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The Future of the Cosmos and the Renewal of the Church's Life with Nature

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> We are now living in the dawn of the future life; for we are beginning to regain a knowledge of the creation, a knowledge forfeited by the fall of Adam. Now we have a correct view of the creatures, more so, I suppose, than they have in the papacy. Erasmus does not concern himself with this; it interests him little how the fetus is made and formed and developed in the womb..., but by God's mercy we can begin to recognize His wonderful works and wonders also in the flowers when we ponder his might and goodness.
>
> —Martin Luther, *Table Talk*

> Now if I believe in God's Son and bear in mind that he became man, all creatures will appear a hundred times more beautiful to me than before. Then I will properly appreciate the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, apples, and pears, as I reflect that he is Lord over all and the center of things.
>
> —Martin Luther, *The Gospel According to St. John*

The threat of mass catastrophe is now a commonplace of the popular mind. With the passing of each day, we are becoming more and more familiar with scenarios of global thermonuclear death and devastation, planetary ecological collapse, toxic pollution of our environment, vast blights of deforestation and soil erosion, constant economic crisis for the great majority of the earth's peoples, and rampant starvation in some regions around the world, all punctuated by the threats of nuclear accidents or terrorism and stories of increasingly capricious patterns of global weather. Hovering in our consciousness, as well, is the vague but dismal image of the end of cosmic history itself, ignominiously, eons from now, through some kind of universal "heat death." It is existentially thinkable today, perhaps as never before, that the final word being written across the pages of the whole human drama, and across the chapters of the cosmos itself, is *finis,* termination, death, once and for all, and not some placid passing, but a death with terror, torment, and excruciating moments of pain. These are apocalyptic times indeed. And the dark clouds of a future which is No Future often flood backward, as it were, into the present, producing a deep-seated and widespread spiritual anomie.

Witness the oft-reported dreams of children today around the world: visions of nuclear winter dance in their heads. Adolescents, likewise, are stricken in large numbers with a "heavy metal" rock music, which is sometimes

directly inspired by the apocalyptic visions of world judgment depicted in the Book of Revelation and which borders at some points on self-conscious nihilism. Films popular with "mature audiences" often betray a similar spirit of terror before the future and alienation from the present. They are full of images of cosmic horrors, as in *Jaws,* or feature numerous vengeful images of insects or rats or even machines taking over the world, frequently in the aftermath of nuclear catastrophe. To be sure, a Luke Skywalker may somehow manage to triumph over the forces of cosmic evil in a *Star Wars* epic, and audiences may take delight in the sight of cuddly little bear-like creatures, reminiscent of the best of Disney, coming to save the day for the forces of good in the same story. But one can wonder whether that narrative represents anything more than a temporary reprieve, a romantic retreat, from the otherwise daily fears and horrors fixed deeply in our minds from the images generated by narratives such as *The Day After.*

This poses a new kind of challenge for the church and its theologians. Does the church have access to a theological vision which is commensurate with the cosmic despair and the spiritual anomie which characterizes so much of our culture today?

It appears that the theology in which recent generations of church leaders, above all parish pastors, have been trained is no longer fully able to serve the life of the church, precisely because the church lives in a culture in which the thought of mass catastrophe and the despair that goes with that thought are increasingly commonplace. Until very recently, the theology taught in our seminaries, by and large, focused mainly on the "inner agenda" of guilt. This theology took "justification by faith" not only as the central hermeneutical and normative doctrine, by which the church stands or falls, but also as the church's chief substantive teaching as well. This meant that *the content* of the gospel proclaimed was essentially "the forgiveness of sins."

But we live in a world in which an "outer agenda"—is there any meaning, is there any reason to look forward to tomorrow, will there ever be any end to the pain and anguish of this world, is there any reason to go on living?—has come more and more to the fore. This means that our church leaders today, who seem to be relatively well-equipped to proclaim the gospel of God's liberating grace to individuals burdened with guilt, are often, so it would appear, strikingly ill-equipped to proclaim that same gospel to people who are depressed and immobilized by a world which seems to be going to hell at every turn.

Enter the Theology of Hope. In this time of increasing despair about the future of our species, and the future of the cosmos as a whole, the church needs a theological vision of the future which is larger and deeper than the hopelessness of our souls. The Theology of Hope has helped to make just such a vision possible.[1] Still, notwithstanding many suggestive motifs, no single theologian

[1]The pioneering work of this movement—still a study that merits exposure, especially in our theological schools—is Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). Perhaps the most accessible work of substance in this area is Carl E. Braaten, *The Future of God: The Revolutionary Dynamics of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). The theme of hope also emerges, inevitably, in many of the articles of a recent issue of this journal, whose topic was 1984. See *Word & World* 4/1 (Winter, 1984).

has yet explored the implications of the Theology of Hope substantively for "the theology of the

earth," that is, the biophysical world, the cosmos, or nature. Thus far protagonists of this school of theology have mainly focused their efforts on the theology of human history, in particular the theology of human liberation.[2] They have been relatively silent about the whole creation's groaning in travail. This is an area in the Theology of Hope which surely needs to be developed, in a way that is consistent with its overall principles, to the end that the life of the church might be more fully served in these apocalyptic times.[3]

What can a Theology of Hope tell us, then, about the future of the cosmos, and how might this theology help the church to renew its life with nature in this era of growing cosmic alienation?

I. THE PARADIGM OF HOPE

To begin to answer this question, I want to highlight three texts, which I believe can be, and perhaps should be, as charged for us today as the famous justification-by-faith texts of Romans and Galatians were for Luther in his day. The first depicts the cosmic scope of God's gracious lordship, as God's reign moves toward its fulfillment, toward the final Rest of God's Future:

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

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

> For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death....When all things are subjected to him, then the son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:28)

Then, thirdly, a text which envisions the landscape and the soulscape of the consummated Future of God:

> Then I saw a new heavens and a new earth; for the first heavens and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God....(Rev 21:1f.)

The paradigm of hope which emerges when these texts are allowed to interact with each other in our imagination has a number of general characteristics which I want to identify at the outset in order to set the stage for some historical analysis and some constructive reflection.

First, the paradigm of hope moves us toward a vision of reality which is fundamentally *temporal* rather than static. The dynamism of the Hebraic worldview, which was somewhat eclipsed as early Christianity established itself in the

[2]Some discussion of the theology of nature appears in Jürgen Moltmann's essay, "Creation as an Open System," *The Future of Creation: Collected Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) and in Carl E. Braaten's chapter, "Toward an Ecological Theology," *Christ and Counter-Christ: Apocalyptic Themes in Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

[3]For a general discussion about "the theology of nature" in the last two decades, see my forthcoming article, "'Toward a New Theology of Nature': Beyond the Theological Impasse" (to be published in *dialog).*

world of Hellenistic culture, here comes to the fore self-consciously and unashamedly. Ultimate reality is not some unchanging, timeless eternity. Ultimate reality is history. So we can readily think in terms of God's universal history with all things.

Second, the scope of this universal history is, indeed, *universal,* not just historical in the narrow sense of that word. The whole cosmos, not just the human family, is on a pilgrimage with God from alpha to omega, and God is on a pilgrimage with the cosmos, not just humanity, from the very beginning to the very end. We gain this insight, if for no other reason, when we lift our eyes to see God's Future and see a new heavens and a new earth, not only a new Jerusalem.

Third, the movement of God's universal history with all things—and, analogously, the life of humanity with nature—is *holistic,* rather than monistic or deistic. God is God and the world is world, as Karl Barth used to say. God and the world are fundamentally distinct. God is not identical with the world. Nor is the world God's body. The world is created by God *ex nihilo*; it has a beginning and an ending, however difficult that may be to conceptualize. On the other hand, the world is not separate from God: it is through God and to God. God's presence permeates, embraces, and governs the world, majestically and intimately. God is the circle, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. The world is therefore charged with the glory of God, and it will be even more so at the very end, when God will be all in all.

Likewise, the human creature's relationship with the cosmos is neither monistic nor deistic in character. Created in the image of God, the human creature transcends cosmic life. Human life, we can say with Teilhard de Chardin, is evolution conscious of itself. It is nature emerging beyond itself. So, at the very end, when God will be all in all, the distinctness of human life will be reaffirmed and consummated. God will call forth a new Jerusalem, not only a new heavens and a new earth. At the same time, humanity has its life in, with, and under the cosmos. Human life is unthinkable apart from our embodiedness, apart from our deep roots in the earth and its history. So, at the very end, when humanity will be gloriously transfigured in the new Jerusalem, and when the whole cosmos will be born again, humanity will be blessed with a glorious new corporality and radically transformed relationship with nature generally. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them.

Fourth, the paradigm of hope moves us toward a vision of reality which is finally *theocentric* rather than Christocentric. This will sound like a scandal to some of our contemporaries, who grew up at Karl Barth's knee. But St. Paul seems to say quite clearly, nonetheless, that the reign of Christ is subordinate to the reign of God.[4] Perhaps we should try, accordingly, to hear Paul afresh at this point, before we quickly run off to re-read the *Church Dogmatics.* Systematic, dogmatic Christocentrism as we know it today, it is worth noting here, is a relatively recent phenomenon in the theological tradition. It emerged probably for the first time in Schleiermacher, in the early nineteenth century. Prior to that time the church's theologians surely always exalted the name of Christ, but

[4]1 Cor 15:28. For an analysis of the centrality of this point in Paul's thought, see J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

virtually always in the context of a trinitarian theocentrism, as reflected in the classical creeds.

Fifth, the paradigm of hope shows us a God whose universal will is to embrace all things, to unify all things, in perfect harmony in the perfected Kingdom of God, when God will be all in all. The underlying, eliciting Divine *telos* of the universe is, then, *ecological and communitarian,* rather than anarchic or individualistic. As we look to the things that are to come, particularly focusing our eyes on the human future, this ecological and communitarian shape of things is especially visible. We see neither a congeries of glorified individuals alone in eternity, nor a collection of transfigured human families alone. Rather we see a new-born *city,* a new-born human community, rooted in its own renewed cosmic home. The world moves forward to the consummated Jerusalem of God in the new heavens and the new earth. It does not move toward some kind of anarchic or individualistic acosmic eternity.

II. THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC-SOTERIOCENTRIC TRAJECTORY

With this fundamental theological paradigm of hope before us, we can instructively note some contrasting features of certain major trends in the theological tradition, down to our own century.[5] I want to identify these trends, in a preliminary way, by raising a question. We have two creation narratives in the Book of Genesis. Which does one interpret in terms of which? The paradigm of hope which I have just identified would, as a matter of course, prompt us to see Genesis 1, the Priestly narrative, as being first, and Genesis 2-3, the Yahwistic account, as being second. But highly influential trends in the theological tradition have tended to reverse that order, in exegetical emphasis.

The temporal, universal, and holistic story of God's creative activity with the world, which we encounter in Genesis 1, has been seen by more than a few theologians *not* so much as the theater for the universal manifestation of God's glory and the arena for the cosmic expression of his goodness, in the midst of which Adam and Eve are given the choice of life or death, but more as the mere prologue to what is "really essential": the creation of the human creature, subsequently the fall, and then the foreshadowing of human salvation. The static and parochial image of the garden, rather than the dynamic and universal image of creation-history, has tended to dominate large sections of the traditional theological consciousness, at least from the time of Augustine.

Indeed, this fascination with the human story depicted in Genesis 2-3 spilled over, as it were, and influenced interpretation of Genesis 1. Thus we find Ambrose, in commenting on Genesis 1:31—which states that God looked at *everything* he had made, and behold it was very good—observing that God looked at *Adam alone,* not at all things he had made as the text says, when God saw that everything was "very good." For Ambrose the human creature is clearly the whole point of the creation narrative in Genesis 1. For him, Genesis 1 is an anthropocentric narrative and more. Congruent with his anthropocentric

[5]For an extensive discussion of the points touched on briefly in the following paragraphs, see my forthcoming study, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

reading of the creation narrative, he identifies Adam's special significance in creation with the fact that the eternal Son of God would become incarnate in Adam's progeny, in the Second Adam. In this sense, then, for Ambrose the whole point of the created order is human salvation. Anthropocentrism and soteriocentrism, if I may use that term, are thus intimately related in his reading of the Genesis accounts.

This anthropocentric-soteriocentric hermeneutic of creation was given an impressive systematic statement in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas. He argues that the very *raison d'être* of the whole creation is the coming into being of the rational creatures, and that the *raison d'être* of the rational creatures, in turn, is their final beatific vision. That is to say, teleologically considered, the cosmic order is a kind of stage constructed by God for the sake of the human drama of salvation (and for the angels); and it has no enduring meaning apart from that instrumentality. Thomas makes this point quite explicitly and with sobering clarity. Although he qualifies the matter in a number of ways, he finally ends his argument by saying that in the End Times, with the exception of human bodies, the whole biophysical world will fall away into nothingness. Why should it do anything else, since its only essential meaning was instrumental? We see, then, that the famous Thomistic principle that "grace perfects nature" does not in fact apply in his thought to the biophysical world generally. On the contrary, in this context, grace *destroys* nature! As for Ambrose, only much more systematically, for Thomas the whole creation is viewed anthropocentrically and soteriocentrically, that is, in terms of Genesis 2-3. And that leads to the final abnegation of nature as a whole.

This medieval theological perspective is alive and well in our own time. It has been represented by thinkers as diverse as Karl Barth and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. For Barth the Garden scenario is, as it were, pushed back into eternity where, in effect, the salvation of humanity happens in Jesus Christ. For Barth, creation as depicted in Genesis 1 then becomes the external stage for the enactment or the realization of God's covenant with humanity in Jesus Christ. For Teilhard, the Garden is not, as it were, pushed back into the eternity prior to the creation of the world, as it is for Barth. Rather, for Teilhard the Garden is, so to speak, pushed forward into the eternity that follows the end of the world. For him the whole point of Genesis 1 is to set the stage so that the law of complexity-consciousness can run its course, so that the many cosmically scattered elements of consciousness can be gathered into greater and more intense spiritual constellations, until the universal history makes its last great leap into a world of pure spirit, at which time the whole of material reality (presumably with the exception of human bodies, as for Thomas) will fall back into nothingness, whence it came. For all his attention to cosmic evolution, cosmic drift, cosmic energies, and the cosmic Christ, the whole point of the biophysical world, for Teilhard, is the unification and the final consummation of consciousness, in and through the human creature. The natural world, for Teilhard, is actually only a passing stage in the greater scheme of things, much as it seems to be for Barth.

In my judgment, this anthropocentric-soteriocentric trajectory of the tradition offers us no viable, positive way to come to terms with the future of the whole cosmos theologically, no way to draw out the fullness of meaning given in

the New Testament expectation of a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It can only have the effect, finally, of reinforcing the anti-cosmic, even nihilistic tendencies of modern culture, which also teach us that nature has No Future, or nothing worth looking forward to. That means, in turn, that this anthropocentric-soteriocentric trajectory in the tradition is also ill-equipped to deal with the questions of cosmic despair and spiritual anomie, which go hand in hand with such negative cosmic expectations.

III. A DYNAMIC CREATION-HISTORY

Instead of that anthropocentric-soteriocentric line of theological reasoning, I propose—prompted by the paradigm of hope—that we read Genesis 2-3 in terms of Genesis 1, not vice versa; that we see Genesis 1 not merely as a prologue, but as *the* story, which then, with regard to its human dimensions especially, is further explicated in Genesis 2-3 and beyond.[6] Genesis 1 then becomes the narrative of the universal matrix, from first things to last things. Genesis 2-3 is the story that specifically depicts the initial details of human existence. I am therefore envisioning a dynamic, comprehensive creation-history, embraced and governed by God throughout, which gives humanity a place of special significance, but not the only place. That is the premise of all that follows.[7]

We can think of the universal Divine Economy, then, as an integrated history with two dimensions: the all-embracing ecological and the particular sociological dimensions. The older dogmaticians were accustomed to speak of *providentia generalis* and *providentia specialis* in this connection. Human history, the city of God, surely has its own meaning in the greater scheme of things. But it is not the exclusive meaning of everything. Cosmic history, the household of God, is first and foremost the theater of God's glory, as Calvin was wont to say. Its meaning is not exhausted when it offers humanity a congenial place to live and to grow in grace. As I have argued elsewhere, nature has its own integrity in the greater scheme of things.[8]

I want to examine now the relationship between the sociological and the ecological, the human and the natural, in some detail, since it is in the context of this discussion that we can see how a Theology of Hope for the cosmos as a whole can also bring with it an impetus toward the renewal of the church's life with nature. This will mean dealing first with two critical theological themes, sin and salvation, then concluding with a discussion of the calling of the church.

IV. SIN, SALVATION, AND CONSUMMATION

Clearly, creation-history is not as God intends it to be. Here is where the narrative of Genesis 2-3 gives its special explication of Genesis 1. The history of

[6]From Irenaeus through Augustine, it was a theological commonplace to interpret the history of the world—creation-history—as having six periods, as an interpretation of the six days of creation in Genesis 1. On this, see my work cited in the previous note.

[7]I have developed a similar kind of schema at some length in an earlier study, albeit with less emphasis on the category of hope. See *Brother Earth: Nature, God, and Ecology in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1970).

[8]Ibid.

humanity is a fallen history. And I take that fall to be thoroughgoing and overwhelming. But now a crucial point emerges. *There is no cosmic fall.* The earth is cursed because of humanity's sinfulness. That is to say that the judgment of God rests on all the elements of human identity, on the self as embodied and embedded in the whole of nature. But nature in itself is not fallen. The notion of a cosmic fall is essentially extrabiblical.[9]

Further, although human sin is radical, the underlying intentionality of creation-history is unaffected by sin. Sin does not stop God from being the Creator and Lord of all things. God still rules and still blesses the whole creation, the just and the unjust. The principalities and powers of death, to be sure, strike out at the goodness of God's created realm, and to that degree God's providence is fought and obscured. But God remains faithful to his original intentionality, his original covenant with the whole creation. God still elicits new life everywhere, both in the cosmic household of God and in the human city of God. From the songs of the morningstars to the hymns of joy raised by the oppressed when they leave the land of Egypt, from the bursting forth of one bud of spring to the steadfast refusal of Rosa Parks to move to the back of the bus, God is incessantly at work to renew the face of the earth, notwithstanding the incursions of human sinfulness and the havoc wrought by the collective expressions of human sin.

I surely do not want to suggest some kind of a simplistic, optimistic reading of human history and its radical evil at this point; for, clearly, from our perspective the just cause all too infrequently triumphs. The powers of death abound in human history, as well as in nature. But like the poor woman who lost a coin and searched diligently until she found it, the people of God are "prisoners of hope," as Zechariah said. Our identity constantly prompts us to search diligently for signs of God's creative rule, both in natural and human history. A Theology of Hope as a matter of course seeks to articulate that hopeful preoccupation of our souls.

It is at this point that we can appropriately begin reflecting about the meaning of human salvation, as it pertains to our life with nature. I have deliberately taken a long time before addressing this topic. For, there is a tendency in the theology of our era, and in the piety of many of our churches, to make human salvation everything, without question, the alpha and omega of the world, the alpha and omega of the church, the alpha and omega of our own personal existence. This is understandable; but it is an inflation. It reflects the hegemony of Genesis 2-3 over Genesis 1, and the underplaying of the kind of New Testament texts I cited earlier, with all the liabilities attendant on that theological emphasis.

In the universal history of God with all things, we are better instructed to say that salvation is one facet of the Divine activity, however decisive it is in fact for us humans. Salvation is the restoration of the city of God to its intended role in the universal history of God with all things. Salvation is the outflowing of that deep potency in the heart of God that was ready from before the foundation of the world to go forth to heal human history, should the experiment of human

[9]See ibid., Appendix.

history go awry. Salvation is the Creative Spirit of God going the extra mile, seeking out those who have gone astray, calling them back to their originally intended life with their Creator and

the Creator's universal history, as a shepherd seeks out the lost sheep.

Consummation, then, is the larger term. It refers to the originally intended goal of God's history with all things, both cosmos and polis, both natural and human history. Salvation is the smaller term. It refers to the divine strategy which operates to bring human history back on course, back in phase with everything else in the created universe, as all things move, elicited by God, toward the new heavens and the new earth, and the new Jerusalem.

This allows us, then, to think of the mission of Jesus Christ as being twofold in character, as it relates to salvation and consummation. We can first look at Jesus Christ as the climax of salvation history, which can be called *providentia specialissima,* using the older dogmatic language. In this context he can be called the Restorer, the One in whom humanity is re-established in its originally intended location in creation-history. This is effected chiefly through the Cross. At the same time, we can say, Jesus Christ is also the Perfector, the proleptic inflowing, of human and cosmic history as it will be consummated at the very end, when the *providentia generalis et specialis* are finally vindicated. This is effected chiefly through the Resurrection. In this respect, Christ is the foretaste or the first fruits of the End Times. Christ, then, is not only the body and blood, broken and shed for us. He is also the Lord of the banquet, that Messianic feast promised for the human community from the very beginning, when the Lord said "be fruitful and multiply."[10]

V. THE CHURCH'S CALLING

The logic of all this leads us to this observation about the calling of the church in general, and the church's life with nature in particular: in the life of the church, when it is faithful to its calling, we can see adumbrated the originally intended relationship between humanity and nature, and also a new element, the fragmentary exemplification of the life of the End Times, when God will be all in all. As the community which walks the way of the Cross and lives by the Resurrection, the church, by the grace of God, lives as the royal priesthood of God, as the embodied, congregated testimony of both the restoration and the foretaste which God has brought forth in Christ. Perhaps I can invoke an old word in this connection, drawing on both its connotations of self-sacrifice and joyful celebra-

[10]On the twofold character of the mission of Jesus Christ, cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) 116: "According to Paul Christ was not merely 'delivered for our offences' but was also 'raised for our justification' (Rom 4:25). Reconciling sinners with God through his cross, he brings about the new righteousness, the new life, the new creature through his resurrection. The justification of the sinner is more than merely the forgiveness of sins. It leads to new life: 'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more' (Rom 5:20). This is the way Paul expresses the imbalance between sin and grace, and the *added value* of grace. The surplus of grace over and above the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of sinners represents the power of the new creation which consummates creation-in-the-beginning. It follows that the Son of God did not become man simply because of the sin of men and women, but rather for the sake of perfecting creation."

tion of the Future of God—martyr. The calling of the church, we can say, is to manifest both the love of the Cross and the power of the Resurrection. What does it mean, then, for the renewal of the church's relationship with nature? I think we can see the life of the church with nature as having four aspects, three of which pertain to the restoration effected by salvation and the last of

which pertains to the anticipated consummation proleptically given in Jesus Christ.[11]

First, as redeemed creatures we can enter into a new life of *righteous cooperation* with nature. The word "dominion" can also be used here, if we do this self-consciously and cautiously. All too often " dominion " is read out of its biblical-theological context. Then it readily becomes will-to-power, or domination. This is one of the liabilities of the anthropocentric-soteriocentric trajectory in the theological tradition. It really has no way to keep the construct of human dominion over nature from becoming, in preaching and in practice, a notion of a master-slave relationship since, according to its premises, nature has no meaning or value in itself; nature only has meaning in relationship to human affairs and human destiny. Dominion, then, rightly construed, must always mean righteous cooperation with other creatures, who belong to God and not to us.

That implies two things: using the earth, yes, but doing so respectfully, attentive to its own God-given structures, and attentive to the causes of social justice. One middle axiom in this respect, for example, might be: never overwork the land or underpay the laborer. The land deserves its rest. The laborer is worthy of his or her hire. In this connection, it seems to me that the whole modern notion of private property and capital accumulation, predicated as it is on the continued exploitation of nature, is highly suspect from a theological perspective, and therefore the church should eschew it. Righteous cooperation means using the earth as God's good commonwealth in a communitarian mode, not abusing it for the sake of individual gain or class aggrandizement.

Second, as redeemed creatures we can also enter into a new life of *sensitive care* of the earth. This is care for nature, for nature's sake, an idea which may sound odd, if not scandalous, to some who have only heard the Bible interpreted in anthropocentric, soteriocentric—or secular—terms. But, nevertheless, we have been created to till the garden and keep it. And this means not only for the sake of food production, and so on, for our own well-being. It means the whole garden, the so-called useless plants and animals, as well as the productive ones. Recall that Noah took all the animals with him into the ark; presumably if his role had been only to take along animals for food, he might well have righteously seized on the opportunity to leave the unclean and the wild animals behind.

I take it that sensitive care for nature implies three kinds of engagement with nature, pertaining to what we can think of as its three dimensions—wild nature, cultivated nature, and fabricated nature—with varying degrees of effective involvement. We cannot do a great deal about caring for wild nature, nor should we, but at least we can seek to preserve it, with due attention, of course, to the canons of social justice (obviously one does not rightly seek to save the whales, let us say, oblivious of the needs of hungry children). Wild nature is

[11]A number of the following points I have discussed at length, in a slightly different form, in *Brother Earth.*

good, created so by God, and deserves to be preserved. I see no indication whatsoever in the Bible—indeed many indications to the contrary—that God would smile on an earth covered with blacktop and geodesic domes. With regard to cultivated nature, which is the interface between the wilderness and the city, we can properly intervene, by definition, more extensively. Farmlands and other sensitively managed natural reserves seem to me to be a divinely intended

datum of our existence together as human beings. In the area of fabricated nature, clearly, we can legitimately intervene even more extensively and thoroughly. I can express what I mean here by saying that in my judgment architecture and city planning are divine sciences. Since our identity as God's creatures is rooted in the whole earth, moreover—not just in the city, not just in the farm—our urban existence will be appropriately designed with signs of cultivated nature here and there, and our life in cultivated nature will be appropriately managed to allow occasional incursions of the wild, as well.

Third, as persons whose lives have been restored to our authentic roles in creation-history, we not only live lives of righteous cooperation and sensitive care; we can also live new lives of *blessed wonder.* This means seeking opportunities to contemplate both the beautiful and the sublime aspects of the cosmos, standing in awe of both the sunset and the lion roaring for its prey, seeing the glory of God refracted in both the elegance of a Mies van der Roe building and in the terror of molten steel. As guides to this wonder, perhaps Psalms 104 and 29 are among the most helpful. The first is reminiscent of the Egyptian hymn to the sun; it celebrates the gloriously harmonious diversity of the creation. The second is reminiscent of a more Babylonian-type apperception of nature, celebrating the terrible presence of Yahweh in the storm and in the pangs of birthing.

Yet as members of the church, our lives have been touched by more than salvation, which restores us to our rightful relationship with nature. The gospel we celebrate and proclaim to the world is not only the good news of our salvation, but also the good news of the consummation of the world. So there is a fourth element in our renewed relationship with nature: *joyful anticipation.* We are in touch with the reality of God's Future, we are embraced by it, in and through Christ. With him and through him, therefore, the church joins with the choirs of angels who celebrate the new heavens, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem which is to come. And so the life of the church is transfigured, however imperfectly, by the eschatological glory of God, in and through Christ.

If I read Romans 8 correctly, I think I am right—with Oscar Cullman—in concluding that a special kind of bodily renewal, anticipating the final resurrection, may be found in the life of the church in this world.[12] This reading of Pauline theology then has implications for our understanding of the church's ministry of healing today. I also wonder whether some kind of heightened spiritual relationship with nature more generally may not be possible in the context of the sacramental life of the church, prefiguring the kind of intimate communion with the whole earth that will be ours in the consummated Kingdom of God. Perhaps as we raise such questions and think such thoughts more regular-

[12]Oscar Cullman, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1958) 44ff.

ly than we have in the past, our eyes will be opened to possibilities which many of us may have hitherto ignored.

At the same time, however, we know that the powers of death are still reigning and will continue to reign until the End Times come, and that therefore our life as the martyr church must always be lived, as the word martyr suggests, under the sign of the Cross. Each of these elements—righteous cooperation, sensitive care, blessed wonder, and joyful anticipation—will

be regularly contested and often undercut, in our hearts as elsewhere, by the powers of this age. This is why a balanced, biblical Theology of Hope for cosmic history, and for our engagement with that history, must always be, until the Eschaton, what a Theology of Hope is for human history and the history of salvation, more particularly, a theology of "the Crucified God" (Moltmann). We see through a glass darkly. And we live with all the ambiguities of a sinful world. But we do see and we do live, with hope: for the future of the cosmos and for our own relationship with nature.