantly as you like in the course of evolution-not by accident (which would not much matter) but through the very structure of the system.'⁷⁷⁰ Even when the theological element is added to our view of the world, evolution provides the clue that makes it possible to have belief in God despite the notion of evil. God is responsible for evil in that it follows from the fact that he is the creator, but yet at the same time, the presence of evil does not contradict Christian belief in God's love and sovereignty. But then we are faced with the question, "Why did God not make creation without evil?" Teilhard refuses to answer this question. He sees this as merely speculation about a hypothetical world. It is *this* world we are concerned with. God could only create a world that is moving towards him and where there is free union with him in the way he intended it to be.⁷⁷¹

The paradox concerning the question of God and evil, is taken up in Quantum theology.

Creation is regarded as being essentially good and not evil, an unbroken whole, a totality within which everything, including darkness, pain, suffering and chaos, plays an interdependent role in the evolving cycle of creation and destruction. Creation is viewed as being essentially good rather than evil. Original blessing as opposed to original sin characterises life in its most basic essence. The aforementioned negative forces ensue from the free, indeterminate nature of evolution itself, in a similar way to

⁷⁷⁰ Hanson, p. 69. The quote is taken from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), p. 311.

⁷⁷¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 311.

the final point made on Teilhard. Much of the meaningless pain we endure has been caused by humanity itself, resulting in great suffering. Dualistic thought patterns exacerbate the meaningless of pain and suffering. Rather attempting to befriend the dark, we continuously split it off, counteract it in antagonistic fashion and empower its destructive impact. We have alienated negative forces to such an extent that we eventually personalised them into a supreme, divine, evil force called the Devil, Lucifer or Satan. This has produced yet another false god to idolize the very thing we are called upon to diminish by befriending it. In using the term 'befriending,' O' Murchu states that it is not merely a form of sentimental tolerance. Rather, it is a heightened sense of concern and imagination and includes the prophetic qualities of righteous anger, moral outrage, protest and defiance, to name but a few. It is characterised by a passion for solidarity and justice for the poor and oppressed. Befriending the dark of our world involves the castigation of not one, but many ideological forces.⁷⁷²

Conclusion

Teilhard although a Catholic priest, was far removed from his counterparts in much of what he believed. Despite the commonalities he shared with them, many of his ideas were new and different. Teilhard tried to draw science and theology together in order to present his own vision of what he considered to be the true reality, believing that both disciplines needed to become less compartmentalised and thus more open to embracing new theories. Teilhard envisaged a time when science and theology would merge together in a bid to unveil the cosmic mysteries and the uniting of humanity is crucial in bringing about a transformation. The unification and the spiritual evolution of the universe are necessary components of this. What is required according to Teilhard then is a meaningful and coherent vision of creation that will activate us. This would mean a vision that will serve to encourage humanity. For Teilhard, the theology of creation

⁷⁷² O'Murchu, pp. 141-142.

assigned to the Middle Ages only served to discourage human effort and thus he seeks to establish his own system of thought here. A major requirement of this would mean embracing a broader understanding of Jesus; one that moved him beyond his own time and that would make him relevant in a living cosmology for today. We have seen that Teilhard continues to pursue the concept of an evolutionary Christ. The suffering of the physical, historical Jesus on the cross is hugely symbolic in the evolutionary step towards the full realisation of the Cosmic Christ. Through the cross, humanity was reconciled with God. This could be said to be a first stage in humanity's journey to cosmic consciousness. It also put into place the notion of a continuing cosmic presence through the figure of Jesus. The cross in this way symbolises an 'initiation' both of Jesus and of humanity by way of stepping into the divinity of creation. From the cross and after the resurrection, Jesus as the Christ figure is fully integrative in his human, divine and cosmic roles. He became the evolved and the evolver in assisting humanity in the move towards the recognition of a divine, integrated creation.

In the final chapter, we discuss how both cosmologies can contribute to making a forward move that is relevant for today.

Chapter Five

Hildegard and Teilhard

The purpose of presenting the cosmology of Hildegard and the cosmology of Teilhard is to enable two approaches, one historical and the other contemporary, to show how, whilst at numerous times distinctive in their own right, can merge together to formulate a cosmology that is relevant to this century in terms of understanding the importance and crucial aspect of uniting humanity with God and the cosmos and in such unification, gaining a better understanding of how we are inextricably linked, through Christ, to both, culminating most definitely in the drawing together of both the spiritual and the material aspects of 'being' in a physical world.

Here are two mystical writers whose works are unique in their own way and different to each other but have at the heart of their writings, commitment to the Cosmic Christ, to Love, and the recognition that we are all interconnected: God, Christ, humanity and the cosmos. These are important components of a modern cosmology that can take humanity forward into a better way of existence.

Firstly, in Hildegard's cosmology, she believed that it was due to a lack of stewardship that creation was in a dire state of imbalance. This is a far cry from the egg in Hildegard's vision where the egg represents unity, balance, and an organic universe that is truly alive and harmonious.⁷⁷³ Hildegard's strong use of metaphor and imagery in describing her visions, serves as though she is painting a picture of the cosmos. For example the greening power of creation represents divinity and a way of creation expressing meaning and truth. God is evident in trees and fields. For Hildegard, creativity and greening power are vital to the flourishing and balance of creation. It is here where the Holy Spirit is most evident by being the very motion through which

⁷⁷³ Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co, 1985), p. 36.

everything can grow and flourish. She even referred to Jesus as ‘Greenness Incarnate’ because she believed that the return of moistness and greenness through Christ was deeply embedded in the return of greening power to creation.⁷⁷⁴ For Hildegard, greenness is the overcoming of the dualism existing between heaven and earth, therefore, it might offer the suggestion of oneness; the joining together of heaven and earth, thus dispelling the notion of separateness from God and from each other.⁷⁷⁵ This is a crucial aspect of a living cosmology.

The Word of God is central and is described in very vivid terms. We are left in no doubt as to his importance in creation and his work from the very beginning of creation. She sees Christ as playing a central role and that its manifestation and rich fruitfulness come about through him. His role therefore is vital in rectifying the balance.⁷⁷⁶ This is a very earthy approach, but yet Hildegard always maintains a thoroughly cosmic aspect in expressing the ways in which humanity and the cosmos are interlinked. Therefore her visions concentrate on the micro and macrocosmic interrelationships existent between God, humanity, the cosmos, human nature and the human soul. All of which are the foundational focus for Hildegard’s visions.⁷⁷⁷ Humanity has been placed on earth to play an active role. And therefore it is vital that unless humanity recognises this, it cannot accomplish its true place in creation.⁷⁷⁸ The disregard humanity has for creation is an age-old story and therefore it through her visions, that Hildegard seeks to direct humanity towards a holistic understanding of the self, religion and earth.

Viriditas plays an equally key role in her cosmology because it is essentially holistic in nature. Her holistic cosmology is a major aspect of the thesis in bringing

⁷⁷⁴ Fox, p. 32.

⁷⁷⁵ Bowie, p. 32.

⁷⁷⁶ Craine, p. 75.

⁷⁷⁷ Dennis Doyle, ‘Vision two of Hildegard of Bingen’s *Book of Divine Works: A Medieval Map for a Cosmic Journey*’, *Pacifica*, 20 (2007) 142-161.

⁷⁷⁸ *Book of Divine Works*, ed. by Matthew Fox, (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), p. 102.

about the concept of a 21st century cosmology that recognises the *importance* of the term holistic with regards to restoring the balance throughout creation.

The breaking of the covenant was the cause of the problem, according to Hildegard and through her visions she expressed what humanity had achieved through this and how it could be rectified. At the heart of this is the consistent theme throughout her work that it is the greening power of humanity and the earth that must come to full fruition and bring creation back into balance. All weaknesses must be rectified.

Teilhard's approach is somewhat different. He approached his cosmology from the perspective of both a theologian and scientist. Hildegard's approach presents a more holistic picture, with her constant references to greening power and the earth and of course, the greening power of Christ. Yet in Teilhard's *Divine Milieu*, we have a cosmic vision of the material world equally in all its earthiness, providing a setting for a profound and mystical vision of God. For Teilhard, the divine is to found in all things, with Christ at the very heart. This forms the nucleus for Teilhard's living cosmology.

A full integration of the universe with God, is essential to Teilhard's cosmology. It is love that will sustain everything in the end. We are part of the cosmic body of Christ and as such, we have a calling to live in the divine reality.⁷⁷⁹ This is a living spirituality. It is not enough to be called to religious worship unless one is prepared to put that worship into practice in the material world. It has to be lived out.

Therefore Teilhard is presenting an invitation to transform ourselves and the world; the Greek word for the world is *cosmos*, meaning all of creation.⁷⁸⁰

In Teilhard's work, we can see that he is very observant about the world where he points out the destructiveness of it and the effects it produces on humanity. This is a

⁷⁷⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 122.

⁷⁸⁰ Louis M. Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Divine Milieu Explained* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), p. xvii.

world consumed by greed and corruption and if we relate it to Hildegard's work in terms of disharmony, we find that Teilhard is expressing a very modern day imbalance.

An imbalance is unacceptable but Teilhard, like Hildegard envisaged unity and harmony but in his case it would emerge from a scientific approach where there would be a pursuit of the science of spiritual energy. This he saw as providing the drive for the pursuit of world unity.⁷⁸¹ In the seeking of such unification, humanity, says Teilhard, will reach a point whereby, even though it *may* be through a more scientific approach, will seek to discover God whether it is actually aware of it or not.⁷⁸² The goal of this union is the Parousia where the maximum point of universal union can be achieved with Christ. For Teilhard, Christ is part of the evolutionary process as is humanity.⁷⁸³

This process, for Teilhard, requires Christ to eventually become complete, whereas there is no mention in Hildegard's work that Christ is yet to be complete, for her he is already complete and this never comes into question, for Teilhard, he offers ways in which humanity can assist in this process. However, in a similar way to Hildegard humanity if it is to assist in the return to wholeness, it must work with Christ to achieve a return to *viriditas*. Much of this notion of a return to wholeness can be found in the *Divine Milieu*, where Teilhard offers a worldly view of how the individual can spend a life living both as part of the worldly and the heavenly kingdom. The church for Teilhard offers a different focal point to that of Hildegard. In Hildegard's letters she frequently launched an attack on the clergy. For Teilhard it was the church in terms of those who might be seeking an alternative to traditional forms of worship. Wavering Christians who may find the church too stifling and unchanging in moving with the times. Or those who found it difficult to reconcile the sacred with the secular. Hildegard followed the more traditional route whereby the church plays a more central

⁷⁸¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, (London: Collins, 1965), pp. 80-82.

⁷⁸² Teilhard de Chardin, p. 33.

⁷⁸³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, trans. by Rene Hague *Christianity and Evolution* (USA: Harcourt, 1971), p. 76.

role, even though she was at times, feisty in her approach to the bishops. Teilhard wished to break the boundaries. He wished to show how religion can be exciting and that this can be achieved by being involved in the world, not by separating the two (church and the world).

For Teilhard, it has been the quest of humanity to seek to understand the mysteries concealed in matter and it was to this end that he prophesied that there would ensue a pursuit of spiritual energy that would be linked up with the human drive to pursue a world unity.⁷⁸⁴ He believed that faith in the future was not dead and that we were moving towards a gradual creative union.⁷⁸⁵

Throughout his work, Teilhard suggested a process of evolution for the modern world that would place Christ more fully in his cosmic role. As the cosmic centre of creation, he needs to be presented completely in this way, arguing that Christ had not been presented in terms of his cosmic function. It is the transformation realised through his humanity that enables individuals to become Christ-like.⁷⁸⁶ But for this to happen, the church also had to play its part. And this for Teilhard presented a major question in how that could take place in the modern world. Readjustment was required on the part of the church in terms of how the form of Christology we are familiar with is still expressed in the exact same way it was centuries ago, and which at that point was able to satisfy those whose outlook is now physically impossible for us to accept. Therefore, for Teilhard, the position requires modifying.⁷⁸⁷ This he argued requires bringing Christianity and evolution in line with each other, in other words, the transformation which has taken the universe from that of a static one to one of evolution.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, (London: Collins, 1965), p. 75.

⁷⁸⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* (London: Harcourt, 1971), p. 134.

⁷⁸⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'Comment Je Vois', unpublished essay, 1948, p. 18.

⁷⁸⁷ *Christianity and Evolution* trans. by Rene Hague (USA: Harcourt, 1971), p. 77.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 77.

Whilst their cosmologies are very distinctive in their approach, Teilhard and Hildegard have one central theme and that is for humanity to achieve unification with each other and with God. Both assign a key role to Christ in obtaining this and not least in his role as the Cosmic Christ.

However, their ideas regarding human culpability, sin and the fall, are quite different in many respects. For Hildegard, the fall of humanity and its redemption and thus her vision of creation, inextricably links up to the incarnation. This is because of the cosmic relationship of which we are a part; sin, redemption and the meaning of the Word all have a role to play in the cosmic drama.⁷⁸⁹

In order to access one of the key ingredients of humanity's weakness, we refer once again to the term 'greenness' which Hildegard believed had steadily declined, losing its power. This came about, she believed as a result of the flood, which had caused a weakness of the earth. Humanity had most definitely been affected by this. Further, more weakening had ensued due to the influence of the serpent, in other words, the angel who had fallen from grace; Lucifer.⁷⁹⁰ Hildegard believed that humanity had been unquestionably led astray by the devil, but that we have also played our own part by failure to know God and ourselves. It was Lucifer who introduced sin into the world, she states, through his jealousy of the harmonious state that existed between Adam and Eve. The devil played upon Eve's vulnerability in his bid to conquer Adam.⁷⁹¹ But the light of God has been placed in all of humanity which means that we have the ability to discern good from evil, whichever way we choose to act. Therefore, we have to assume responsibility for our actions.

For Hildegard, it is vital that humanity recognise its interdependence with the rest of the cosmos and she expresses this in her second vision in her *Book of Divine*

⁷⁸⁹ Bowie, p. 26.

⁷⁹⁰ Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1985), p. 112.

⁷⁹¹ Scivias ed. by Columba Hart & Jane Bishop (USA: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 77.

Works, stating that it is the “powers of virtue” that keep humanity going and working in the universe. When we experience suffering it is there to teach us to walk the right path through teaching us patience and avoiding evil, because it is surely when we feel at our weakest that the serpent will venture forth and snatch his opportunity.⁷⁹²

In a similar way in *Le Milieu Divin*, Teilhard states that, by what he terms as ‘original fault,’ that it is by our own nature that we would be able to completely avoid the darker path.⁷⁹³

Whilst both Hildegard and Teilhard have a spiritual approach to their cosmologies, Teilhard’s appears to be rooted in the material. It has to be said that Teilhard did not produce a systematic treatise on the question of evil and in many ways, his thought on this subject seem to take the form of just how it appears to be for him personally. He has been strongly criticised for the lack of a structured mode of thinking in this area. Indeed, he argued that evil is a ‘necessary accompaniment’ to creation and one with which God struggled.⁷⁹⁴ He further stated that although evil is not the will of God, and there is no defect in in God’s power or his love for humanity rather it is down to the nature of creation itself.⁷⁹⁵

In Teilhard’s writings, he works on the idea that we are following what he terms as the line of complexity consciousness, where humanity is progressing through evolution to reach an axial point (Omega) where evolution will be complete and which thus takes us into a ‘super’ form of consciousness. Evil plays a role in this for Teilhard and unlike Hildegard, he views humanity’s role in creation as being more observant than subjective. For example, Hildegard directly insists that humanity has played its part in the unbalanced state of creation and whilst Teilhard does not deny this, he approaches

⁷⁹² Dennis Doyle, ‘Vision Two of Hildegard of Bingen’s *Book of Divine Works* : A Medieval Map for a Cosmic Journey’, *Pacifica* 20 (2007), p. 158.

⁷⁹³ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Fontana Books, 1957), p. 85.

⁷⁹⁴ *Comment Je Vois*, Auvergne, Les Moulins, par Neville, 1948 (Unpublished).

⁷⁹⁵ *Teilhard Reassessed*, ed. by Anthony Hanson (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970), p. 60.

from a different viewpoint, rather than 'attack' humanity which Hildegard may appear to be so given to at times, he seems to observe that everything, including, suffering, evil, humanity's indiscretions and faults are all part of the evolutionary process towards an eventual higher state of being.

For Teilhard, all seems necessary in the journey towards complete union with Jesus. God has given humanity free will but at the same time is directing creation through his divine love and through the working of Christ as the omega, moving through the evolutionary process with us.⁷⁹⁶ He states that though evil is present in creation, it does not in any way detract God's love for us or his majesty. He argues that the presence of evil does not contradict this. God is responsible for evil only in the sense that he orchestrated creation. He is unable to answer the question why God created evil, but neither does Hildegard specifically answer this question, nor address it. For her, it exists as it is, as part of creation. Albeit a very negative and dangerous part of creation because of how it was able to bring about the fall. Despite this, though, she still believed that we can and must as human beings overcome all evil tendencies and traits, for in their absence, evil has no power. Also, in following more of the path of light, this will greatly assist in creating the harmony and balance creation requires.

Teilhard does seem almost matter of fact regarding the question of evil. It is there as part of creation as he already states and he is unable to answer any real questions on this subject with a satisfactory answer. Disorder and disunity are part of the material base of evolution and thus evil extends throughout creation.⁷⁹⁷

In terms of pain and suffering that humanity endures as a result of the fall, Teilhard seems to see this as a step on the individual's evolutionary journey. Pain and suffering are a transformation of this elementary form of evil at a higher state of being.

⁷⁹⁶ Hanson, p. 69.

⁷⁹⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'L'Evolution de la Responsabilité dans Le Monde', in *L'Activation de L'Energie* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), p. 215.

Suffering can be seen as an incentive to progress, a stage we might need to pass through in order to learn something.

As we can ascertain, we are presented with two distinct, passionate mystics but at the same time two mystics who are deeply concerned about humanity moving forward. The ways in which Hildegard and Teilhard move in their ideas of creation and the cosmos provide us with a stark contrast to each other. For Hildegard, the micro and macrocosmic interrelationships among God, the cosmos and humanity serves to provide the fundamental framework for the first set of visions, thus laying the foundation of the entire work.⁷⁹⁸ In Part One of the *Book of Divine Works* there are four visions that deal with the cosmos, God, the human soul and human nature. Although it is Vision Two that places the emphasis directly upon the cosmos, this vision is also relevant to God, human nature and the human soul. This is because each succeeding vision is a microcosm which fits and unfolds within the preceding vision. The cosmos is a microcosm of God. The figure of a human being is dominant in this vision of the cosmos and is a microcosm of that cosmos. The entire universe is presented as a complex system of interwoven layers of intersecting and interpenetrating webs of cosmic proportions. This could also work in reverse where it can be said that human nature is a macrocosm of physical human existence. The cosmos is a macrocosm of human nature. God is a macrocosm of the cosmos. Each one intertwines with the other in a similar way that various systems, nervous, muscular, endocrine and circulatory intertwine or enfold within each other in the human body.⁷⁹⁹

Whilst a major aspect of her visions focuses attention on the microcosm and macrocosm, it also heavily focuses on the Word of God and the function that this has in the cosmic creational narrative where she states: 'In the beginning was the Word...'

⁷⁹⁸ Doyle, p. 152.

⁷⁹⁹ Doyle, p. 153. What Doyle is referring to here is to be located Matthew Fox, *Book of Divine Works* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), pp. 22-55.

Reflecting on the nature of that Word, ‘sucking its revelation’ as John had done (*revelationem suxit*), leads her to understand the complementarity of human and divine, ‘Man with every creature, is a handiwork of God. But man is also the worker (*operarius*) of divinity, and the shading (*obumbratio*) of the mysteries of divine being.’⁸⁰⁰ The vision showed Hildegard how to explain the Prologue of John: ‘And I saw that this explanation had to be the beginning of another piece of writing, which had not yet been manifested, in which many investigations of the creations of the divine mystery would have to be pursued.’⁸⁰¹

In light of this experience, in Hildegard’s fourth vision in the *Book of Divine Works*, she provides a lengthy exposition of John’s Prologue (*In principio erat verbum*). From a conceptual point of view, this passage binds all the analogues of authority within her work: The Bible, the cosmos, nature, mental activity, humanity and divinity.⁸⁰² In this vision, Hildegard celebrates the deep psychological healing that occurs when microcosm and macrocosm are wedded together. In this cosmic wheel, humans are seen to be cultivating the earth, through the seasons of the year and the seasons of their lives. Human creativity and gentle but industrious cultivating of the earth is what the cosmos longs for. As shown in the vision, Hildegard has chosen the tree to symbolise the cosmos at play. The question is why?⁸⁰³ J.E. Cirlot, whose areas of study include medieval symbology and hermeneutics, comments on the meaning of the tree in symbolic history. “In its most general sense, the symbolism of the tree denotes the life of the cosmos: its consistence, growth and proliferation, generative and regenerative processes. It stands for inexhaustible life.”⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁰¹ Dronke, p. 163. See footnote 79 for original reference.

⁸⁰² Matthew Fox, *Book of Divine Works* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co, 1987), pp. 128-148.

⁸⁰³ Fox, p. 47.

⁸⁰⁴ J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Dover, 1962, p. 328.)

Teilhard claims that Christian doctrine not only posits a creation *ex nihilo*; it also claims that this original creation, which includes humanity, is, within the limits imposed by existence, a perfect creation. It is an organic complex of God, humanity, and the world. Existence as we know it, and the conditions of time and space as we know them, issue from a disruption of this original creation. According to Teilhard, life and consciousness have not emerged on earth as the result of any long process continuing through time. Life and consciousness are present *ab initio* (from the beginning) and Teilhard states that humanity, having projected itself outside the state in which it was originally created, plunges into the fragmented and alienated world in which it now finds itself. However, the divine image though is still present in humanity in the very fact of its existence; but it is present, so to speak, in a passive mode. Teilhard argues that growth in the spiritual life consists in developing the divine image inherent in humanity's very existence in whatever time or place this may be, from the passive to the active mode. This development corresponds to the recovery of that life and consciousness eclipsed through the fall. The essential point to grasp is that in the Christian perspective ultimate life and consciousness are innate in humanity (and, *mutatis mutandis*, in all created things) from the instant of creation; and they remain innate (as in all created things) as a realizable potential of that being at whatever point in the course of history he/she comes into existence.⁸⁰⁵

It is not only the evolution of humanity that Teilhard concerns himself with, but the whole of creation. Through the notion of evolution what Teilhard sought was to both see and understand the whole of reality, from the primordial energies studied by physics to the complexities of human culture and community. Initially he thought of the whole of reality *as* a universal process of becoming. He preferred the more organic process view of nature as opposed to the mechanical view of nature that emerged from the

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 149.

thought of Isaac Newton. A much more dynamic, metaphysical construct of energy shaped his every thought about material and spiritual realities, akin to motifs that were to later become commonplace in post-Einsteinian physics. However, this universalizing vision had scandalized not only the Church but many natural scientists of his time. Teilhard had envisioned a universal process of genesis, a cosmos where all things were evolving. He further described this process as *orthogenesis*, which is a concept that suggests things come to being in a straight line. This concept was rejected by Darwin. The notion of orthogenesis presents the suggestion that there is an underlying purpose in the universal unfolding of cosmic evolution.⁸⁰⁶

This leads us to question the purpose that underlies the cosmos. Cosmic evolution has always had one goal, states Teilhard. From the beginning of the universe, evolution has followed one line that led to the emergence of human life. Teilhard uses the concept of a universal law: the law of conservation of energy. This is the law of “complexity consciousness.” All life from its beginning has been gradually moving and evolving along the axis of complexity consciousness. This law describes the universal process of cosmic evolution as an ever-increasing development toward higher organisation and more intense and unified forms of consciousness. Teilhard suggested that there are axial lines in the universe. The material aspect of the universe, which forms an axis, is ultimately leaning toward death. The second line is the evolutionary axis of complexity-consciousness. In accordance with this law in the midst of the physical dying cosmos, life and consciousness are gradually emerging and intensifying. By this he meant that life as a conscious form of energy was in the process of becoming

⁸⁰⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, trans. by Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 302.

much stronger as it moves higher up in the cosmos. Teilhard saw this as the key to understanding the universe-its purpose and meaning and the history of evolution.⁸⁰⁷

But Stephen Jay Gould, an evolutionary biologist, launched a brutal attack on Teilhard's thoughts concerning evolution, arguing that his theological insights are incompatible with science.⁸⁰⁸ Gould, it should be pointed out, is a leading advocate of scientific atheism, making it his fullest intention to keep God out of science. For example, he argues that real science can only operate with integrity if God remains isolated from it completely. In marking out the course of natural history, he says, one must look at the actual processes of nature, not impose upon nature any grand theory or design. He sees no positive role for religion whatsoever in the area of scientific study. He firmly believes that religion has damaged science and therefore the two must be kept separate.⁸⁰⁹ This brings us to the question of where Teilhard can be placed in all of this. He on the other hand argues that the sciences of nature validate the fundamental affirmations of the Christian faith. Whilst Gould firmly shuts God out, Teilhard argues that the only way to save science from self-destruction is to place God back in.

Henderson states that a small number of world class scientists have taken Teilhard seriously enough to structure their own work around his model, but many scientists have reacted as defensively as the Vatican.⁸¹⁰ Henderson argues that it is as a result of negative reactions to the work of Teilhard that he remains in the present day greatly underestimated in both the religious and scientific communities. For the vast majority, his ideas seem at best marginalised and his insights remain unstudied in the depth they deserve. This can be partly laid at the feet of the Vatican for actively

⁸⁰⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, p. 188.

⁸⁰⁸ Henderson, para 4 of 61. Stephen Jay Gould, *Hen's Teeth and Horses Toes* (New York: Norton, 1983), p. 225.

⁸⁰⁹ Henderson, para 29 of 61. See also Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 130.

⁸¹⁰ Henderson, para 3 of 61.

suppressing his work and for the scientific community who treated his writings with suspicion. Teilhard seemed to exist in a world that was foreign to theologians and to scientists.⁸¹¹

Quantum theology brings some fresh considerations. Since the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, then the “whole” of the evolutionary/creative process will always outstretch our human, theological and scientific speculations. The evolutionary/creative process is a subject for contemplation and mystical comprehension rather than for theological discourse or scientific analysis. Quantum theology states that the greater “whole” of the evolutionary/creative process is animated and empowered by a supernatural life force. However, it does consider that life force to be inherent to the creative process rather than external to it.

Orthodox theology often seems to conspire with mainstream religion in subconsciously attempting to “conquer” God by discovering and knowing everything concerning divine reality. The outcome is inevitably an idolatrous one containing dishonourable validations of war and manipulation in the name of one or other omniscient, omnipotent God. Such reflections on God demand novel perceptions on the role of humanity in the creative process. Since the divine life force is not about controlling or conquering the world, nor the process of evolution, then neither should humanity be.⁸¹² Humanity is most definitely not in charge of the universe: but rather participates in its development and growth. We *belong* to the universe and to its unfolding process. Our lives are void of meaning without the universe. The role of humanity in the grand process of evolution is a subject for great debate. Maybe it is God’s intention that we are the nervous system of the earth or as numerous philosophers and scientists are suggesting, the *conscious* dimension of the universe. From the

⁸¹¹ Henderson, para 5 of 61.

⁸¹² O’Murchu, p. 115.

mechanistic world view, we assume that we have been endowed with consciousness in order to subdue all other life forms deemed to be inferior to humanity. From the quantum perspective, we are invited to use this gift in the service of the universe, becoming more conscious, since consciousness is perceived to be embedded in creation, seemingly awaiting a fuller sense of awakening. Perhaps the fullness of evolution itself is the conscious universe fully alive. This is a strong point O'Murchu makes.

Beyond revelations and various speculations, quantum presents us with an invitation to a new theological threshold. Since all theology concerns the *logos* the Word and the wording of ultimate reality (God), then the quantum horizon becomes an energy for story-telling. In quantum terms, our theological role as human beings may be that of narrators of the sacred cosmological story. Beyond the academic pursuit of ultimate building blocks and the intellectual search for convincing answers lies the creative, contemplative exploration of evolution itself, where divine initiative and human response blend into one. It is only upon deeply entering such a story as this, and feeling its meaning deep within our hearts, have we truly understood what life is all about. We will not have conquered the world, but we will have understood.⁸¹³

Creation by its very existence is an on-going hymn of praise. Winter's view is that paradoxology is praise of the Divine in a quantum universe where paradox is paradigm. It permeates life with a unifying spirit, overturning our expectations and messing up our plans. It is a wave of continuity as we move in and out of a parallel universe created by our longings and filled with kindred spirits where energy is exchanged in chaotic and dynamic ways.

Paradoxology, states Winter, is eternal. In a quantum universe, past present and future are interwoven, thus enabling us to look to the past for wisdom while shaping a future expectant with hope, as we move through a here and now that is coming apart at

⁸¹³ O'Murchu, p. 116.

the seams. It is also that which is unceasing. It challenges everything we take for granted, urging us toward a new way of being and behaving.⁸¹⁴ For Winter has a number of component parts: Channelling hope for the hopeless on the edge of despair, forgiving before one has been forgiven, giving thanks to God in the midst of turmoil, saturating our hearts with divinity and being willing to reconcile. It promises a breakthrough into freedom; mainly freedom from fear, fear of the unknown, fear of being wrong or hypocritical, no longer pretending to understand that which is beyond our comprehension. It is rooted in justice and taking a stand. And when we do this, we are standing on holy ground. Ultimately then, paradoxology is uninterrupted praise to all the multifaceted energies of God's creation, all that is past, present and still to come. It is a cosmos radiating and saturated with interactive, intergalactic praise.⁸¹⁵

There have always been those who have known life to be reflected Being, who see the sacred in the physical world and live in awe at the privilege of standing on holy ground. But most people struggle with the idea of Divinity everywhere. It is perhaps easier to rationalise and restrict God and Divinity than to know and understand that they are both everywhere and here.⁸¹⁶

Paradoxology continues to move us forward along with Quantum theology in how we are now required to think in more cosmological terms about God, humanity and the universe. It sees the universe as being fully divine in every sense and encourages humanity to understand and embrace a new way of being through the recognition that we too are inherently divine and that we are part of a universe in which the divine is fully active.

A change of thinking is clearly involved here. Not just in relation to how we view the world, but this also concerns regard to the changes taking place in the physical

⁸¹⁴ Winter, p. 24.

⁸¹⁵ Winter, p. 25.

⁸¹⁶ Winter, p. 48.

structure and functioning of the planet itself. This is a change so significant in its order of magnitude that the centuries that have gone before us must be considered not simply as a historical period but more as a geological age.⁸¹⁷

Berry is emphatic about this need for change. He states that humanity needs to make the move from a spirituality of alienation from the natural world to a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world, to a spirituality the divine has revealed in the visible world about us, to a spirituality concerned with justice for humans to a spirituality of justice for the devastated earth community. The sacred community must now be considered as the integral community of the entire universe and more immediately, the integral community of planet earth.

Our Western Christian humanist world needs to experience a reversal of values, states Berry. We exist in a time when the survival of humans can only be achieved by saving the natural world which humans depend on in order to flourish on all levels. But Berry claims that there exists a fundamental flaw in Western civilisation and that is the mistaken attitude that only the human is capable of having rights. The out-dated attitude that the main purpose of the nonhuman world is to serve humanity can no longer be accepted. It is precisely this attitude that has contributed to the devastation of the natural world. Realistically, every being has three basic rights: the right to be, the right to habitat, and the right to fulfil its role in the great community of existence. Likewise, every being has a right not to be abused by humans, a right not to be despoiled of its primary dignity whereby it gives some manner of expression to the great mystery of existence, and a right not to be used for trivial purposes.⁸¹⁸ To bring about recognition of this new sense of the human role in relation to the natural world, we require a radical transformation throughout the entire human venture.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁷ Berry, p. 63.

⁸¹⁸ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 133.

⁸¹⁹ Berry, p. 134.

The ultimate concern then, according to Berry, lies with the shaping of the human world itself; identifying values, establishing a civilizational discipline, moulding a language that is able to carry more deeply our interpretation of human experience, activating a communion with the divine, and providing an educational programme in which succeeding generations can achieve an expanding life pattern along with an interpretative vision of reality.⁸²⁰ Before we are able to venture into the deeper issue of just how to understand our constructive role in the immediate future, we might observe the challenge that is before us: the challenge of a planet severely damaged by an assault of unprecedented violence; a planet so toxic that rainfall is no longer the purest of waters but has become sulphuric or nitric acid; a planet with its rivers and seas seriously polluted; a planet with its atmosphere diminished in its oxygen context and saturated with hydrocarbons; a planet with its continents impoverished in their capacity to support life because of blacktopping and road building, erosion and strip mining. We now have a disturbed biosphere brought about by a technology for which nature has no limiting forces short of suffocating or eliminating the others. The astounding capacity of nature to establish ecosystems wherein the myriad of life systems interact creatively with each other is finally negated by its own recent invention, the human.⁸²¹

For Swimme, the fundamental starting point is cosmology. It's important to begin with the universe as a whole. Indeed, he suggests that our difficulties today are rooted in the way we are caught up in a human world. We cannot seem to break out of this anthropocentrism. To ask, "What's the best story we can tell?" is a great starting point. That is what cosmology basically is: It's the fundamental story that people live within. Margaret Mead said that every culture she looked at had a "cosmic sense" and needed to know how it related to the cosmos as a whole, how it related to the sun or the

⁸²⁰ Berry, pp. 65-66.

⁸²¹ Berry, p. 66.

sea. Mircea Eliade claimed that for the tribal people, their central organizing pattern is the cosmogonic myth, the creation story. A living cosmology enables the human being to hold these immense realities in mind. Without a cosmic story, they escape us.

What is required of us is nothing less than a reinvention of what it means to be human. It does not mean merely making an adjustment. It means complete reinvention. We have been on the planet for two million years and we have constantly reinvented ourselves. And now we have to do it in a new way and the proposal is that the most effective way to reinvent a human being is within the cosmic story. After studying all the major cultures of the world for 50 years, Thomas Berry came up with a conclusion which startled Swimme. He said that in the history of humanity, the scientific enterprise is the most sustained meditation ever carried out on the universe. And furthermore, what has been discovered in the scientific era has to be regarded as equally important with the revelations of the great religions. That approach is worth consideration. Thomas Berry is not the only person who has come to this conclusion. Stephen Toulmin, a philosopher at the University of Chicago, who wrote *The Discovery of Time* , says that science's discovery of this evolutionary story has to be regarded as the most significant achievement of human mentation. This is a large claim. Why is the change so vast, why is it so enormous? It is because we are just now beginning to understand what this story might mean for us. This enormously fascinating story is breaking into human awareness.

Why is it only now dawning on us, argues Swimme? Because we had to go into a shamanic trance to arrive at the story. Humans for the last two centuries have had to close down an enormous number of sensibilities, sensitivities, to get the story right, to focus entirely on empirical evidence and scientific understanding without any interference with religious tradition or spiritual thinking. And so the interpretation

Swimme would make of our moment is that science now is coming out of its shamanic trance and has returned to the culture at large, but more importantly to the planet as a whole. And now it's telling the story of this universe exploding into being 20 billion years ago.⁸²²

From a deep ecology stance, when we theologize about creation, incarnation, sacrament and covenant in an ecological vein, we will find ourselves moving toward new understandings which may be quite different from those we were taught. The doctrine of creation, for example, points to the goodness of all creatures and to God's abiding love for the universe. But the doctrine of creation is intrinsically linked to that of redemption. We have not been used to thinking about God's work of redeeming the nonhuman world. Further, it cannot be guaranteed that some animals will cease to be less dangerous or not dangerous at all in a more cosmologically harmonious world or that diseases will suddenly die out. If the latter is as valuable to the Creator as the human species, what restraints, accommodations and additions will need to be made in other areas of Christian thought? Most Christians associate the doctrine of incarnation to Jesus as the Christ, although it is also understood in the broader sense of God's enfleshed or "en-mattered" presence in all things. But does the image of the crucifixion extend in an intrinsic way to the suffering of animals and to devastated rain forests? The Christological myths express Christian faith as the nearness and concreteness of divine presence. But God's sacred dwelling will need to transcend humans to be found in calves tortured in immobilizing boxes to produce milk-fed veal, in poisoned rivers and bays, in mountains clear-cut and gouged by greed.⁸²³

⁸²² Stephen Toulmin & June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Brian Swimme, 'A Cosmic Story,' <<http://www.Gratefulness.org>> [accessed 30 August 2012]

Conclusion

In moving towards a cosmology that is wholly appropriate for this century, humanity is required to think more seriously than possibly ever before, about its place and its responsibility to creation and all that exists within the created order. Awareness of the divinity of creation does not appear to come naturally to humanity and one could argue that in a divinely created universe, infused with such powerful divinity, that it ought to. Each point of view from Hildegard to Swimme, makes a valuable contribution towards formulating a blueprint for a more 'wholistic' way of existing and indeed in understanding what the position is and what action needs to be taken.

⁸²³ Eugene C. Bianchi 'The Ecological Challenge to Christianity', *New Theology Review* February 1998.

Conclusion

The contribution I have made in producing a spirituality that is truly appropriate for the 21st century is in presenting an urgent call to embrace the concept of a Christ-centered living cosmology, one that creatively draws together what I consider to be some of the most powerful strands of thought that can help to successfully demonstrate why humanity needs to transform itself to a higher state of being through the body, spirit, the Christ energy, God and creation so that a complete unification can be made manifest and where in this way, we *can* truly achieve heaven on earth.

My cosmology is one that places Love at the heart of it, not only that, but *anchors* it throughout the cosmos through the Cosmic Christ. Love was the new covenant ushered in by Jesus, based upon the idea that it has been recognised and commanded by God that humanity requires reconciliation, given that it has lost much of its sense of the sacred divine. That is the secure component that could be said to exist between God, Christ and the whole of creation. I have shown that the anchoring of this Love is vital in restoring a balanced, harmonious creation, requiring a firm structure from which to emanate throughout the cosmos and this could only be put in place through the Cosmic Christ and then planted into the hearts of both male and female in order to allow a new consciousness to arise.

This different cosmology is about living from the heart and taking responsibility for each other and creation. It is also about standing in one's own truth and recognising who we are as individuals and operating as the authentic self. When we do this, we are spiritually more able to merge with the cosmos and experience the connection, the oneness. In this way we are able to begin to understand the true reality of who we are and the cosmic consciousness of our own existence. It is only through awakening to

cosmic consciousness that we can start to more fully understand the *divinity* of ourselves and of creation. In this sense we bring the metaphysical into physical reality because it involves a merging of the two: a combination of heaven and earth. In this way, we are able to be reconciled with the whole of creation. This is something that we can only experience with our whole being.

In bringing creation spirituality into this century, I have shown that the Cosmic Christ is central, assisting in the transformation of ourselves and creation. This requires the leaving behind of old thought patterns and destructive ways of being that no longer serve us on our path towards harmony and wholeness. We can no longer be constrained by the past. A living cosmology requires us to continue moving forward. We are thus able to start to fully express our true humanity and the qualities that let God shine through us, such as mercy, unconditional love and compassion.

The 'missing link' is a Christ-centered living cosmology where Christ is present both in the world and throughout the cosmos pulsating with cosmic energy, liberating humanity and driving us forward to bring about the expression of our own divinity and recognition of a fully divine creation. The Cosmic Christ urges us to change, to follow through our 'process of becoming.' The call has arrived for humanity to once and for all banish the notion of its fallen state that would otherwise keep it trapped and on the lowest rung of the cosmic ladder towards transformation, and healing. We are now required to embrace a new way of being, one that demands whole hearted responsibility for each other and all of creation. This is the path of the spirit made possible by our own embodiment on earth, where we are able to experience, grow and make the journey together towards unification and the divine reality of our true being. Sallie McFague states: we *are* the body of God. Equally Pierre Teilhard de Chardin sees humanity as being present in world which he describes as the 'body'. Thus it might be said that in this way, creation and humanity are the full expression of God's

body on earth. This therefore requires us to see each other equally and without hierarchal structure. It requires us to realise that we are caretakers of the earth that it is not there to be dominated, but to be lovingly cared for.

It can be said that it was God's intention to interlink himself with Christ, humanity and creation. Creation remains divinely inspired and this continuing aspect of interconnection remains a key aspect today. In moving beyond the resurrection of Jesus, his role as the Christ means that he has a continuing relationship with the cosmos. It is in this sense that he becomes the Cosmic Christ, an acting living presence within creation. This continues a strong cosmic theme. In terms of today, what can his Christhood contribute? I suspect that it will be almost if not the same as it was when he lived more than 2000 years ago: the expression of love, understanding, compassion, respect and a great sense of justice. These are Christ-like qualities. This helps in putting a strong basic structure in place. But this is not with a view of remaining 'static' and 'living in the past' in terms of what we know about the historical Jesus. This is about moving his way of living, his theology, his ideas, beliefs and qualities, forward into this century. He can be described as being 'radical' in his own time. Is this not what is required now, radical, drastic changes to our own way of being, one that truly corresponds with this 'radical' Jesus who existed over 2000 years ago? I strongly suggest that it is *exactly* what is required.

The different consciousness I have presented offers a useful blueprint of this never-ending circle of creation and humanity passing through a continuous process that is not in itself perfect due to humanity's misdemeanours, but is nonetheless a continual strive towards growth and perfection and the realisation that we are completely divinely linked. The ultimate goal would be for humanity to comprehend that it is possible to experience this ultimately in terms of 'oneness.' Perhaps the most important thing to point out here is the physicality of this inter-connection. Jesus was an incarnate being

and as such this immediately connects humanity, as incarnate beings, to him. We exist in a physical universe. The whole purpose in terming Jesus as the Cosmic Christ is to see his role in creation in every sense. Jesus as the Cosmic Christ would have to be regarded as an active energy in helping humanity to restore the *greening* power of the cosmos. Therefore, it was wholly appropriate for me to examine the ecological crisis as the background for the themes. The events described are happening *now*. The world is in crisis, embroiled in an apocalyptic scenario, even at the very moment of reading this. We have the opportunity and sufficient knowledge to help prevent or at the very least minimise the damage we are causing. There are no excuses to be made. Issues and concerns have been examined in depth to establish the seriousness of humanity's action or more perhaps in-action towards nature which has resulted in the gradual destruction of the eco-system.

The main issue is that scientific evidence has shown that denial of an ecological crisis would be futile and inaccurate. The extent to which Christianity can be held fully responsible is questionable, especially when once again, hermeneutics have played a major role in comprehending the creation texts, not to mention inadequate translation of the words 'subdue' and 'dominion'. There is little doubt that dualistic thought has contributed to this great gulf between humanity and nature and fear of the return of pagan ideas relating to nature which were quickly abolished. Despite the triumphs and contributions of science and technology, both have served unfortunately to advance dualistic, mechanistic ways of thinking and of course, the ridding of the notion of separation and dualistic thought is imperative if we are to instigate a contemporary cosmology. When we exist in a state of oneness, we no longer feel isolated, separated or lonely from each other and creation.

The place of the feminine has also, historically, been greatly subdued and is now re-emerging as it must to in order to properly re-dress the balance. Both of these aspects

had to be addressed as key concerns in my cosmology. Since the fall we have strayed from the main element that kept us attached to God: the feeling of wholeness. What we are witnessing today is its primary factor: 'cosmic disruption'. There is a distinct lack of harmony and communion that moves away from what Jesus taught. This demands a change of consciousness, a complete recovery of the sacred and a ridding of the notion of an illusory dualism, recognising that humanity is and always has been at one with the divine. This provides further key reasoning in my cosmology.

The term 'eco-feminism' draws women and nature together, who have both for many centuries been treated with disregard. The point of eco-feminism is not necessarily to convert women everywhere, but to address the problems *through* this term. Introducing a different model of consciousness, one that will ultimately close the divisions between men, women and nature, might help to repair the situation that has been brought about through patriarchy. This was a primary aim of the research. I see my own cosmology as a contributory factor in moving forward. I have drawn upon the work of feminist theologians in order to demonstrate more effectively why it is *so* important that we put into place a different cosmology that without doubt is a fully inclusive one.

The wake-up call has arrived. It seems that we have become separated from our intended state of being and perhaps allowed the evil side of human nature to become more dominant. The 'dark' side of woman--chaotic and wild--demonstrates that from a patriarchal stand-point, only the dark side is really expounded. After the fall it is Adam who becomes the 'transformer' not Eve, it appears she still needs to be tamed! For Eve, there is no leniency shown towards her: she remains cast as the villain. Whilst the role of Mary, Jesus' mother, becomes of positive cosmic significance, her biblical role is extremely understated. This is a woman who, we are told, experienced 'daily visitors from God' serving to show how blessed she was. She has joined in the mystery with Christ. Her salvific role in redemption shows the uniting of mother and son in the

cosmic scheme of things in a similar way to Jesus as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride, or indeed Jesus as the bridegroom and Israel as the bride. Mary has thus become part of the New Covenant. Peace, harmony, justice throughout creation and the recognition of equality between male and female are of primary importance and present us with a huge task in terms of repairing the covenant and emerging ourselves back into our original intended state of oneness.

Hildegard of Bingen and Teilhard de Chardin have proved invaluable to me in attempting to get to the heart of why humanity and creation have ended up in this position, and in understanding what the true state of our existence should be. Both felt strongly and passionately about a Christ-centered cosmology and both understood the urgency for humanity to understand the interconnection between God, Christ, each other and creation. The messages of these two mystics are powerful and unite across time towards a common goal: To achieve a more balanced and Christ-infused creation cosmology. This also adds to originality and contribution in terms of bringing together the work of these two mystics. Both had clear, strong messages. In addressing the mystical writings of Hildegard of Bingen, the themes could be seen to be very well placed and explicit in the historical context but also to have a timeless quality to them. This is why they are so significant in the bringing about of a different cosmology for the 21st century. The warnings Hildegard gave in the twelfth century remain valid today. Our world has changed but unfortunately our attitudes have not. The cosmological ideas of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin were certainly vital in this research. Both of these mystics suffered a great disservice in having their work neglected. In Hildegard's case this continued for many centuries. In Teilhard's case the Vatican made sure that he was stopped in his tracks, as it were, because they could not afford to allow a Catholic priest to disagree with certain doctrines impounded within the Catholic tradition. He was controversial, there is no doubt, both in the scientific world and the world of theology

and was unable in his lifetime to overcome the barriers that might have allowed his seemingly radical works to reach the world stage. But it was not just the Vatican he had to contend with, but his own peers from the scientific world in particular. He believed in cosmic evolution and the oneness of nature, stating that we are moving towards a state of unification that is complex. His ideas stepped outside of traditional belief, yet these were the very same ideas that for him lay at the heart of the Christian faith. He firmly believed that the divine was to be experienced through the material world and that this was central to the concept of evolution as he saw it. This, he stated, is what would draw together science and religion. He was so convinced of his ideas that he even remarked (referring to the Church) he “would be happy to die and be free of it” if this would unite him with the ‘reality’ that he believed in, which was the mystical union.

Whilst being a very *different* kind of mystic compared to Hildegard, he understood that the material world, the world of matter, was crying out for humanity to recognise not only its own divinity but that an interconnection and interrelatedness exists between the two. As far as Teilhard was concerned, dualism of any kind has no place on earth and as far as I am concerned it has no place in a living divine cosmology. At Teilhard rightly states, the time of individualism is now over. We have reached the age of community where all can benefit from working together and sharing talents for the good of each other and the community and this in turn can help to heal creation.

It was also important in this thesis to establish a hermeneutical basis, since it presents a formidable challenge to transform Hildegard’s work into a 21st century setting. However, through careful examination of her visions and ideas, and through the contributions of Gadamer and Thiselton, the task became easier of how to approach her writings in the present day for the purposes of constructing a contemporary cosmology.

In so doing, both Gadamer and Thiselton make interesting and valid points. Thiselton suggests that we cannot enter a text with fore-conceptions without some

difficulty. Gadamer argues the opposite. This is almost certainly bound to happen. Whilst I believe that Thiselton is correct up to a point in stating that what we should be looking for is a hermeneutics of expectation, I also agree with Gadamer in his idea of expanding the text, thus bringing about a breadth of vision that invites many things into the overall understanding of the text. This includes, for example, the stripping away of the 'externals' of the text, i.e. culture of the time, and getting to the heart of the text itself: although, as we have discovered, it is necessary to have some historical and cultural comprehension of the time in question. But Gadamer invites the reader to look more deeply into the text itself. When the reader achieves this, then what we have is a selection of very rich texts from which we can begin to build a comprehensive modern day cosmology. This is not to deny that elements of Hildegard's work may jar with contemporary viewpoints. The one she apports blame to for attempting to destroy the work that Christ accomplished is, of course, Satan. The personification of the devil in Hildegard's work however, might not translate well into a 21st century cosmology for a number of reasons. Firstly, if we understand the world as being divided between the religious and the secular, how many of the world's population, in either case, would realistically accept the idea of the existence of the devil, however much the idea may be convincingly portrayed through the world of film, for example? We live in what may be seen by some as a rational world, with no place for anything that may seem otherwise, especially that which we cannot see. Could it be possible for many contemporary individuals to believe in a Garden of Eden, which Hildegard did: a place that is fully divine, rich and glorious when this is both far from the truth of our own reality and appears to stand outside scientific, rational worldviews?

What may also not transfer well into a modern cosmology, certainly from a feminist point of view, is the fact that she believed women ought to be passive. Where love and sex are concerned she suggests that, by very nature, women are the 'weaker'

sex. Yet Hildegard had previously stated that as woman was created secondary to man, she might well be the weaker vessel *physically*, but that in this sense her fragility makes her more like God, because she possessed God-like qualities such as mercy and compassion. In other words, perhaps Hildegard was suggesting that the female through her emotional nature would be seen to be as having strength in this respect, in much the same way as the physical strength of the man. Perhaps Hildegard does a great disservice to Eve by suggesting that she is more 'susceptible and vulnerable' than Adam. According to Hildegard, Adam loved Eve so much that he would do anything for her. One could argue that Adam was equally as susceptible. Hildegard seems to be making an unfavourable assumption about Eve. There is nothing in the first Genesis account that suggests she is more vulnerable than Adam.

But can we be kinder to Eve? Loss of the greening power came about as a result the fall. Maybe compassion and understanding would be appropriate Christ-like qualities to administer here. Within the narrative, Adam played his part alongside Eve and therefore Eve cannot be held totally responsible. However, surely in the 21st century it is time to move on and stop apportioning blame. The way forward must surely be to embrace equal status between the sexes, recognise stewardship of creation and focus on how humanity can resolve the difficulties that have resulted from fear, ignorance and cruelty to each other and nature. All the negative aspects that create darkness, including lack of faith and trust in each other, cause humanity to constantly break the covenant. A more conscious way of behaving would help in the process of restoring the covenant. These serve as important factors in building this cosmology.

Hildegard would have advocated the need for worldwide justice in every sense and this is what we need now. The lack of it has contributed greatly towards the serious problems and conflicts we see happening in societies worldwide, thus causing problems on a cosmic scale. There may be those who mistakenly believe that our misdemeanours

are confined to earth: they are not. They produce effects on the cosmos as a whole and can no longer be ignored. Recognition of this is a first step towards a change of consciousness. If we wish to continue living in fear and isolation from God, we need do nothing to change the situation. The connection humanity has with each other is real. Jesus recognised humanity as brothers and sisters and this was not meant as a term of endearment. It was meant to demonstrate to us that our brother and sister hood reaches far beyond the dimensions of blood relations. This is important because both Hildegard and Teilhard's writings place the focus on humanity, creation, God and Christ and their inter-relatedness. Hildegard sees a full divine purpose not only in creation, itself having been divinely ordained by God, but also in the connection between humanity and God. She understands Christ as fulfilling his role as co-creator and in being fully present in creation. This enables the concept of the Cosmic Christ to be acknowledged, which constitutes the first theme of the thesis. Christ as entirely active in his cosmic role places him within the scope of a living cosmology. A major focus of Hildegard's visions concern humanity's disregard and disuse of nature and indeed of each other, seemingly failing to recognise the importance of not only earthly harmony, but cosmic harmony. What Hildegard shows is major cosmic disruption caused by the actions of humanity, stating that 'when man sins, it will result in cosmic disharmony.' Humanity does not recognise its place in creation where it is linked to Christ, forming a special relationship. Humanity is accountable for nature and Hildegard presents a stern warning if this accountability is not adhered to, warning that its neglect can only result in disastrous consequences. What she seems most afraid of is that God will withdraw angelic protection of the earth, where it will become susceptible to the devil's snares. This gave the second theme of apocalyptic.

Hildegard states that the universe reveals the inter-relational Trinitarian energy pattern of love. This is interwoven into the entire cosmic structure. As individuals,

humanity is expected to participate in this energy and help to bring it fully to fruition. A sense of morality must be addressed in this case, because in order to allow love to manifest, then there also needs to be a great sense of justice and compassion on humanity's part towards each other. This is especially important in an ecological sense. Hildegard writes about *viriditas* (green life force) and records that where this was once strong, it is depleting through lack of respect. As all parts of creation form inter-related parts of the cosmos, this means that it has already seriously affected the environment. Hildegard sees Christ as the focus of this 'greening power' she constantly refers to. As the Word of God, she states that he was instrumental in bringing creation into being and so stands at the heart of it. This is an on-going task of Christ, and the growth and fruition are *the* significant key aspects of a creation that is cosmic in nature.

The covenant is another key aspect of Hildegard's cosmology, making the point that each time a sinful act is committed, the cosmos suffers and this contributes significantly towards an imbalance. It means that the covenant has been broken. This, she believed, was in place from the moment Eve was deceived by the serpent. Adam subsequently sinned and they were forced out of paradise by God. This meant that the gates of paradise were then sealed off from impurity, casting Adam and Eve onto barren land. Ecologically, this is a poignant moment. In human terms it is disastrous because as Hildegard believes, the episode in the Garden of Eden clearly instigated the capacity for human will to follow one of two paths, one of light and one of darkness. Light, and the 'light of men' were key ideas in Hildegard's visions. The Living Light was God. She claimed all beings possess this light but in some it will turn to darkness. Yet she always maintained that good would triumph over evil. The desire that comes about through failure to adhere to the light will inevitably result in evil deeds. This has a direct effect on cosmic harmony. Her visions were very much focussed on the Christo-centric and anthropocentric. Adam and Eve were the instigators for what had become an on-going

problem for humanity--disrespect and disregard for God and his creation. It also inadvertently introduces the final theme of the sacred feminine, which has been explored throughout this thesis.

To close this conclusion, I would argue that my contribution shows clearly where my own position lies concerning the importance of the Cosmic Christ and a creation cosmology that is *real* for the 21st century. It will take hard work on humanity's part to overcome the difficulties I have stated throughout the research, and to be prepared to make the effort to raise its consciousness and that of the planet we call home.

The three major parts of the thesis then, work well together in drawing out what I believe to be a plausible, comprehensive and explicit blueprint for a modern day creation cosmology; one that emerges from a sense of the apocalyptic, is covenantally understood, addresses imbalance through recovering the sacred feminine, and has the Cosmic Christ at its heart. In placing the Cosmic Christ at the centre, this cosmology is living, and loving and sacred.

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