Mystical Theology and Ecological Theology: The Role of Nature Mysticism in Building Ecological Theology and Ethics

by

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Abstract

As eco-theologians continue to address the current ecological crisis, there is continued effort to examine ways Christianity can contribute to building an ecological theology and ecological ethic that takes seriously the human responsibility for creation. This thesis will contribute to ecological theology and ethics by examining how a unique type of Christian mysticism, nature mysticism, can be incorporated into ecological ethics. The rich tradition of Christian nature mysticism, as examined in the mystical theology of both Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Merton, demonstrates how a nature mystic becomes conscious of the presence of God within the cosmos and that this consciousness subsequently elicits not only a deep awareness of the sacredness and interconnectedness of all creation but also contains an ethical imperative that strives to build an ethic of creation. Moreover, since this nature mysticism can employ a cosmology of cosmogenesis, the opportunity to bring these together in ecological theology can further strengthen ecological ethics. In essence, this thesis argues that nature mysticism is an excellent source for building an ecological ethic that takes seriously the human responsibility in creation.

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Introduction

In the midst of our current ecological crisis, ecological theologians have expressed how that crisis is indicative of a serious spiritual malaise, evidenced by humanity's abuse and neglect of Earth, and have emphasized the urgent need for Christian communities to respond to this spiritual and ethical crisis.[1] Ecological theologians have provided substantial research regarding cosmology, ecological Christology, anthropology, ecological spirituality, God's immanent presence in creation, and the ethical responsibility of humans toward all creation.[2] This research reveals how the tradition of Christianity contains an inherent spiritual and moral concern for creation. However, there is a lack of research regarding the potential contributions of mystical theology within the study of ecological theology and ethics, particularly how nature mysticism could strengthen ecological theology and build up ecological ethics. The tradition of mysticism within Christianity is rich with mystics whose experiences of faith have often brought about ethical transformations.[3] This dissertation will address the lack of research integrating mysticism and ecological theology with the goal of examining how mystical theology, specifically nature mysticism, can be incorporated into ecological theology and ethics.

The potential contributions of mysticism to the study of ecological theology and ecological ethics have yet to be fully considered. Currently within ecological theology, very few scholars make use of Christian mysticism and mystical theology when addressing ways Christian spirituality can positively respond to the current environmental crisis. This is indicative of a deeper issue

[1] Thomas Berry called for this reform throughout his writing. His reflections on the role of Christianity contributing to the ecological crisis can be found in his *Riverdale Papers*, and in his article, "Ethics and Ecology," *Teilhard Perspective* 24, no. 1 (June 1991): 1-3.

[2] See H. Paul Santmire, *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000) for an overview of important ways Christianity can and is reflecting on ecology and the ecological crisis. Santmire also explains how ecological theology emerged in the twentieth century as a reaction to our growing environmental crisis. He focuses on examining how Christianity contains a tradition of theology and spirituality focussing on the relationship between humanity and the cosmos. Ecological theologians who have researched ecological interpretations of Christology, anthropology, cosmology and ethics include Thomas Berry, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Denis Edwards, Celia Deane-Drummond, and Mark Wallace (to name a few).

[3] Two examples of Christian mystics who exhibited a strong sense of ethics and social justice include Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) and Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380). Furthermore, scholars Roger S. Gottlieb, Kathleen Fischer, and Susan Rakoczy have written of mysticism's potential to create social transformation. See: Roger Gottlieb, "The Transcendence of Justice and the Justice of Transcendence: Mysticism, Deep Ecology and the Political Life," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 1 (1999): 146-166; Kathleen Fischer, "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Awareness," *Theology Today* 67, no. 2 (2010): 169-181; and Susan Rakoczy, *Great Mystics and Social Justice: Walking on the Two Feet of Love* (New York, NY: Paulist, 2006).

regarding the role of mystical theology in the academic study of theology, an issue Mark A. McIntosh has examined. McIntosh argues that mysticism and mystical theology are valuable and authentic sources for theology. The goal of this dissertation, however, is not to succinctly argue how mystical theology has been rejected by theology; rather, my dissertation will focus on how a particular type of mysticism—viz., nature mysticism—can be a viable and foundational source for building an ecological theology that emphasizes the need for an ethic of creation.

My dissertation also operates with an understanding of the universe through a cosmology of cosmogenesis, as outlined by Thomas Berry. I argue that this context is necessary since this cosmology can best help humanity to not only begin to better comprehend God's presence and order within our evolving universe but it can also further enable each person to grasp more fully their own cosmic identity and purpose within creation. Berry opines that humanity "may now be defined as the latest expression of the cosmic-earth process, as that being in whom that cosmic-earth-human process becomes conscious of itself."[4] This cosmic-Earth consciousness is evident in many Christian nature mystics through a cosmic Christology that not only permeates and transforms them, but also further motivates them to develop an ethic of creation.[5] This nature mysticism is demonstrated in the life and writings of both Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and Thomas Merton (1915-1968). As authors living and writing in the twentieth century, Teilhard contributed theological insights on cosmic Christology within an evolving world while Merton's practical theology began to engage with ecological issues after he read Rachel Carson's influential book, *Silent Spring* (1962). While both Teilhard and Merton brought their own approaches to theology, embedded within each of their theological writings was a nature mysticism that stemmed from their own unique cosmic-Earth consciousness.

This dissertation will examine the nature mysticism contained within the works of both Teilhard and Merton, through the context of cosmogenesis, and will build from McIntosh's argument that mysticism and mystical theology are essential for theological development. In doing so, this dissertation will contribute to ecological theology and ecological ethics by incorporating the

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[4] Thomas Berry, "The New Story: Comments on the Origin, Identification and Transmission of Values," in *Riverdale Papers* 5 (1977): 7.

[5] Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to Earth without the definite article 'the.' The point of dropping the definite article is to emphasize that Earth is a planet just as any other. Also, the definite article 'the' is not used when referring to other planets.

voice of nature mysticism into theological development that is focused on the relationship between humanity and Earth. Particular attention will be given to the ethical dimension contained within nature mysticism and how this particular dimension can assist in the foundation of ecological ethics.

Thesis Statement

The integration of Christian mysticism, and especially the nature mysticism as found in the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Merton who both employ a cosmology of cosmogenesis, will enrich ecological theology with a mystical theology that will provide a foundation for ecological ethics. By incorporating the mystical theology of nature mystics that emphasize the presence of God within the cosmos and the sacredness of all creation, we will be better able to address the current ecological crisis by building an ethic of creation. Some of the characteristics of nature mysticism that can contribute to ecological theology and ethics include a cosmic Christology, ecotheological anthropology, the transcendent yet immanent presence of God within creation, and an ecologically sensitive ethical imperative. This ethical dimension of nature mysticism will also be explored in detail, as the potential for mystical experiences to elicit social transformation and inform ethics is an important characteristic of nature mysticism.

Definitions

In order to clarify my use of the terms mysticism, nature, nature mysticism, mystical theology, cosmogenesis, and ecological ethics, it is necessary to provide definitions for each of these terms.

When referring to mysticism, I will use Bernard McGinn's definition of mysticism, which he outlined in his influential seven volume series, *The Presence of God,* on Christian mysticism.[6] He maintains "that the mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that

[6] See Bernard McGinn's current 7 volume series *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. McGinn writes little about nature mysticism but does identify it as a type of mysticism that contains an emphasis on the mystic becoming conscious of the presence of God in creation. See: Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism – 1200-1350*, vol. 3 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1998), 54-56. McGinn's approach to mysticism and his limited writing on nature mysticism will be explored in Chapter One.

concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God." [7]

For the purposes of this thesis, creation is the entire context of the phenomenal order while nature is the other-than-human context on Earth. While my use of the term nature does not include humanity, it is not because humanity is not part of the created world; rather, my use of this term will be to highlight references or themes found in nature mysticism that focus on the created world that is not human.

My definition of nature mysticism, as explored in this thesis, is a type of mysticism where the mystic emphasizes becoming conscious of the presence of God within the cosmos that subsequently elicits not only a deep awareness of the sacredness and interconnectedness of all creation but also contains an ethical imperative that strives to build an ethic of creation. In order to provide further explanation of my definition of nature mysticism, I will examine three key characteristics of nature mysticism that are each evident in the mystical theology of both Teilhard and Merton. The first characteristic of nature mysticism is that it contains an emphasis on becoming aware of the intimate relationship between humans and all creation by building a relationship *with* creation not *over* creation, and by refusing to view creation as empty matter. This intimate relationship with creation is increasingly being understood via a cosmology of cosmogenesis, which Thomas Berry has outlined in his writing. The second characteristic explains how nature mysticism relies heavily on the mystic's experience of the divine in the phenomenal world, which can include personal, emotional, and mystical encounters with God through and in other people, creatures, or nature. The third characteristic is that nature mysticism demands an Earth ethic of care and justice, which is often evident in the actions of the nature mystic. Moreover, this demand for an Earth ethic can be a great source for building an ecological ethic.[8]

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[7] Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2006), xiv.

[8] These three characteristics of nature mysticism are inspired by and connected to Thomas Berry's suggestions on how to create a "mystique of the Earth," outlined in his essay "An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality." These characteristics will be explored in detail in Chapter Four. See: Thomas Berry, "An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality," *Earth Ethics* 8, no. 1 (1996).

My understanding and use of the term mystical theology builds from McIntosh's definition of the term. He argues that the term 'mystical theology' has a long history within the Christian tradition, reaching back to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. It is used in modern theological studies today as a technical term referring to "theoretical teaching about the soul's process of sanctification."[9] Furthermore, mystical theology is studied and lived within a community of the religious faithful as this community of believers examine, internalize, and wrestle with the lives and writings of Christian mystics.[10]

Cosmogenesis refers to the irreversible, non-repeatable, evolutionary and creative processes of the universe that fashion the universe itself from its primal origin to this present space and time.[11] A cosmology of cosmogenesis is a particular cosmology that explains this developmental process of creation based on a certain understanding of evolution. There are different cosmologies of cosmogenesis, each expressing a particular understanding of (or absence of) the purpose of the cosmos.[12] When referring to the term cosmogenesis, I will use Thomas Berry's understanding of the cosmology of cosmogenesis and its implications, which are very much

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[9] Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 8.

[10] Ibid., 62.

[11] Brian Swimme, "Cosmogenesis," in *Worldviews and Ecology*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell, 1993), 238-239.

[12] Richard Dawkins argues for a cosmology of cosmogenesis that describes the evolutionary universe as random, not directed, and as essentially meaningless. See: *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* (New York, NY: Norton, 1987). In his book, *The God Delusion*, Dawkins argues further that there is too much evidence against the existence of God and that those who continue to argue for the existence of God are in fact deluded. Unlike Dawkins, William A. Dembski, a philosopher and mathematician, proposes a cosmology of cosmogenesis that emphasizes God's action and direction of the cosmos through the process of intelligent design. See: *The Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions about Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004). Paleontologist Simon Conway Morris also outlines a cosmology of cosmogenesis that is purposeful and meaningful. In his book, *Life's Solutions: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe*, Morris argues that creation is not random but is inevitable and directed upward (*Life's Solutions: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge: NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Unlike Dawkins, who openly states he is an atheist, both Dembski and Morris are Christians. Thomas Berry, Catholic priest, cultural historian and a self-described geologian, offers a more moderate approach to cosmogenesis, which is influenced by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, by proposing that evolutionary events are neither determined nor solely random, but involve both chance and the order of creation all nurtured by God. Furthermore, he explains that "the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects" and that "existence itself is derived from and sustained by this intimacy of each being with every other being of the universe" (*The Universe Story*, 243). Berry outlines this perspective in his book *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York, NY: Bell Tower, 1999), and also in (along with co-author Brian Swimme), *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (New York, N.Y: HarperCollins, 1992).

influenced by Teilhard. For Berry cosmogenesis refers to the origin, evolution, and structure or order of the universe and the cosmos; however, particular attention is given to the development of the human within that cosmological order. Building from Teilhard, Berry further highlights how this cosmology of cosmogenesis acknowledges that the universe has had a psychic-spiritual dimension from its origins, and that the Earth is not simply a collection of objects produced through chance. Berry expresses how every part of our cosmos is part of God's cosmic creation, and it is humanity that "activates the most profound dimension of the universe itself, its capacity to reflect on and celebrate itself in conscious self-awareness."[13] Berry urges for an understanding of cosmogenesis that informs and guides our spirituality since "our spirituality is earth-driven. If there is no spirituality in the earth then there is no spirituality in man. Man is a dimension of the earth. These two are totally implicated each in the other."[14]

Lastly, my use of the term ecological ethics also builds from Berry's work. Ecological ethics is based on the understanding that Berry emphasized, that "the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects."[15] From this perspective, ecological ethics requires that humanity take seriously our responsibility to care for and protect Earth, because all of creation not only deserves to be properly treated but has the right to be respected. In *The Great Work,* Berry further explains,

> every being has rights to be recognized and revered. Trees have tree rights, insects have insect rights, rivers have river rights, mountains have mountain rights. So too with the entire range of beings throughout the universe. …We have human rights. We have rights to the nourishment and shelter we need. We have rights to habitat. But we have no rights to deprive other species of their proper habitat. …We have no rights to disturb the basic functioning of the biosystems of the planet.[16]

Therefore, ecological ethics involves respecting the rights of all creation and caring for creation in a sustainable and fair manner.

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[13] Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1988), 132. Berry's cosmology of cosmogenesis will be further examined in Chapter One.

[14] Thomas Berry, "The Spirituality of the Earth," in *Riverdale Papers* 5 (1977), 1.

[15] Berry, *The Universe Story*, 243.

[16] Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future,* 5.

Method of the Study

In order to effectively bring together nature mysticism and ecological theology, this dissertation will employ a syncretic method that brings together Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim's retrieval, re-evaluation and reconstruction method, Mark A. McIntosh's transcendental interpretive method, and Thomas Berry's cosmogenesis method. Tucker and Grim's method of retrieval, re-evaluation and reconstruction is commonly employed within religion and ecology studies that engage with the new cosmology of cosmogenesis.[17] This method seeks to identify the various ways religious traditions can contribute to "supporting sustainable practices toward the environment."[18] They highlight in particular the need for "the ethical involvement of the world's religions in mitigating the human causes and planetary effects of climate change."[19] While Tucker and Grim's approach is ultimately an interreligious project that seeks to bring together a variety of different religious beliefs and scientific advancements, they are hopeful about the role religion can play in addressing the current environmental crisis. They explain that "while religions have often preserved traditional ways, they have also provoked social change. …In the twentieth century, for example, religious leaders and theologians helped to give birth to progressive movements such as civil rights for minorities, social justice for the poor, and liberation for women."[20]

The retrieval approach focuses first on uncovering within each community's religious texts "traditional religious teaching regarding human-Earth relations."[21] The re-evaluation approach then considers how specific religious teachings could, or could not, address current ecological issues in the context of cosmogenesis. In order to re-evaluate religious and theological content,

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[17] It is important to note that Tucker and Grim did not create the method of retrieval, re-evaluation, and reconstruction; rather they have incorporated this method into their own scholarship on ecology, religion, and cosmogenesis, which has had an important effect on this area of research. They also worked closely with Thomas Berry and have published research on the importance of Teilhard within the study of ecology and religion (see Mary Evelyn Tucker, "The Ecological Spirituality of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin" *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 7, no. 1 (2007): 1-19). Since their scholarship employs Berry's cosmology of cosmogenesis, like mine, their use of the method of retrieval, re-evaluation, and reconstruction can be easily applied to my research.

[18] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "Introduction: The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology," *Daedalus* 130, no. 4 (2001): 2.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 3.

[21] Ibid., 16.

Tucker and Grim suggest this approach address this question: "can the ideas, teachings, or ethics present in these traditions be adopted by contemporary scholars or practitioners who wish to help shape more ecologically sensitive attitudes and sustainable practices?"[22] Lastly, Tucker and Grim describe the more challenging reconstruction step as "ways that religious traditions might adapt their teachings to current circumstances in new and creative ways."[23] This particular step, though challenging, contains the potential for new and innovative ways to apply traditional ideas or beliefs in an appropriate and current manner. In order to effectively use this method within this dissertation, it will be blended with both a transcendental interpretive method based on the work of Mark A. McIntosh, and a cosmogenesis method based on the work of Thomas Berry.

A transcendental interpretive method for mystical theology as outlined by McIntosh will be employed during the stage of retrieval in order to retrieve the mystical theology, specifically nature mysticism, of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Merton. McIntosh's method will be employed again during the stage of re-evaluation in order to re-evaluate how nature mysticism can be incorporated into ecological theology. McIntosh's transcendental interpretive method will serve to provide a general understanding of how this dissertation approaches Christian mysticism and how we can integrate the Christian tradition of mysticism into ecological theology. McIntosh explains how this method builds on Karl Rahner's transcendental anthropological method, which argues that theology develops out of human encounters with God.[24] Building from this, McIntosh's method focuses on how mystical texts, recounting a person's mystical experiences and encounters with God, need to be more seriously incorporated into Christian theological studies since these texts can enrich theology with the mystic's reflections on God.[25] He argues that ignoring or disregarding mystical theology "is to muzzle the theological power of the

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[22] Ibid., 17.

[23] Ibid.

[24] See Karl Rahner, "Introduction" and "Chapter One: The Hearer of the Message," in *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity,* trans. William V. Dych (New York, NY: Seabury, 1978), 1-43 and, *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Michael Richards (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1969). McIntosh chooses to build his method from Rahner's method because Rahner is one of the few modern theologians who directly addressed the relationship between theology and mysticism and because Rahner's transcendental anthropology emphasizes how Christians are continually rotating between questioning reality/God, 'hearing' God, and understanding God. See McIntosh's specific chapter on Rahner and mystical theology, "Chapter Three: Recovering the Mystical Element of Theology: The Twentieth-Century Examples of Rahner and von Balthasar" in *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, 90-118.

[25] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 140.

mystics and to de-legitimate their theological perceptions."[26] His method challenges approaches to theology that reject mystical theology within the academic study of theology, especially since, according to McIntosh, theology has not always distanced itself from the life and writing of the mystics.[27] He describes the current relationship between theology and mysticism (and spirituality) as being in a state of divorce which has unfortunate consequences. "[T]heology without spirituality becomes ever more methodologically refined but unable to know or speak of the very mysteries at the heart of Christianity, and spirituality without theology becomes rootless, easily hijacked by individualistic consumerism."[28] Therefore, McIntosh argues that the texts written by mystics provide an elaboration of personal mystical experiences of the revelation of Christ.[29] In this method, mystical texts are essential sources for theological development, enabling theologians to properly interpret and understand Christian doctrine as "living mysteries to be encountered."[30]

McIntosh argues for "an interpretive approach to mystical texts that gives maximal value to the texts themselves, with all their particularities of imagery, structure and language."[31] He is arguing that readers should avoid the tendency to psychologize and analyze mystical experiences which, he argues, often leads to isolating the mystical experience and describing it only as an 'inner experience' that carries authority.[32] McIntosh emphasizes that the reading of a mystical text should not focus only on feelings or events contained in an actual mystical text but on the mystic's language and expression of the "overwhelming *reality of God*…drawing the reader into

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 7-9. McIntosh outlines how in early church theology, the writing of saints and mystics was critical for theological development. As new academic approaches to history, culture, and religion emerged throughout the 17th and 18th C., however, McIntosh argues that mystical theology was understood less as a source for theology and more as "a sub-specialization of moral theology, which, while important for the growth of the individual soul, could hardly be imagined to be a source of theological insight or discovery." Ibid., 8.

[28] Ibid., 10.

[29] Ibid., 122.

[30] Ibid., 14-15.

[31] Ibid., 122.

[32] Ibid., 136-137. McIntosh cites others, such as Grace Jantzen, who are also critical of this psychological approach to mysticism arguing that in this methodological approach, we not only lose the greater meaning contained within mystical texts we also further separate, even alienate, mysticism from Christian theology and Christian communities. See Grace M. Jantzen's article "Mysticism and Experience," *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 295-315.

a new event."[33] He explains: "Mystical language is, rather, more like lenses for viewing what cannot be seen; it is describing in a simple or direct sense neither God nor the mystic's experiences but evoking an *interpretive framework* within which the readers of the text may come to recognize and participate in their own encounters with God."[34]

Readers of a mystical text are therefore brought into a greater understanding of God and are invited to engage in theology as they personally encounter God through a mystical text. What exactly this entails is, to some extent, unique to each person. The mystical text is not limited to only impacting an individual; rather, McIntosh explains that "theology that is willing to risk 'a moment of vulnerability' may be able to bring the richness of mystical thought to bear on contemporary theological problems."[35] In order to do this, McIntosh argues one should employ a transcendental interpretive method that sees mystical texts as having a life beyond the mystic since the purpose and meaning of a mystical text is "the hidden reality of God's encounter with humanity."[36] Essentially, McIntosh calls for a greater realization and appreciation regarding the variety and depth of meaning contained in a mystical text. "Their work as mystical texts, and their theological meaningfulness, is not isolated in a 'finished' product of definitions or formulas but in the 'unfinished' activity of orienting the believer towards God. In a sense, they *mean* as texts by letting God supply the theological meaning in direct encounter with the readers of the text."[37] Therefore, since Christian mystical texts contain a sense of unknown potentiality if approached with a sense of vulnerability, McIntosh concludes that mystical theology can only enrich and strengthen the academic study of theology once the theologian "allow[s] the dynamics of the text…to become a new interpretive framework for the theological task."[38]

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[33] Ibid., 124-125. Italics original to the text.

[34] Ibid., 124. Italics original to the text.

[35] Ibid., 125. McIntosh is not arguing here that this 'moment of vulnerability' requires that readers also undergo their own mystical experience; rather, McIntosh urges readers to allow themselves to be vulnerable enough to hear the mystic explain the mystic's own experience, learn of the meaning that that experience generated for the mystic, and potentially apply some of the fruits of the mystic's experience to their (the readers) own theological questions.

[36] Ibid., 142.

[37] Ibid. Italics original to the text.

[38] Ibid., 143.

Thus, to reunite spiritual and mystical texts with theological studies, we must not psychologize, domesticate, or limit mystical language, but rather approach mystical theology and mystical texts with an openness to interpreting the value and message contained in the text. By employing McIntosh's transcendental interpretive method in the retrieval and re-evaluation stage of Tucker and Grim's method, this dissertation will be able to seriously engage with texts that describe humanity's encounter with the mystical presence of God in the cosmos, and assess how the texts can shape theological development. Furthermore, this method will guide my reading of Teilhard and Merton's mystical texts by prioritizing their own expressions of mysticism, such as nature mysticism, within their writings.

While McIntosh's method provides a foundation for this dissertation, the context for this research is a cosmology of cosmogenesis as described by Thomas Berry. This cosmogenesis method will be essential for bringing nature mysticism into ecological theology and in identifying ways nature mysticism can contribute to the development of ecological ethics for our time. In essence, these three methods will function together in a syncretic fashion that will allow for the best integration of ecological theology and nature mysticism. Berry's cosmogenesis method will provide the context for this research while also being the method I will use during the reconstruction stage of Tucker and Grim's method in order to build an ecological ethic from the nature mysticism present in Teilhard and Merton's mystical theology. Berry's research and writing on Christianity and cosmogenesis emphasizes a radically new theological anthropology that resituates humanity ontologically and functionally within creation, rejecting the view that humanity exists apart and separate from creation. Berry implores us to realize that "we [humanity] bear the universe in our beings as the universe bears us in its being. The two have a total presence to each other and to that deeper mystery out of which both the universe and ourselves have emerged…. A new paradigm of what it is to be human emerges."[39] This new paradigm requires a new relationship between humanity and Earth, and so the old relationship where humanity neglected and despised Earth must be rejected.[40] Berry's use of a cosmology of cosmogenesis calls for a new appreciation of Divine immanence and an ecotheological anthropology that realizes that the history and development of creation is also *our* history, and

[39] Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 132-133.

[40] Ibid., 133-134.

that the roles and responsibilities of humanity are intimately linked to Earth. In response to the ecological degradation of our world, Berry calls for "a new spiritual and even mystical communion with the earth, a true aesthetic of the earth, a valid economy of the earth" so that we can better understand ourselves and our ethical responsibility for the cosmos.[41] This spirituality must be based on the understanding that "man (sic) in his totality is born of the earth. We are earthlings. …Our spirituality itself is earth-derived."[42] Moreover, Berry, building from Teilhard, writes of how this cosmic relationship between humanity and Earth enriches Christology since Christ came from the earth and reveals reality to all creation and "in and through the earth man attains communion with the entire cosmic process."[43] By operating within a context of Berry's cosmology of cosmogenesis, this dissertation approaches ecological theology from a scientific and a theological perspective, embracing an ecotheological anthropology while also assessing the ethical implications of this research within that context.

The syncretic approach employed within Tucker and Grim's method of retrieval, re-evaluation and reconstruction will effectively bring together the methodological approaches of McIntosh, Berry, and Tucker and Grim, and will therefore further enable this dissertation to begin to integrate nature mysticism with ecological theology and ethics in the context of a cosmology of cosmogenesis.

Mysticism and Ecology in Teilhard and Merton

My dissertation focuses on the nature mysticism of both Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Merton because they are two important Christian mystics who together offer a nature mysticism that can contribute to ecological theology and ethics. Their interest in environmental issues and the relationship between humanity and Earth has been noted by other scholars, such as Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Thomas Berry, Dennis Patrick O'Hara, Kathleen Deignan and Monica Weis.

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[41] Berry, "The Spirituality of the Earth," 8. Berry clarifies that the spirituality of Earth that he is calling for "is not directed toward an appreciation of the earth." Ibid., 1.

[42] Ibid., 1. Berry's use of the word man here, instead of humanity, is a reflection of the time period of his writing. It should not be interpreted to mean that Berry believes only men are born of Earth.

[43] Thomas Berry, "Cosmic Person and the Future of Man," in *Riverdale Papers* 1 (1969): 11.

Their nature mysticism offers much to ecological theology and the development of ecological ethics; however, exactly how their mystical theology and specifically their nature mysticism can contribute to ecological theology has not been thoroughly considered. Thomas Berry argues that Teilhard's unique theology of mysticism, cosmology, evolution, and cosmic Christology moved theology into a new direction toward ecological theology.[44] In Berry's opinion, Teilhard "had an exceptional aesthetic-emotional response to the natural world as well as a scientific and mystical sense of the earth's grandeur."[45] By bringing together both evolution and theology, Teilhard's understanding of the cosmos, humanity, and God expanded to such an extent that he referred to humanity as the phenomenon of man.[46] Moreover, his own mystical experiences during World War I made a significant impact on his personal spirituality, and his understanding of the cosmos. His reflections on the spirit of matter in *Hymn of the Universe*, and his explanation of the presence of God in the cosmos as the divine milieu further inspires his nature mysticism.

Kathleen Deignan identifies Merton as a creation mystic and an ecological prophet whose contemplative spirituality and nature poetry "can restore our paradisal consciousness, conscience, and practice" to challenge our perverse, insatiable consumerist tendencies that continue to generate further ecological devastation.[47] Merton's ecological awareness is, however, the result of his own personal and spiritual growth, particularly his interest in social issues that grew from his own mystical experience in 1958, in Louisville.[48] His theology on the self, his nature poetry, and his interest in Christian responsibility regarding the civil rights movement in America are all connected to his nature mysticism. Together, both Teilhard and Merton offer a nature mysticism that does not simply call for one to appreciate nature, but that we truly understand our role within creation and therefore live differently within Earth.

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[44] See Thomas Berry, "Teilhard in the Ecological Age," in *Riverdale Papers* 8 (no date): 1-49. He has also published many articles in the Teilhard Journals *Teilhard Perspective*, *Teilhard Studies*, *and Teilhard Newsletter*. Berry often referenced Teilhard in his work, making him a key source within his ecological theology.

[45] Ibid., 4.

[46] This is also the title of one of Teilhard's best known works, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1959).

[47] Kathleen Deignan, "'Love for the Paradise Mystery'—Thomas Merton: Contemplative Ecologist," *Cross Currents* 58, no. 4 (2008): 554-557. Deignan also collected Merton's nature poetry into the book, *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writing on Nature*, ed. Kathleen Deignan (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin, 2003).

[48] Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1968), 156-157.

Summary of Chapters

Influential approaches to the study of mysticism and mystical theology will be examined in Chapter One. A concise review of the work of William James, Evelyn Underhill, and Bernard McGinn will be the focus of this chapter since their research has had a significant impact on how mysticism is understood and studied. In addition to this, the potential for mysticism to contribute to ecological theology and ethics will also be considered since the benefits of incorporating mystical theology into ecological theology is a task that has yet to be more seriously conducted. While there are examples of ecological theologians who reference the life and writings of various mystics, these references are often only in passing and usually conclude with the suggestion that further research on the benefits of incorporating mystical theology into ecological theology is necessary.[49] Lastly, the value and importance of using Thomas Berry's cosmology of cosmogenesis as the context for this dissertation, as well as the many parallels this cosmology shares with nature mysticism, will be examined.

The focus of Chapter Two is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's life and mystical theology. The chapter begins with a brief biography of Teilhard, followed by an examination of the nature mysticism of Teilhard contained within a selection of his writings. The chapter concludes with an analysis of his nature mysticism, as evident in his writing. Since Teilhard is one of the key figures on whom this dissertation relies, this chapter is critical for understanding Teilhard's own unique nature mysticism. A more detailed examination applying Teilhard's nature mysticism to ecological theology and ethics will be explored in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Three, the life and writing of Thomas Merton will be examined in detail. The structure of this chapter is similar to the previous one on Teilhard, where the chapter begins with a brief biography of Merton, followed by an examination of his nature mysticism contained in a selection of his writing (mostly his later writing). The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the nature mysticism evident in his theology. Examining Merton's writing is essential for this dissertation since Merton's nature mysticism offers much to the development of ecological

[49] See: Denis Edwards, "Planetary Spirituality: Exploring A Christian Ecological Approach" *Compass* 44, no. 4 (2010), 21; Roger S. Gottlieb, "Spiritual Deep Ecology and the Left: An Attempt At Reconciliation," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger Gottlieb (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1996), 521; Kathleen Fischer, "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Awareness," 170; and Beverly J. Lanzetta, "Contemplative Ethics: Intimacy, Amor Mundi and Dignification in Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila" *Spiritus* 5, no. 1 (2005): 2.

theology and ethics. A more detailed examination applying Merton's nature mysticism to ecological theology and ethics will be explored in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four provides a defence of my thesis statement, and so it begins with a detailed examination of nature mysticism and three unique characteristics of nature mysticism. The nature mysticism of both Teilhard and Merton will be brought together in order to demonstrate not only how they can be considered nature mystics, but also to examine how their nature mysticism can contribute to the development of ecological theology and ethics. Particular attention will be given to the ethical dimension of nature mysticism, and how this is an important part of the nature mysticism of both Teilhard and Merton which can assist in the development of ecological ethics. The work of McIntosh is also important in this chapter as I examine how nature mysticism, a type of mystical theology, can be incorporated into ecological theology and ethics.

Lastly, the Conclusion of this this dissertation will provide a brief consideration of the implications of this dissertation's research.

Chapter 1
Mystical Theology and Ecological Theology

The intent of this chapter is to present important research on mysticism and to consider how mystical theology and ecological theology can be brought together. The first part of this chapter will provide greater detail on the study of mysticism, mystical theology, and nature mysticism. I will begin by providing a concise review of influential studies on mysticism that have had an immense impact on how mysticism is understood (viz., works by William James, Evelyn Underhill and Bernard McGinn) with a particular focus on nature mysticism. The second part of this chapter will examine the current interest and dialogue within ecological theology regarding how a greater consideration of nature mysticism will enable the development of a 'mystique of the Earth.'[50] Lastly, I will discuss how a cosmology of cosmogenesis can enable the incorporation of nature mysticism into ecological theology as this cosmology carries striking parallels to nature mysticism and it is already the context of ecotheology and ecoethics.

Influential Research on Mysticism and Mystical Theology

William James (1842-1910), Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), and Bernard McGinn (b. 1937) have each contributed some of the most influential research on mysticism and mystical theology, making their work foundational for studies on mysticism.[51] While the major contributions of each will be briefly considered, the focus will be on their research regarding nature mysticism.

William James was born in New York and raised in a Christian household. James, a trained medical doctor who did not practise medicine, dedicated his life to researching and writing about psychology, philosophy, and religion.[52] His work takes a philosophically pragmatic and empirical approach (two areas of philosophy to which he also made substantial contributions). These two perspectives became the lenses through which he carried out all of his research.

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[50] The particular phrase 'mystique of the Earth' is used by Thomas Berry. See his article, "An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality," 2.

[51] See: Julia A. Lamm, "A Guide to Christian Mysticism," *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A. Lamm (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2013), 1-23. Bernard McGinn also writes of the importance of James and Underhill in his book *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*.

[52] For more detail on the influence of William James on the study of psychology and philosophy, see: Gerald E. Meyers, *William James: His Life and Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1986).

James's pragmatic and empirical method emphasizes the need for collecting factual evidence from our experiences because, according to him, each person uses their own experiences to determine what is reality and truth.[53] James is often described as a radical empiricist since he argues that truth is really only verified through our actions and experiences.[54] My focus here will be on one of his most famous works, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, where James employs his pragmatic and empirical perspective in order to analyze mysticism as a religious experience. He approaches mysticism very broadly attempting to understand what constitutes a mystical experience within any religion.[55] Since the focus is purely on the experience, he also clarifies that he will not consider the role of mysticism within ecclesiastical communities or theological development; instead, he chooses to "confine myself as far as I can to personal religion pure and simple."[56] As a result, his philosophical approach does not consider mysticism within the realm of mystical theology.

James's approach to mysticism emphasizes consciousness and experience. He writes that to begin to understand mysticism and mystical consciousness, we must examine what mystics call 'mystical experience.' According to James, if an experience has the four qualities of ineffability, a noetic quality, transiency, and passivity, then it can be defined as a mystical experience. Mystics often state that their mystical experiences are indescribable, which leads James to argue that "…its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect."[57] In addition, James writes that such experiences also involve the mystics gaining some form of knowledge and understanding, and that this knowledge carries some degree of authority. While

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[53] See: William James, *Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to Pragmatism* (London, UK: Longmans, Green 1909); idem, *Essays in Philosophy*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1978).

[54] Richard M. Gale, "Pragmatism Versus Mysticism: The Divided Self of William James," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 247-248.

[55] James defines religion as "*…the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to what they consider divine*." William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1999), 31. Italics original to text.

[56] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 29. James argues that focusing first and foremost on the mystical experience will enable a greater understanding of the experience. Moreover, he argues that in some cases religion can develop out of a mystical experience, meaning that mystical experience is the 'primordial thing' that religion develops from 'second-hand.' Ibid., 30.

[57] Ibid., 414.

mystical experiences are transient, the mystics usually have the ability to recall the mystical experience and recount their feelings, what they learned, and sometimes other details. The quality of passivity refers to the mystics' experiences of being "grasped and held by a superior power." James adds that during the mystics' passivity, they may also experience other phenomenon (such as visions, prophetic speech, and trance like states) but that these phenomenal experiences may not always be remembered by the mystics.[58]

In addition to these four qualities, which determine when an experience can be understood as mystical, James also lists certain other emotional feelings or realizations that often accompany such events. People who have had a mystical experience often say that they now have a better understanding of something that they had perhaps previously known but not fully realized; they express a general "deepened sense of the significance." Many also express a sense of familiarity with the mystical experience, something James calls "reminiscent consciousness," as if the experience was showing them something they knew or felt long ago.[59] James also references many cases of people who experience these feelings, and some of the qualities of mystical experiences listed earlier, while in an intoxicated state, which he refers to as anaesthetic revelation. He provides many examples of people who describe being in a different state of consciousness, a mystical consciousness, after consuming substances such as alcohol, nitrous oxide, or ether. He writes,

> depth beyond depth of truth seems revealed to the inhaler. The truth fades out, however, or escapes, at the moment of coming to; and if any words remain over in which it seemed to clothe itself, they prove to be the veriest nonsense. Nevertheless, the sense of a profound meaning having been there persists.[60]

This leads James to conclude that there are various levels of consciousness within the mystical experience, some of which are so foreign that we cannot entirely map them out. In an attempt to understand the meaning behind such varying levels of consciousness, James argues that there is some sort of "metaphysical significance" and that mystical experiences "add a supersensuous

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[58] Ibid., 414-415.

[59] Ibid., 416-417.

[60] Ibid., 422. James also writes that he himself tried nitrous oxide, which led him to conclude further about there being various levels of consciousness and that mystical consciousness can be induced through various substances (422).

meaning to the ordinary outward data of consciousness"; however, he concludes that he is unable to expand further.[61] He does argue though that the similarity between anaesthetic revelation and other mystical experiences is that in both situations, each person experiences a "sudden realization of the immediate presence of God."[62] James's research on consciousness is not limited to his research on religious mysticism. Jill Kress notes that James also explored the topic of consciousness within his research on science and empiricism. Kress further argues that his work contains "theoretical contradictions" and linguistic limitations as he is often attempting to explain consciousness as something that is stable and certain in a world he understands to be very relative.[63]

James's writing on mysticism includes a brief discussion on the role of nature in mystical experiences, though he does not use the term nature mysticism. He writes of nature having the unique ability to incite mystical experiences when the mystic suddenly becomes aware of the "immediate presence of God."[64] He lists numerous examples of people who, often through poetry, describe mystical encounters with God in creation.[65] James describes these nature-induced mystical experiences as a particular type of mystical consciousness, which he calls "cosmic consciousness." He offers only a short elaboration on what cosmic consciousness is, stating that it refers to a person who has become more aware of creation and the value of all created life and that such a realization brings forth joy and a sense of eternal life.[66]

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[61] Ibid., 423, 427.

[62] Ibid., 428.

[63] Jill M. Kress, "Contesting Metaphors and the Discourse of Consciousness in William James," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 2 (2000): 263-264. Kress also explains the challenge of interpreting James's many other references to consciousness, such as 'stream of consciousness,' 'free water of consciousness,' and even the idea of personal consciousness (265-269).

[64] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 393-394.

[65] Ibid., 394-397. The examples are not from particularly well-known people (such as Malwida von Meysenbug and J. Trevor).

[66] Ibid., 434. James credits the psychiatrist Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke (d. 1902) with introducing him to the phrase 'cosmic consciousness.' Bucke's most famous contribution to this topic is his book, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (Philadelphia, PA: Innes & Sons, 1901). Bucke writes of cosmic consciousness as a sort of psychological illumination certain humans have experienced. His understanding of cosmic consciousness is broad, and so while he does not discuss cosmic consciousness explicitly in terms of mysticism, he identifies various religious figures (such as Jesus) who, according to him, experienced this cosmic consciousness. This kind of consciousness was important to Bucke for evolutionary reasons since he argued humanity was moving towards greater consciousness which would free humanity from all their current limitations. Bucke defines cosmic consciousness as "…consciousness [that] shows the cosmos consists not of dead matter

James also briefly discusses questions surrounding the meaning of mystical experiences, such as how we can extract some element of truth from these experiences. He shows his pragmatic empirical preferences again when he writes about how the fruits of mystical experiences should be assessed when determining their meaning.[67] In terms of whether or not mystical experiences should be granted authority, James argues the meaning of such experiences are relative to each individual. He states that mystical experiences "have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come" but that this authority does not require others to accept such mystical experiences for themselves.[68] For James, mystical experiences will often shape the person who experienced them and will influence their own perceptions of reality and truth, but they are ultimately private experiences that vary from person to person.[69]

While James's experiential approach provides one way to determine what constitutes a mystical experience, scholars such as Cutis W. Hart and Grace M. Jantzen have critiqued James's approach claiming that it has skewed his reading of many mystics.[70] Apart from this, James's major contributions to the study of mysticism has been his research on the role of consciousness in mysticism, which may have influenced both Evelyn Underhill and Bernard McGinn's view that mysticism can be understood as a unique state of consciousness. This theme of cosmic consciousness is particularly important with regards to the study of nature mysticism. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin makes frequent use of this term in his own nature mysticism, however, his meaning is more theistic.

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governed by unconscious, rigid, and unintending law; it shows it on the contrary as entirely immaterial, entirely spiritual and entirely alive; it shows that death is an absurdity, that everyone and everything has eternal life; it shows that the universe is God and that God is the universe, and that no evil ever did or ever will enter into it. …[A]ll this does not mean that when a man has cosmic consciousness he knows everything about the universe…so it may take it [humanity] millions of years to acquire a smattering of the science of God after its acquisition of cosmic consciousness" (17-18). James also notes how Burke recorded his own personal experience of cosmic consciousness (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, 398-399).

[67] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 450.

[68] Ibid., 460-461.

[69] Ibid., 469.

[70] See: Curtis W. Hart, "William James' "The Varieties of Religious Experience" Revisited," *Journal of Religion and Health* 47, no. 4 (December 2008): 516-524, and Grace M. Jantzen's article "Mysticism and Experience." Jantzen specifically challenges James's interpretations of Bernard of Clairvaux and Julian of Norwich's mysticism.

Even though James made significant contributions to research regarding the psychology of mysticism and the role of experience in mysticism, approaches to mysticism began to slowly shift when Evelyn Underhill published her own work on mysticism titled *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* ten years after James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Underhill was well read on the topic of mysticism and very familiar with James's work. While her book became one of the most well-known books on the study of mysticism, her later work focused more specifically on Christian mysticism. In this book, she builds from James's work, particularly by describing mysticism in terms of consciousness, but also diverges from James by proposing a different definition and characteristics for mysticism. Her definition of mysticism is as follows:

> Broadly speaking, I understand it [mysticism] to be the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood. This tendency, in great mystics, gradually captures the whole field of consciousness; it dominates their life and, in the experience called "mystic union," attains its end whether that end be called the God of Christianity, the World-soul of pantheism, the Absolute of Philosophy, the desire to attain it and the movement towards it—so long as this is a genuine life process and not an intellectual speculation—is the proper subject of mysticism. I believe this movement to represent the true line of development of the highest form of human consciousness.[71]

She also notes that the word mysticism is often misused and misunderstood, which is why throughout this book she frequently returns to this definition of mysticism and clarifies further how mysticism should be understood. In one of her clarifications of mysticism she writes that "mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and that the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to *know about*, but to *Be*, is the mark of the real initiate."[72]

The theme of being and becoming is an important part of Underhill's approach to mysticism, which is why she often refers to the theory of vitalism to further express the uniqueness of the

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[71] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th ed. (New York, NY: The New American Library, 1974), xiv-xv. This book was first published in 1912, after which Underhill published much more on the subject of mysticism. While her definition of mysticism here appears very universal, her later work focuses more on mysticism within the Christian tradition. For more on Underhill's own spiritual growth, see John R. Francis's article, "Evelyn Underhill's Developing Spiritual Theology: A Discovery of Authentic Spiritual Life and the Place of Contemplation," *Anglican Theological Review* 93, no.2 (2011): 283-300.

[72] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 72. Italics are original to the text.

mystical experience. Vitalism was a common philosophical and scientific ideology during Underhill's time. She writes that the vitalist views the entire cosmos as alive and bursting with life, arguing that within creation there is a process and a direction of becoming.

> Vitalists, whether the sphere of their explorations be biology, psychology or ethics, see the whole Cosmos, the physical and spiritual worlds, as instinct with initiative and spontaneity: as above all things free. For them, nature, though conditioned by the matter with which she works, is stronger than her chains. Pushing out from within, ever seeking expression, she buds and breaks forth into original creation.[73]

In comparing this with mysticism, Underhill argues that both the vitalist and the mystic propose a similar opinion, questioning if humanity will break free of the world and reach for a higher level of consciousness. Both the vitalist and the mystic seek a sort of new birth into spiritual consciousness, a consciousness of one's participation with the infinite and eternal. Since consciousness is contained within the human, each human has the ability to choose between "spend[ing] one's life communing with one's own cinematograph picture" or, to seek to understand and come closer to the Divine Life, to develop a spiritual consciousness.[74] Seeking this spiritual consciousness involves breaking from one's ego and reaching out farther into the unknown.

As aforementioned, Underhill's work on mysticism differs from that of William James. Underhill critiques James's work on mysticism considering it unsatisfactory. She does not agree with the characteristics of mystical experiences offered by James, and instead presents different characteristics. She characterizes mysticism as practical and active, transcendental and spiritual, and focused on seeking God/The Absolute who is not simply the Reality but an "Object of Love." Her last characteristic of mysticism is that the mystic may actually reach union with God/The Absolute and that this union cannot be sought through intellectual means but rather through "an arduous psychological and spiritual process" which she calls "the mystic way."[75] Underhill offers more detail on each of these characteristics. Of the first characteristic, that mysticism is practical and active, she cites many accounts of mystics who describe their spiritual life in terms of their actions and how their solitary journey is like "the flight of the Alone to the

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[73] Ibid., 27.

[74] Ibid., 33-34.

[75] Ibid., 81.

Alone."[76] As for the characteristic that mysticism is transcendental and spiritual, she explains that this refers to the mystics' desire only for God rather than material goods for their own self. This does not mean that mystics do not care for the material world; rather, "…he [the mystic] possesses God, and needs nothing more. Though he will spend himself unceasingly for other men…he is destitute for supersensual ambitions and craves no occult knowledge or power."[77] With regards to that which the mystic seeks (God/The Absolute who is the "Object of Love"), Underhill writes that this is "one of the distinctive notes of true mysticism" separating it from other things, such as magic. Examples of this can be seen in the writings of mystics who describe God/The Absolute as love.[78] Lastly, union with God/The Absolute (who is love) "*entails a definite psychological experience*" where the mystic experiences a vision or some sort of consciousness of the perfection of God/The Absolute, and that such an experience leads to a transformation within the mystic because "he has seen the Perfect; he wants to be perfect too."[79] Underhill writes that such perfection, such union with God, is possible through transforming one's life, typically through developing a morally virtuous life.[80] After explaining these characteristics, Underhill again refines her definition of mysticism stating there are two essential parts of mystical experiences: the first being the actual visionary experience or consciousness, and the second being the change that occurs in the life of the mystic who now seeks to be "worthy of that which he has beheld."[81]

This process of transformation, of becoming worthy, brings the mystic into "the mystic way" where the mystic will be led "within the field of consciousness."[82] According to Underhill,

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[76] Ibid., 82-83.

[77] Ibid., 84. When speaking generally about mysticism, Underhill repeatedly uses "he" or "him" when referring to the mystic. This is largely a result of the time in which she wrote rather than reflecting any belief that women were unable to be mystics or have mystical experiences. She often references the life and writings of many female mystics, such as Julian of Norwich, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Catherine of Siena, Gertrude More, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and St. Teresa of Ávila.

[78] Julian of Norwich is an example of a mystic who describes God as love and writes in detail about God's love for all humanity and all creation. See her work, *Julian of Norwich Showings*, ed. Richard J. Payne, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York, NY: Paulist, 1978).

[79] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 90. Italics are original to the text.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 91.

entering into this process is what truly makes one a mystic since this is a very arduous and psychological part of the mystical life. In the mystic way, she stresses that mysticism is about "the transcendental consciousness of humanity" and that reaching this transcendental consciousness involves stages of awareness, purgation, illumination, 'a dark night of the soul,' and ultimately union. [83] Although, since no two mystics are the same, Underhill also stresses that this process is to some degree flexible and personal; there is no "general law" regarding the mystic way except that the goal is always God/The Absolute. Generally speaking then, mystics will initially experience an awakening to a "consciousness of Divine Reality." [84] Following this, the mystics enter purgation as they become aware of their own failings, realizing how they differ from the Divine Reality, from God. The particulars of such purgation and the length of this stage are unique to each mystic. Illumination refers to when the mystics have gained an even deeper understanding of the Divine; however, another period of purgation, which is often described by various mystics as "mystic pain," "mystic death," or "spiritual crucifixion," may also follow this illumination.[85] A surrendering of the self is also characteristic of this type of purgation so that the mystics live only for God. After such purgation, the soul is prepared for union, which is often referred to as mystical marriage and deification; "this is the end towards which all the previous oscillations of consciousness have tended."[86] Once the mystics reach union, Underhill argues that the mystics do not simply stay within the presence of God consumed by the transcendent Divine Reality; rather, they turn outward. The mystics come down from the mountain or out of the wilderness and express within their own life the transformative presence and immanence of God.[87]

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[83] Ibid., 169-170.

[84] Ibid., 167-168.

[85] Ibid., 169-170.

[86] Ibid., 170.

[87] Ibid., 174-175. While Underhill has outlined five stages of the mystic way, there is also a common Christian tradition identifying only three levels of the mystic way (purgation, illumination, union). John R. Francis writes that while Underhill references mystics from other traditions (such as Sufism and Buddhism), she has a clear preference and better knowledge of Christian mysticism. This is also clear in her later writing which focuses more on Christian mysticism. See Francis's article (previously referenced), "Evelyn Underhill's Developing Spiritual Theology: A Discovery of Authentic Spiritual Life and the Place of Contemplation."

It is while discussing the stage of illumination that Underhill makes reference to the relationship between the mystics and nature. Here, she begins to discuss nature mysticism and offers this definition of nature mysticism:

> To "see God in nature," to attain a radiant consciousness of the "otherness" of natural things, is the simplest and commonest form of illumination. Most people, under the spell of emotion or of beauty, have known flashes of rudimentary vision of this kind. Where such a consciousness is recurrent, as it is in many poets, there results that partial yet often overpowering apprehension of the Infinite Life immanent in all living things, which some modern writers have dignified by the name of "nature-mysticism."[88]

Being conscious of the presence of God within creation is a unique characteristic of the illumination stage in the mystic way. Underhill writes that nature mysticism is like mystical poetry that expresses how creatures and plants can show us not only the beauty of the cosmos but also the magnificence of God, the Creator. There is a particular emphasis in nature mysticism on the presence of God, sometimes referred to as the 'sense of God.'[89] Like James, Underhill also cites the similarity between this mystical experience and cosmic consciousness, however, she argues that this is a psychological interpretation of nature mysticism.[90] Furthermore, she describes nature mysticism as having an active element. It is not simply an intellectual, isolating type of mystical consciousness; rather, the nature mystics prove that mysticism is not about escaping from the world but about recognizing how the world is an expression God's goodness and creative love. In her own words, Underhill offers a clear explanation of this. She writes:

> The true mystic, so often taunted with "a denial of the world," does but deny the narrow and artificial world of self: and finds in exchange the secrets of that mighty universe which he shares with Nature and with God. …[I]n that remaking of his consciousness which follows upon the "mystical awakening," the deep and primal life which he shares with all creation has been roused from its sleep. Hence the barrier between human and non-human life, which makes man a stranger on earth as well as in heaven, is done away. Life now whispers to his life: all things are his intimates, and respond to his fraternal sympathy.[91]

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[88] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 234. Unfortunately, Underhill does not identify these modern writers who have used the term nature mysticism.

[89] Ibid., 242.

[90] Ibid., 255. Underhill references the same sources as James on cosmic consciousness (Richard Maurice Bucke, 1837-1902). For more on Bucke's cosmic consciousness, see footnote 17.

[91] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 260. Underhill refers to St. Francis of Assisi, here, emphasizing his love for all creatures who point toward the Creator.

Underhill further describes how the nature mystics, illuminated by God, understand the world in a new and different way; the mystics pierce "the veil of imperfection, and behold Creation with the Creator's eye." [92] The nature mystics turn towards creation not with the desire to own or exploit the cosmos but to live freely within the world; enjoying, cultivating, caring for, and even protecting God's creation, they see "all creatures in God and God in all creatures."[93]

Considering Underhill had little education, her work on mysticism is impressive. Her knowledge of the writings of mystics is notable too since many of the documents by mystics that she cited had yet to be completely translated and made publicly available; however, Lawrence Cunningham argues that some of her quotations require more contextual explanations.[94] Similarities between Underhill and James have been noted by Grace Jantzen who argues that they both dissect mysticism by psychologizing it, and that both seek to understand what is happening to the person having the mystical experience. Jantzen argues, however, that the difference between the two emerges in their approach. "James is offering a set of criteria for intellectual consideration and discussion, Underhill is appealing to the hearts of the readers at least as much as to their minds."[95] Moreover, Underhill's approach to mysticism almost exclusively emphasizes the interior life of the mystic. Mark A. McIntosh notes that within her work we can see how "'mysticism' is now understood as an inner drama enacted by the mystic's exquisitely refined feelings on the stage of the interior self."[96] In addition to these critiques, Underhill, herself, even acknowledges in the preface to the twelfth edition of her book, *Mysticism,* that her use of vitalism was perhaps not appropriate, even though vitalisitic philosophies were popular while she was writing the book. She writes,

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[92] Ibid., 262.

[93] Ibid., 206.

[94] Lawrence Cunningham, "Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*: An Appreciation," *Spiritus* 12, no. 1 (2012): 108. Grace Janzten also makes this critique in her article, "The Legacy of Evelyn Underhill," *Feminist Theology* 2, no. 4 (1993): 86-87. She writes that in Underhill's book, *Mysticism*, "too often mystics are quoted without any regard for their literary context, let alone the social and historical situation in which they lived and wrote" (87).

[95] Jantzen, "The Legacy of Evelyn Underhill," 82-85.

[96] Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, 69. McIntosh also notes the effect this emphasis had on the study of mystical theology, which he writes, also retreated into this interior castle making mysticism only about the inner self and making the mystic "…a marginal eccentric at best, whose peculiar inner experience (to use Underhill's words) of 'unimaginable tension and delight' has come to seem a thing of pious curiosity perhaps, but clearly of little relevance for the serious task of academic theology" (69).

> Again, it now seems to me that a critical realism, which found room for the duality of our full human experience—the Eternal and the Successive, supernatural and natural reality—would provide a better philosophic background to the experience of the mystics than the vitalism which appeared, twenty years ago, to offer so promising a way of escape from scientific determinism.[97]

The contributions of William James and Evelyn Underhill demonstrate two influential but different perspectives on mystical experience and nature mysticism. Since their work, the topic of mysticism has experienced a resurgence, particularly with Bernard McGinn.[98] McGinn is currently one of the leading scholars on the topic of Christian mysticism and is in the process of completing a multivolume series on Christian mysticism titled *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism.* At present, he has published seven volumes each focusing on a unique period of growth and development in Western Christian mysticism.[99] This series has had a significant impact on the study of Christian mysticism today. In the first volume, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, McGinn begins to outline his own historical approach to understanding mysticism that focuses particularly on writings by Christian mystics. It is in this first volume that McGinn defines mysticism as "a part or element of religion; mysticism as a process or way of life; and mysticism as an attempt to express a direct consciousness of the presence of God."[100] In almost all of McGinn's publications about mysticism, he is consistently refining his definition, providing more detail and clarification. In one of his more recent books outside of this series, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, he offers an updated definition that includes the transformative effect of mysticism. He writes that mysticism is "that part, or element, of Christian belief and practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of what the mystics themselves have described as a direct and

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[97] Underhill, *Mysticism*, viii.

[98] Lamm, "A Guide to Christian Mysticism," 3.

[99] In volume 1 (1991) of Bernard McGinn's series, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, he focuses on the Jewish roots of Christian mysticism, and the development of Christian mysticism in the early church. Volume 2 (1994), *The Growth of Mysticism*, focuses on mysticism from Gregory the Great to the twelfth century. *The Flowering of Mysticism*, vol. 3 (1998), focuses on mysticism between 1200-1350. *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, vol. 4 (2005), focuses on mysticism during the medieval era with a particular emphasis on Meister Eckhart. *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism*, vol. 5 (2012), focuses on mysticism between 1350-1550. Volume 6 has been divided into two parts, which each part covering mysticism between 1500-1675 in different places. They include: *Mysticism in the Reformation: Part One* (2016), and *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain* (2017).

[100] McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xv-xvi.

transformative presence of God."[101] His definition of mysticism alone has been particularly influential as numerous introductory books reference and build off his definition.[102]

McGinn's definition outlines a very clear approach to the study of mysticism. First, he has set up some parameters for his research. Since he argues that mysticism is an element of religion, he focuses on historical documents and events that have contributed to the development of mysticism within the Christian tradition in the West. McGinn firmly defends his historical approach stating that "we will not really know what Christian mysticism is, despite the extensive literature that has been devoted to it, until we become better informed about the entire history of its development."[103] Therefore, each volume of *The Presence of God* discusses the development of mysticism within the lives of a select number of Christian mystics from a set period in Western Christian history. This approach demonstrates a movement in the study of mysticism that considers mysticism within the realm of mystical theology. By considering mysticism within the Christian tradition of mystical theology, McGinn is not only interpreting mysticism from a different perspective than James and Underhill, he is also returning to the early Christian approach that interpreted mysticism within the Christian context, specifically within the tradition of Christian mystical theology.[104] In addition to this, his work also contains a thematic element, as he focuses on particular mystical themes common to certain eras of mysticism (such as contemplation, and mystical union). McGinn believes that mysticism cannot be separated from religion since mystics will reflect the tradition and beliefs of the religion to which they are committed. Mysticism, therefore, is "an *element* in concrete religious communities and

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[101] McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xiv.

[102] See: *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A. Lamm, and *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), where many of the scholars who contributed articles on Christian mysticism reference McGinn and build off his definition of mysticism. Other scholars who cite the influence of Bernard McGinn include Mark McIntosh and Dennis Tamburello. See: Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*; Dennis Tamburello, *Ordinary Mysticism* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1996). While McGinn is considered the leading scholar on western mysticism today, his approach to mysticism differs from both James and Underhill who offer more of a psychological approach to mysticism. While both do discuss the consciousness of the mystic, they prioritize the mystic's experience.

[103] Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century*, vol. 2 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1996), x.

[104] Bernard McGinn, "Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 8, no. 1 (2008): 45.

traditions."[105] McGinn himself describes this as a heuristic approach that is, in his opinion, the best method for examining Christian mysticism.[106]

Differing from James and Underhill in his description of mysticism, McGinn does not use the term 'experience'; rather, he describes mysticism as "consciousness of the presence of God." McGinn prefers to move away from experience when describing mysticism, stating that "those who define mysticism in terms of a certain type of experience of God often seem to forget that there can be no direct access to experience for the historian."[107] His reservations around the term 'experience' are a result of the term's multifarious meanings, its uniqueness based on who is using the term, and more importantly, the term was not used historically when defining mysticism. He argues that defining mysticism through experience emerged in the nineteenth century, whereas before, mysticism was discussed in mystical theology.[108] Our use of experience to define mysticism has also led to a further generalization about mystical experience, making it appear to be a "form of feeling and/or perception, one that is common across all religion," which he argues is not only divorcing mysticism from mystical theology but also from the role of the respective religious traditions of the mystics. When McGinn does discuss experience, he is not interested in arguing about how to define it; rather, he focuses instead on how mystics describe their inner experiences through language that "tries to fuse feeling and knowledge."[109]

Describing mysticism as a type of consciousness, specifically mystical consciousness, is not only common to James, Underhill, and McGinn, it is also used by many mystics when recounting their relationship with God. McGinn explains his preference for understanding mysticism as a form of consciousness writing that "consciousness emphasizes the *entire process* of human intentionality and self-presence, rather than just an originating pure feeling, sensation, or

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[105] Ibid. Italics are original to the text.

[106] McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xv-xvi.

[107] Ibid., xiv.

[108] McGinn writes that, "all too many writers who treat mystical experience seem to take experience as an unproblematic word, one scarcely in need of analysis because everyone knows what it means." McGinn, "Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal," 45.

[109] Bernard McGinn, "The Language of Inner Experience in Christian Mysticism," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 1, no. 2 (2001): 156.

experience easily separated from subsequent acts of thinking, loving, and deciding."[110] According to McGinn, mystical consciousness refers to one becoming aware of the "consciousness of the presence of God." Mystical consciousness is different from being conscious of objects or of one's self; it is a type of consciousness that he calls "consciousness *beyond*, or 'meta-consciousness.'"[111] He goes on to write that meta-consciousness is "the co-presence of God in our inner acts, not as an object to be understood or grasped, but as the transforming Other who is, as Augustine put it, 'more intimate to us than we are to ourselves.'"[112] In other words, in mystical consciousness, God is present not as an object, but as a reality that is both transcendent and yet immanent. By examining mysticism through an understanding of consciousness, McGinn argues that we can see how mysticism in religion is "a form of life" rather than simply a natural experience. Furthermore, in the Christian tradition, mystical consciousness is a gift that not only brings awareness and/or experiences of God but also brings about a personal transformation within one's self, leading one to "drive to understand, affirm, and live out the gift received."[113]

The transformation brought about through the mystical consciousness of the presence of God is the last part of McGinn's description of mysticism. He argues that mysticism is not simply an interiorly focused, selfish endeavor, but that mysticism involves a period of personal growth that then extends outwards beyond the person. Mystics go through their own personal transformations that then radiate out from the mystics into the world through their actions. McGinn notes that within the Christian tradition this transformative element is often the way the authenticity of a mystic is determined.[114] He writes that,

> Mysticism involves not just intense forms of contact with God, of whatever duration, but also a transformed life. It is part of a process that begins, as we have seen, with acts of asceticism, reading the scripture, spiritual direction, and preparatory forms of prayer, but

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[110] McGinn, "Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal," 46. Italics original to text.

[111] Ibid., 47. Italics original to text. McGinn also acknowledges here the influence of Thomas Merton upon his own perspective of mystical consciousness. In particular, McGinn references Merton's book, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York, NY: New Directions, 1968).

[112] McGinn, "Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal," 47. For McGinn's specific reference to Augustine, see Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. William Watts (London, UK: Heinemann 1963), 3.6.

[113] Ibid., 51.

[114] McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvii.

> it is meant to spill out and over into a new mode of living. …[I]n Christianity the relation between forms of direct contact with God and everyday life has often been discussed under the rubric of the relation between the contemplative life and the active life.[115]

According to McGinn then, mystics not only develop a spiritual life of contemplation, but authentic mystics also have active lives that reflect the transformative effect of God in their lives.

Like James and Underhill, McGinn has only written a minimal amount on nature mysticism. He begins to discuss nature mysticism when writing about the mystical theology and legacy of St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226). At first, McGinn is hesitant to identify Francis as a mystic arguing that while Francis does speak of faith, prayer, and a transformative-spiritual growth in Jesus Christ, stating such theological truths and beliefs does not necessarily make someone a mystic.[116] It is, however, Francis's poetic and mystical writing of "Canticle of Brother Sun" that persuades McGinn to identify Francis as a mystic, specifically a nature mystic. He writes that in the canticle, Francis can justifiably be described as "an innovator in Christian attitudes toward the environment." McGinn praises Francis for reflecting a specifically Christian understanding of nature mysticism writing that, "his [Francis's] vision of the 'enfraternization' of the whole created world, that is, the mutual interconnection of all creation, must be seen in the context of his fundamental theological belief in God as Creator, Redeemer, and Savior revealed in Jesus Christ as Lord and as crucified Servant."[117] McGinn further clarifies his own understanding of nature mysticism, writing,

> We can…speak of the canticle as expressing a form of theophanic nature mysticism, which is to say that Francis's consciousness of the world is more than just a sense of integration with the cosmos conceived of as in some way divine. …Francis presents a specifically Christian nature mysticism in which God's presence is experienced as luminously real and immediate in the cosmos as a whole and in each of its elements insofar as they reflect some aspect of the divine fullness.[118]

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[115] Ibid., 519.

[116] McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism – 1200-1350*, vol. 3 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1998), 54.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid., 55-56.

McGinn's description of nature mysticism essentially reflects his previous more general definition of mysticism, yet shows how nature mysticism is more of a specific type of mysticism that emphasizes and embraces a consciousness of the presence of God in the cosmos.

McGinn's work on mysticism has become essential for any study involving Christian mysticism. His multi-volume series, *The Presence of God*, which has yet to be completed, has reintroduced the perspective of mysticism as a form of consciousness and the importance of understanding mystics within their traditions. Even though McGinn's work has a historical approach, it is not merely descriptive; "it is always guided and informed by explanatory perspectives that are at least implicitly constructive."[119] While his research returns to a more traditional understanding of Christian mystical theology, he makes an effort to examine as many mystical writings by male and female mystics as possible within the Western Christian tradition. Even though McGinn's research on mysticism is focused predominantly on its development in the West, particularly in Catholic mystical theology, this allows him to consider how the tradition can aid in reading and understanding each mystic within the tradition of mystical theology.

While James, Underhill, and McGinn have made essential contributions to the study of mysticism, each have also referenced the role of nature in mystical experiences. In particular, Underhill and McGinn highlight nature mysticism as a unique type of mysticism within the Christian tradition. Their research on nature mysticism can be further developed and incorporated into ecological theology by identifying and exploring in more detail Christian nature mystics. In order to consider how this nature mysticism can be incorporated into ecological theology, it is necessary to consider next what research has been done on nature mysticism and ecological theology.

Current Discussions of Mystical Theology within Ecological Theology and Ethics

While James, Underhill, and McGinn have contributed influential research arguing that mysticism is a unique, phenomenal experience involving the mystic gaining consciousness of the presence of God, only a few ecological theologians have offered some brief reviews of mysticism. In order to bring mysticism into greater conversation with ecological theology and ethics, it is necessary to now consider the current scholarship in ecotheology on this topic, albeit

[119] McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xii.

limited. Presently, much of this scholarship typically contains only brief discussions on this topic and often with concluding arguments calling for further research into how the tradition of Christian mysticism could contribute to ecological theology and ethics. One way mysticism is discussed in ecological theology is within the context of ecological spirituality, which Trappist monk Charles Cummings defines as a spirituality that "explores some of the relationships that human beings have with the world around us and with God. Our environment, both human and non-human, channels divinity to us, because in every creature we can encounter in some way the creator."[120] Within ecospirituality, the spiritual reflections and poetry of mystics are often referenced as possible sources that can contribute to a practical ecospirituality that reinforces a love and concern for the cosmos. In addition to this, a second way mysticism is addressed in ecotheology is by a few ecotheologians who examine the life and writings of a particular mystic in order to assess whether their mystical theology can contribute to ecological ethics.[121] While these two ways demonstrate that there is some relationship between ecotheology and mysticism, the engagement between the two is minimal and the term 'nature mysticism' is rarely used.

Ecotheologian Denis Edwards, whose research primarily focuses on how Christology and the wisdom tradition can contribute to ecological theology, has briefly discussed the importance of mystical theology.[122] His engagement with mysticism is most thought out in a more recent article where he introduces a "mysticism of ecological praxis." Briefly explained, Edwards's mysticism of ecological praxis calls Christians to live a converted life of hope dedicated to truly embracing the cosmos, "of coming to know other creatures of Earth as kin, of coming to know that each has its own value and its own integrity."[123] Moreover, this mysticism of ecological praxis opposes an isolating, consumer driven society. For Edwards, this praxis embodies "the

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[120] Charles Cummings, *Eco-Spirituality: Toward a Reverent Life* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1991), 27.

[121] I will provide examples of this second way based on the research of Beverly Lanzetta and Steven L. Churchill.

[122] Denis Edwards has published many books on eco-theology, specifically on the Christian wisdom tradition, Jesus Christ, evolution, and eco-spirituality. Some of his important publications include: *Jesus and the Cosmos* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1991), *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1999), and *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006).

[123] Edwards, "Planetary Spirituality: Exploring A Christian Ecological Approach," 22.

experience of being caught up in the utter beauty of the natural world."[124] At the conclusion of this article, Edwards emphasizes the need for Christian mysticism to be incorporated into ecological theology, particularly how this mystical tradition can contribute to ecological spirituality. Arguing that this mystical tradition not be neglected, he writes:

> if it is to be an authentic ecological spirituality I think it will involve a rediscovery of asceticism and true mysticism. It will be a mysticism that finds the incomprehensible mystery of God in the boundless beauty of the natural world as well as in its strangeness and otherness. It will be a mysticism that involves an enduring, life-long, indeed eternal, commitment to the good of Earth. It will respect and love Earth and all its diverse forms of life and act to preserve Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations. Conversion to the Earth, to solidarity with the creatures that make up our planetary community, must involve action. It is not only a radical reorientation of thought, and it is not only the discovery of a new capacity for feeling for non-human creation. It is both of these issuing forth in personal, political and ecclesial action.[125]

While Edwards's move to incorporate mystical theology into ecotheology is an important start, it should also be noted that he does not explicitly refer to or use the term nature mysticism, even though his mysticism of ecological praxis is very similar to this type of mysticism. His research here, however, is a good example of the call for ecological theology to more seriously engage with mystical theology.

Philosopher and spiritual ecologist Roger Gottlieb has also written about the role of mysticism within deep ecology.[126] While his understanding of deep ecology is more secular, he emphasizes the need for a spirituality infused with the teachings of deep ecology. He explains how deep ecology is a spiritual perspective that teaches that the human person is not superior to creation and that nature is not simply here for our use; rather, we exist within an ecosystem, a web of life,

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[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid., 21.

[126] Roger Gottlieb writes predominately about spiritual ecology and deep ecology as a philosopher. He argues that deep ecology inherently contains a sense of spirituality even if it is not connected to any one religion. "[B]ecause of the way it expands our sense of what people are, deep ecology can be considered a *spiritual* perspective. …This sense of spirituality does not require a conventional (Western) religious attachment to a personal God." Furthermore, he writes, "spiritual deep ecology can help us begin to understand ourselves as natural, rather than purely psychic, social, and symbolic beings" and ultimately, could help us challenge political ideologies that desire to sustain the status quo of consumerism, and help us fight against radical fundamental movements threatening the environment. See: Roger S. Gottlieb, "Spiritual Deep Ecology and the Left: An Attempt At Reconciliation," 521, 524. Italics original to text.

that works together where we are all able to live and grow.[127] A deep ecology spirituality, according to Gottlieb, would emphasize a mystical appreciation of creation since it incorporates "a mysticism that takes the earth and all its life as an ultimate truth," which furthermore encourages social and ethical changes regarding the environment.[128] Like Edwards, while he emphasizes the need for more research into the role of mysticism in ecological spirituality, Gottlieb does not explicitly use the term nature mysticism.[129]

The potential for mysticism to elicit social transformation and ecological ethics has been discussed by ecotheologian Kathleen Fischer, who argues that "the ecological crisis offers an opportunity to restore mysticism and contemplation to their rightful places in Christian experience."[130] She emphasizes returning to the traditions within Christianity, such as mystical theology, where a concern for creation is an ethical imperative.[131] Turning to the work of Bernard McGinn, Fischer highlights McGinn's discussion regarding the mystic's experience of the presence of God in the cosmos. Fischer emphasizes that the omnipresence of God is a key point that can be seen sometimes in the prayers or poetry of mystics who openly gaze upon creation and express the incomprehensibility of the presence of God.[132] In her conclusion, she argues against restricting mysticism, or the spiritual life more generally, to the interior of our self. Ecotheology can assist in creating a spiritual life that is both contemplative and active, the inner and the outer. "[S]pirituality cannot concern itself simply with private prayer or personal fulfillment; its scope is as wide as that reign of God which encompasses all creation."[133]

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[127] Gottlieb, "Spiritual Deep Ecology and the Left: An Attempt At Reconciliation," 518.

[128] Gottlieb, "The Transcendence of Justice and the Justice of Transcendence: Mysticism, Deep Ecology and the Political Life," 154-155, 163. It is important to note that Gottlieb does not subscribe to a Christian sense of ecological spirituality.

[129] Ibid., 162.

[130] Fischer, "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Awareness," 173. Fischer has written more about ecological spirituality in her book, *Loving Creation: Christian Spirituality, Earth-Centered and Just* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist, 2009).

[131] Fischer, "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Awareness," 170. Fischer uses the mystical theology of Thomas Merton as an example.

[132] Ibid., 174.

[133] Ibid., 177.

More discussion on incorporating nature mysticism into ecotheology can be found in research that engages specifically with a particular mystic. Discussing Christian mysticism and ethics more generally, Beverly Lanzetta argues that the tradition of Christian mysticism has always expressed mysticism as involving an interior level and an ethical dimension. She is critical of studies of mysticism that isolate mystics from ethical concerns, depicting mystics as having only "antinomianism, amoral behavior, or ethical apathy."[134] She refers to both Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila as examples of Christian mystics who present "a rare insight into the phenomenology of moral-mystical consciousness; that is, how ethical response emerges directly out of contemplative experience."[135]

Lanzetta compares how the mysticism of both Julian and Teresa demonstrates a contemplative ethic that contains an ethic of intimacy, an ethic of '*amor mundi*' and an ethic of dignification. Of the ethic of intimacy, Lanzetta describes how these women seek and experience a communion between God and their own souls which leads to an intimate friendship where the mystics experience not only God's love but also God's suffering. Lanzetta writes of how Teresa explained this experience: "the soul experiences the afflictions of its most receptive nature, both in terms of the negative wounding sustained from bearing the sin and violence of the world, and the positive touching of Divine Wisdom which opens it to deeper reserves of communion and oneness."[136] Referring to Julian's reflection on how a hazelnut she held in her palm was loved into existence by God, Lanzetta argues how an ethic of *amor mundi* instills in the mystic a love of God's creation because of the goodness of creation.[137] God's immense love for all creatures becomes the foundation for this ethic which seeks to enable all creation to flourish. Lastly, an ethic of dignification, or the ethic of perfection, is about enabling divinization, which is something both Julian and Teresa declare to be "the goal of the mystical life…[and that] whatever impedes that realization is against ethics."[138] This process of divinization contains

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[134] Lanzetta, "Contemplative Ethics: Intimacy, Amor Mundi and Dignification in Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila," 1.

[135] Ibid., 2.

[136] Ibid., 6.

[137] Ibid., 10. See: Julian of Norwich, *Showings*.

[138] Ibid., 13.

many challenges and trials, but Lanzetta summarizes Teresa's desire "to lift up human reality to reflect the experiences of love, mercy, and compassion she perceived in her mystical visions."[139] While Lanzetta does not identify Julian or Teresa as nature mystics, nor does she use this term, her study of these mystics demonstrates how mystical theology contains an ethical dimension, and in this case, a broad ethical concern for creation. Moreover, Lanzetta has provided a strong example of how mystical theology can speak to the development of ecological ethics.

Steven L. Churchill has a similar approach to Lanzetta when he examines the mysticism of Martin Luther. Referring to Underhill's definition of nature mysticism, Churchill describes Luther as a nature mystic because, unlike other contemporary Reformers, he stressed how seeing wonder and excitement in creation would enrich our spiritual life.[140] Churchill suggests that Luther's sense of the wonder of creation and his awareness of the presence of God in the cosmos are possibly a result of the influence of the anonymous book, *Theologia Germanica*, which describes the creation-centered mysticism of mystics within the Christian tradition of mystical theology.[141] Luther stresses that nature does not simply point to God but that God is present "in and through" all creatures and creation, just as Christ is present in the Eucharist.[142] This presence of God, which is key for the nature mystic (as argued by both Underhill and McGinn) is described by Luther in detail. His protestant theology emerges as he reflects that no human can see or recognize the true majesty of God because of our depravity, our sinfulness. Even though he stresses that God is therefore veiled and visible only now in creation, at other times Churchill

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[139] Ibid., 14. See: Teresa of Avila, "The Book of Her Foundations," in vol. 3 of *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriques (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1987). Lanzetta also discusses here how Julian and Teresa both endured sexism and a degree of oppression at the hands of men who sought to control their mystical experiences. This particular struggle was part of their dignification since both women needed to overcome their "social self-hate" (13).

[140] Steven L. Churchill, "'This Lovely Music of Nature': Grounding an Ecological Ethic in Martin Luther's Creation Mysticism" *Currents in Theology* and Mission, 26 no 3 (1999): 184. Churchill clarifies that the focus of this essay is not to debate mysticism, but to examine where Luther wrote about the presence of God in creation.

[141] Ibid., 187. See: *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther*, trans. Bengt Hoffman (New York: NY: Paulist, 1980).

[142] It is important to note, here, that Luther understood the Eucharist to be the Real Presence of Christ. However, Luther and Lutherans today still differ from Roman Catholics in their understanding of the Eucharist since they would not use the Catholic term 'transubstantiation.' Lutheran Eucharistic theology is similar to, but not the same, as Catholic Eucharistic theology. See: The Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and The U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, *The Eucharist as Sacrifice* (New York, NY: National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, 1968).

notes that Luther appears to retract this statement arguing that human depravity is so severe that we cannot even encounter God through the veil of creation.[143] The only hope lies in Christ, who Luther declares is able to uncover this veil; it is Christ who came to "…remind the world of God's grace in the creation."[144] Churchill concludes that Luther is indeed a nature mystic and that "Luther is trying to wake us up to the amazing spiritual truth that we are all creation mystics through Christ's redemptive act."[145]

Although Luther appears to struggle with how to best understand the omnipresence of God in creation, it is evident that he has some sense of nature mysticism. It is also important to note that in Luther we begin to see the importance of Christology for the nature mystic, particularly how the Christ event enables humanity to 'see' God. In addition to this, Churchill argues that the nature mysticism present in Luther is necessary for ecological theology and ethics since it will first enable humanity to see the presence of God in all creatures and then provide a reason for why creation must be properly cared for and used.[146]

This brief overview of current scholarship on ecological theology and mysticism indicates that while there are some engagements between mysticism and ecotheology, there is a great need for more research into nature mysticism and ecological theology and ecological ethics. In order to help reduce this deficit, I will now turn to cosmogenesis, which in addition to being the context for ecological theology, also offers a possible way to engage with nature mysticism.

A Cosmology of Cosmogenesis and Mystical Theology

One essential characteristic of ecotheology is how it operates from a theistic cosmology of cosmogenesis, which is typically a non-dualistic view of the entire cosmos as both material and spiritual. Cosmogenesis refers to the irreversible, non-repeatable, evolutionary processes of the universe.[147] A theistic cosmology of cosmogenesis understands this evolutionary development as

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[143] Churchill, ""This Lovely Music of Nature': Grounding an Ecological Ethic in Martin Luther's Creation Mysticism," 189.

[144] Ibid. See: Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, vol. 54 of *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1955).

[145] Ibid., 192.

[146] Ibid., 194.

[147] Swimme, "Cosmogenesis," 238-239.

an intentional creation that results from the creative love of God. The ecotheologian Thomas Berry outlines a theistic cosmology of cosmogenesis that explains how creation continues through evolutionary developments that are purposeful and initiated by God. He describes all of creation as we know it now as being in "a state of continuing transformation," and that as humanity becomes aware of evolution, "the unfolding universe becomes conscious of itself."[148] Moreover, Berry's cosmology of cosmogenesis is an essential part of his ecospirituality. The focus of the last section of this chapter will be to examine how this cosmology of cosmogenesis, as outlined by Berry, can become a connecting point between nature mysticism and ecotheology and ethics.

Berry argues that contemporary Christianity has lost its connection with the rest of creation and that this loss occurred gradually through three particular movements in human history: first, through early Christianity's engagement with Greek humanism and anthropocentrism that valued the human as subject and all else as mere object; second, in the theological response to the plague in Europe that was most deadly from 1347-1349 resulting in the death of almost one-third of Europe's population which, at the time, could only be explained as God's punishment for the wickedness of humanity and the need to flee from a forsaken Earth to a true home in heaven; third, through the rapid industrialization of agriculture and the importance of an "extractive economy" that led many people to view the Earth strictly as a resource to be exploited.[149] Due to these major shifts in society, Berry argues that we now view all creation as "a collection of objects, not a communion of subjects," which leads him to conclude that, "the basic problem before us now is how to recover a sense of the universe as manifestation of some numinous mode of being."[150]

In an effort to recover this, Berry presents a theistic understanding of cosmogenesis. He argues that cosmogenesis refers to the origin, evolution, and structure or order of the cosmos; however, particular attention is given to the relationship between humanity and Earth. Building on the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Berry further highlights how this cosmology of

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[148] Berry, *The Dream of the Earth,* 128, 132.

[149] Thomas Berry, "Christianity and Ecology," in *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth,* ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 60-63.

[150] Ibid., 63.

cosmogenesis acknowledges that the universe has had a psychic-spiritual dimension from its beginning, and that humanity is awakening to the reality that we are "the psychic dimension of the earth" and that we "hold the fate of earth."[151] Described in more detail, Berry writes that the "awakened consciousness of the earth"[152] within humanity demonstrates "the most profound dimension of the universe itself, its capacity to reflect on and celebrate itself in conscious self-awareness."[153] This awareness is also essential for our own human understanding since discovery of ourselves is intimately bound with our discovery of the cosmos.[154] This leads Berry to argue that our understanding of cosmogenesis must permeate our spirituality since "our spirituality is earth-driven. If there is no spirituality in the earth then there is no spirituality in man. Man is a dimension of the earth. These two are totally implicated each in the other."[155]

This awakened consciousness of Earth also contains an ethical dimension, namely addressing how humanity should live within Earth. In reaction to the ecological devastation that was becoming more and more evident, Berry desired that humanity become conscious of its role in our destruction of the planet and begin to radically change our understanding of God, the cosmos and our place within creation. He writes,

> A return to a mystique of the Earth is a primary requirement for establishing a viable rapport between humans and the Earth. Only in this context will we overcome the arrogance that sets us apart from all other components of the planet and establishes a mood of conquest rather than of admiration. To assume that conquest and use is our primary relation with the natural world is ultimate disaster.[156]

Therefore, in order to build an ecospirituality that contains a "return to the mystique of the Earth," Berry proposes his cosmology of cosmogenesis as a paradigm for an ecospirituality that contains a spirituality of intimacy with creation, a spirituality that acknowledges and seeks the

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[151] Berry, "Cosmic Person and the Future of Man," 5. Ecotheologian Dennis Patrick O'Hara has also written about some of the main source's for Berry's cosmology of cosmogenesis (such as Teilhard, Sri Aurobindo Ghose (Hindu), and Zhou Dunyi (Neo-Confucian)). See: Dennis Patrick O'Hara, "Thomas Berry's Understanding of the Psychic-Spiritual Dimension of Creation: Some Sources," in *The Intellectual Roots of Thomas Berry: Imagining the Earth Community*, ed. Heather Eaton (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014), 81-102.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 132.

[154] Ibid., 195.

[155] Berry, "The Spirituality of the Earth," 1.

[156] Berry, "An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality," 2.

divine in the world of nature, and a spirituality of justice that incorporates justice for all creation.[157]

Bringing about this awareness and building this ecospirituality is an essential component of what Berry refers to as the great work. He writes, "the Great Work now, as we move into a new millennium, is to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner."[158] The great work entails a massive social, political, cultural, and religious transformation enabling humanity to live within Earth in a much more positive and engaged manner compared to the current situation. Moreover, this great work is something we cannot avoid or ignore; rather, it is a situation we have been forced into as a result of humanity's destructive relationship with the rest of creation.[159] As for Christianity, then, the great work requires a renewal of Christianity that engages seriously with the natural world. This can involve retrieving traditions in Christianity that acknowledge and seriously engage with creation, such as mystical theology, which Berry briefly acknowledges as a valuable tradition where one can find various Christian mystics who demonstrate an intimate, spiritual relationship with creation.[160]

Mystical theology, specifically nature mysticism, a tradition of Christian mysticism evident in the work of Teilhard and Merton, can contribute to Berry's call for the renewal of Christianity in many ways.[161] Nature mysticism is a type of mysticism that emphasizes a consciousness of the presence of God within the cosmos that elicits not only a deep awareness of the sacredness and interconnectedness of all creation but also contains an ethical imperative that strives to build an

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[157] Berry, "Christianity and Ecology," 60. Berry's use of the phrase "the Earth," rather than "Earth," is a reflection of the time of his earlier writing. There has been a gradual shift from describing our home as "the earth" to "The Earth," and today to "Earth." This shift in descriptive language reflects our movement away from a distant understanding of our planet and closer towards a more intimate relationship with our home. This shift is evident in Berry's work where later writing describes our home simply as "Earth."

[158] Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*, 3.

[159] Ibid., 7.

[160] Ibid., 23. Berry specifically highlights here Hildegard von Bingen, Richard of St. Victor, Meister Eckhart, and John of the Cross (23).

[161] Berry's work also contains possible signs of nature mysticism, particularly in his poetry which Ann Marie Dalton refers to as ecopoetics. See: Ann Marie Dalton, "*The New Story and* Journey of the Universe *as* Habitus," in *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 42-50.

ethic of creation.[162] As Underhill succinctly stated, a nature mystic "beholds creation with the Creator's eye."[163] Moreover, some nature mystics, such a Teilhard, operate out of a cosmology of cosmogenesis, or, in the case of Merton, a broad cosmological view that centers on the cosmic Christ. Their nature mysticism also emphasizes the reality of God's presence in the cosmos and how this reality creates an ethical imperative calling the Christian to a greater sense of justice for all humanity and other-than-human creation. In addition to this, Berry's emphasis on the psychic-spiritual dimension within creation draws many parallels with nature mysticism, particularly with the nature mystic's emphasis on the omnipresence of God. This is most clearly evident in Teilhard, who was one of Berry's many sources regarding the psychic-spiritual dimension of creation, who outlines in detail how consciousness and the presence of God throughout the cosmos are examples of this psychic-spiritual dimension.[164] Merton, too, demonstrates an engagement with the presence of God in the cosmos; however, he differs from Teilhard as his understanding of this dimension of creation is more closely tied with his own personal experiences, his nature poetry, and his cosmic Christology.[165] While the nature mysticism of both Teilhard and Merton can be simply read as examples of mystical theology worthy of theological reflection, by understanding their work within a cosmogenesis cosmology, such nature mysticism will not only contribute to Berry's great work but will also contribute to and enrich ecological theology with a mystical theology that will provide a foundation for ecological ethics.

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[162] This definition builds off the work of Bernard McGinn, Evelyn Underhill, and Thomas Berry.

[163] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 262.

[164] See: Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, and, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York, NY: Harper Torch Books, 1965).

[165] See: Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York, NY: Farrer, Straus and Cudahy, 1961), *New Seeds of Contemplation* (London, UK: Burns & Oates, 1962), *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, and, *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writing on Nature*.

Chapter 2
The Nature Mysticism of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's Life and Mystical Theology in his Writing

In order to understand Père Marie Joseph Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's mystical theology, particularly his personal development and his unique nature mysticism, this chapter will first briefly describe his life, focusing mostly on some of the pivotal events that shaped him and his work. Teilhard's mystical theology, as found in *Writings in a Time of War* (written 1916-1919; published 1968), *Hymn of the Universe* (written 1916-1955; published 1961), *The Phenomenon of Man* (written 1935-1940; published 1955), and *The Divine Milieu* (written 1926-1927; published 1957), will also be examined. The concluding section of this chapter will examine how we can understand Teilhard's own sense of nature mysticism and how this can contribute to ecological theology and ethics.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born on May 1, 1881 in Auvergne, France. Better known simply as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, he was the fourth child of eleven in a Catholic family of ancestral nobility. Teilhard enjoyed a happy childhood and wrote that it was during this time in the French countryside that his interest in rocks, metals, and Earth began.[166] Teilhard recounted how, as a child, he realized his own mortality and sought after that which was immortal, durable and permanent. He was at first convinced that it was material things such as rocks or metals that were truly permanent; however, he soon realized that they too can deteriorate or be destroyed.[167] This realization pulled Teilhard closer to Christ as he sought to understand the depth of the Incarnation, one of the greatest examples of God's presence in the cosmos. Teilhard's personal faith was further strengthened by his mother who, Teilhardian scholar Ursula King notes, had a strong devotion to Christian saints and mystics, which she passed on to her children.[168]

By the time Teilhard was eleven years old he was sent to a Jesuit boarding school, and when he turned 18, he formerly entered the Jesuit community in Aix-en-Provence, France, as a novice.

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[166] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, 2nd edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996, 2015), 6.

[167] Thomas M. King, *Teilhard de Chardin*: *The Way of Christian Mystics* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1988), 21-23.

[168] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 2.

King notes that Teilhard entered the Jesuits seeking further spiritual perfection and that he also "excelled as a classic scholar" during his early years of study with the Jesuits.[169] In 1901, after only two years of being a novice, Teilhard relocated with his community to a Jesuit house in St. Helier, Jersey Island (Channel Island). It was here that Teilhard received not only theological training but also training in the sciences, mainly geology.[170] Teilhard explored Jersey Island like he had the French countryside during his childhood. King argues that it was here that Teilhard's cosmic consciousness was awakened as his passion for not only nature but all creation began to grow immensely; "he now became fully aware of a deeply pantheistic and mystical inclination in him. This vibrant sense of a strong nature mysticism was to remain with him all his life."[171] Teilhard's cosmic consciousness was further expanded through his many travels, beginning with Cairo, Egypt, where he spent time teaching and researching at a Jesuit school from 1905-1908. After Egypt, he went to Hastings, South England, where he continued his Jesuit training for ordination which happened on August 24, 1911. After his ordination, Teilhard continued his studies and became involved in the archeological exploration in Piltdown, Sussex (England) following the discovery of the 'Piltdown Man,' which at the time was believed to be a collection of some of the earliest human fossils.[172]

When World War I broke out in 1914, Teilhard was 33 years old. His research was now put on hold as he was called to serve. He chose to enlist as a stretcher bearer, an important but underappreciated role. While at war Teilhard continued to perform his duties as a priest, and it was well known that he would offer mass and spiritual guidance.[173] He provided such excellent

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[169] Ibid., 14-15.

[170] Ibid., 16. Ursula King notes that the move to Jersey was also related to the political situation in France. In 1901 the French government passed anticlerical laws restricting the activities of religious communities. As a result, Teilhard's Jesuit community decided to relocate (15-16).

[171] Ibid., 17. Ursula King's use of the term pantheistic here refers back to Teilhard's own use of this term. In many of Teilhard's essays he often uses the term pantheistic rather than panentheistic when describing his love for nature; however, while he uses the term pantheism, he explicitly states in many of his essays that God is separate from creation. He also explains in the essay "Pantheism and Christianity" his view of Christian pantheism, which is essentially Christian panentheism. See: "Pantheism and Christianity," in *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. René Hague (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 56-75.

[172] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 23-32, 42-47. Charles Dawson discovered the 'Piltdown Man' in 1910 in Piltdown, Sussex England. Teilhard was not present when the discovery was made; rather, he joined the group after the discovery. In 1953, however, the 'Piltdown Man' was determined to be a hoax. It is not known even to this day who orchestrated this hoax (44-45).

[173] Ibid., 49-50.

service in the war that he was promoted to corporal and awarded a 'Légion d'Honneur' medal.[174] It was also while serving as a stretcher bearer that Teilhard wrote many essays, particularly one of his most important essays, "Cosmic Life." He wrote this essay in 1916 as a sort of intellectual testament of himself and his ideas since he felt that it was possible that he may not survive the war.[175] It was also during (and soon after) his time in the war that Teilhard wrote some of his most mystical essays that explored the relationship between God and the cosmos.[176] King reflects that the war was a pivotal time for Teilhard, not only since he was altered by what he witnessed, but because it was during the war that Teilhard clarified his ideas about the role of the human in the cosmos. Teilhard began to see how "the human being, like every other being, is essentially cosmic."[177] Teilhard's cousin, Marguerite Teilhard, with whom Teilhard exchanged many letters during the war, writes that she saw how the war "enabled him to see himself."[178] Teilhard wrote to Marguerite describing himself as a 'soldier-priest' who did not simply view the war as wasted years away from his true calling. Marguerite writes,

> He felt he had reached a milestone in his life. While his fellow-Jesuits and scientific colleagues were sympathizing with him for the time wasted in the war, he himself knew that this breathing-space would stand him in good stead. He would at last be able to give form to a rich store of visions and enthusiasms that were now clamouring for expression; and this meant that it must be done before death overtook him; which meant it must be done immediately, for death might well be round the corner. The dazzling Presence that had become manifest to him 'before the age of ten' as running through the immensity of creation, was now summoning him. If he was to make men see this God hidden in the world—and how hidden he realized more every day—he must see him more vividly himself.[179]

While Teilhard survived the war, two of his younger brothers, Gonzague and Olivier, did not.[180]

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[174] Ibid., 53.

[175] Teilhard sent this essay to his cousin Marguerite Teilhard for her to keep safe and to possibly share if he did not survive the war.

[176] I am referring to three of Teilhard's essays in *Hymn to the Universe* ("The Mass on the World," "Christ in the World of Matter," and "The Spiritual Power of Matter"). These essays will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

[177] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 55.

[178] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Making of a Mind: Letters from a Soldier-Priest 1914-1919*, trans. René Hague (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1965), 23.

[179] Ibid., 33.

[180] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 47, 68. Gonzague died at the beginning of WWI in 1914 and Olivier died at the end of the war in 1918.

It was not until May 26, 1918 that Teilhard would take his final vows back in France with the Jesuits. Now that the war had come to an end, Teilhard could return to his research in Paris and it was during this time that he expressed his desire to be the Lord's "evangelist—*of your Christ in the universe*."[181] He completed his studies in geology, botany, and zoology, and by 1922, Teilhard completed his doctorate on natural sciences.[182] As his career in scientific research was beginning, Father Émile Licent reached out to him, requesting his help with various fossils and other archeological discoveries Licent had made while in Tianjin, China. At first, Teilhard spent time analyzing what materials Licent sent to him in Paris but he soon realized it was necessary to travel to China in order to offer a better analysis. In the spring of 1923, Teilhard travelled to China at Licent's invitation. Teilhard had long desired to travel there as his elder brother Albéric had previously traveled to China, and Teilhard's elder sister, Françoise, who had joined the Little Sisters of the Poor, died in China in 1911 shortly after arriving there for missionary work.[183]

Teilhard would travel throughout China and parts of Mongolia, returning to Europe every few years, for the next twenty years. While he saw many parts of China, the city of Tianjin and then Beijing each served as a base for him. While in China, Teilhard went on many expeditions searching for traces of early human life. After only two expeditions in China, Teilhard's Jesuit community began to express concern over Teilhard's writing and theology. In 1924 he was first informed by his Jesuit Provincial in France that he was no longer to publish or discuss his theological work (particularly theological work that engaged with his scientific research).[184] In addition to this, Teilhard also agreed to no longer teach at Jesuit schools; however, since he was still permitted to carry out his scientific research, he returned to China. Even though Teilhard did not publish his theological work during his lifetime, he was of course still working on it and sharing it with a select few.[185] King notes that while Teilhard's time in China was fruitful for his research, it also became for Teilhard "a convenient and not unattractive exile at this critical

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[181] Teilhard de Chardin, "The Priest," in *Writings in a Time of War*, trans. René Hague (London, UK: Collins, 1968), 219. Italics original to text.

[182] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 84-85.

[183] Ibid., 31-32, 92.

[184] Ibid., 108.

[185] His cousin Marguerite Teilhard, Ida Treat, Lucile Swan, Père Leroy, Mademoiselle Mortier and Rhoda de Terra are just a few of the people with whom he would share his essays and ideas.

turning point in his life."[186] Even if his time there was to some degree forced, it was also during this period that Teilhard completed two of his important works, *The Divine Milieu* (completed in 1927), and *The Phenomenon of Man* (completed in 1940).

In 1929, Teilhard became part of an important excavation in Zhoukoudian, China where an early human skull had been found (dating to at least 700,000 years ago). This skull became known as Peking Man.[187] Continued excavation in this area lead to the discovery of more skulls and bones, and to the conclusion that it was here where the oldest human civilization had used fire, an important evolutionary discovery.[188] To this day this site has remained an important place for the study of early humanity. Teilhard referred to the discovery of Peking Man, also known as Sinanthropus, as a "stroke of luck" that further solidified the connection between humanity and Earth. "For anyone with vision, the discovery of Sinanthropus, by binding man more intimately to the earth, merely contributes to augment the supreme importance, in our eyes, of the phenomenon of man in the realm of nature."[189] It was also during this time that Teilhard met the American artist Lucile Swan in China. Swan became a dear friend of Teilhard's, typing up his essays and creating sculptures of the fossils he had found or been researching in China.[190]

While Teilhard continued to be involved with the archeological studies going on in Zhoukoudian and with the Peking Man discovery, in the winter of 1932 he received the sad news of his father's death. Unfortunately, he could not travel to Europe after receiving this news, so he continued with his research and in 1935 he travelled to India and Java.[191] The news of the death of his mother and his terminally ill younger sister Marguerite-Marie in 1936 left Teilhard very upset, but he was comforted by Swan and a visit to America where he attended some conferences and met likeminded scholars. When Teilhard returned to Beijing he experienced the invasion of

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[186] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 110. Teilhard was not formally exiled. King describes this as a voluntary exile.

[187] Ibid., 131. King notes that while the Peking Man was discovered in 1929, archeologists had been surveying and digging at this site since 1926. The Peking Man fossils were unfortunately lost when the Japanese invaded China in the late 1930's.

[188] Ibid., 132-133. King notes that the dating of these discoveries varies from "700,000 to 200,000 years ago" (132).

[189] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Discovery of Sinanthropus," *The Appearance of Man*, trans. J. K. Cohen (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1965), 85, 92.

[190] Ursula King, "Lucile Swan," in *Spirit of Fire*, 147-157.

[191] Ibid., 164.

the Japanese into China and he felt its affects most when the archeological site at Zhoukoudian had to be shut down after being taken over by the Japanese. Compounded with the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Teilhard became very isolated as he could neither leave Beijing nor could he communicate with anyone outside of the city due to the war.[192]

When Teilhard was unable to leave Beijing during the war, he and his fellow Jesuit and scientist Père Leroy founded the Beijing Institute of Geobiology in 1940 where the artifacts and fossils previously held in Tianjin museum were then moved. This provided a significant amount of work for Teilhard with endless cataloging and organizing.[193] Other than Leroy, Teilhard enjoyed Swan's company until she too left Beijing in 1941 as the war worsened. Soon after her departure, Teilhard learned that his younger brother Gabriel, a soldier in the war, had been killed in action; however, this news took a year to reach Teilhard in Beijing.[194] Only Teilhard and one younger brother, Joseph, remained.

Teilhard was to remain in China until 1946. Leroy writes that during this time, the isolation affected Teilhard and it "did violence to his nature to be thus sealed in."[195] When the atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, Teilhard was still in China and he wrote an essay reflecting on how this event had now radically changed all of humanity. He believed that the nuclear bomb was the end of all war and that humanity would now be directed towards sympathy and union. He writes,

> our future action can only be convergent, drawing us together in an atmosphere of sympathy. I repeat, sympathy, because to be ardently intent upon a common object is inevitably the beginning of love. In affording us a biological, "phyletic" outlet directed upward, the shock which threatened to destroy us will have the effect of giving us a sense of direction and a dynamic force and finally (within certain limits) of making us of one mind. The atomic age is not the age of destruction but of union in research. …[Now is] the coming of the *Spirit of the Earth.*[196]

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[192] Ibid., 172-176.

[193] Ibid., 183-184.

[194] Ibid., 186-187.

[195] Père Leroy, "The Man," in *Letters from a Traveller*, trans. René Hague, Violet Hammersley, Barbara Wall, and Nöel Lindsay (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 35.

[196] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Some Reflections on the Spiritual Repercussions of the Atom Bomb," in *The Future of Man*, trans. Norman Denny (New York, NY: Image Books, 1964), 140.

Teilhard wrote more essays about peace during this time as he attempted to address for himself the tragedies of war and the increasing struggle for peace throughout the world.

By 1946 he was able to leave China travelling first to America and afterwards to France. Teilhard would spend over a year in Paris, where he now enjoyed some popularity among scholars and others who were more generally interested in his work. While he was not permitted by the Church to share his views in a public fashion, King writes of how Teilhard would attend small house gatherings where everyone could openly discuss their research and interests.[197] Unfortunately, during the summer of 1947 Teilhard began to experience many health problems. First a heart attack and then a breathing attack that left him extremely ill for about two weeks. He was ordered to rest for the remainder of the year which meant he could not travel.[198] When his health improved Teilhard made his first and only trip to Rome, at the request of the Jesuit Superior General, who informed Teilhard that his book, *The Phenomenon of Man*, would not be published.[199] Realizing he would likely never see his work published during his own lifetime, Teilhard gave his friend Mademoiselle Jeanne Mortier, who had provided secretarial work for Teilhard after Swan, the rights to all his theological writing in 1951 just before travelling to South Africa for another expedition.[200] Teilhard had desired to see South Africa after Abbé Breuil and George Barbour had encouraged him to explore the excavation sites and the archeological discoveries made there. He only spent a few weeks in South Africa but returned there again in 1953. According to King, Teilhard's trips to South Africa provided him with some degree of peace as he was beginning to feel more the limits of his age (he was now in his seventies) and further pressure from his order.[201]

The last year of Teilhard's life was marked by increasing health concerns and challenges with the Jesuits. Also, upon his return from his second trip to South Africa, he learned that the Piltdown Man had been a hoax.[202] He travelled one last time to France in the summer of 1954. Leroy took

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[197] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 192-193.

[198] Ibid., 197.

[199] Ibid., 201-202.

[200] Ibid., 212.

[201] Ibid., 220-221.

[202] Ibid., 223.

Teilhard to see his family home and Teilhard offered a lecture at the request of the Jesuits on his scientific research. When he returned to New York later that year, feeling as though he was not welcome in Paris, he fell ill in December.[203] King notes how it seemed that later in Teilhard's life he was often struck by anxiety to the point that even meeting some people made him unwell.[204] At the age of 73, on Easter Sunday April 10, 1955 Teilhard suffered from a massive heart attack and died. His funeral was small and only Leroy accompanied Teilhard's body when he was laid to rest in the Jesuit cemetery of New York, where his body remains today.[205] Publication of his works began immediately with *The Phenomenon of Man* even being published the year of his death. When reflecting on the importance of Teilhard and his passing in New York, Ursula King writes,

> visitors need a key to the cemetery gate to gain access to the simple grave where this great man is buried, hidden under a small headstone simply inscribed with his name, the date of his birth (May 1, 1881), of his death (April 10, 1955), and that of joining the Jesuits (March 19, 1899). It seems a forlorn place for someone who traveled the world and is said to have influenced the thinking of both the United Nations and the Second Vatican Council. It is almost as though Teilhard were still living in exile sixty years after his death.[206]

The purpose of summarizing Teilhard's life here is to gain some insight into his mystical theology. Some of Teilhard's most important pieces of writing were composed when he was serving in the war, after experiencing censure from his order, and when he was isolated in China and then unofficially exiled to America. He was a well-traveled man who had endured much in life, but throughout each of his many life experiences, his theological and mystical reflections were never stifled; rather, they were strengthened and developed.

Mystical Theology in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's Writing

Many of the events of Teilhard's life inform the mystical theology found in his works: *Writings in a Time of War*, *Hymn of the Universe*, *The Phenomenon of Man*, and *The Divine Milieu*. This is particularly evident in *Writings in a Time of War* and *Hymn of the Universe* which both contain essays influenced by his experience of WWI. Like the majority of his theological work,

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[203] Ibid., 226-227.

[204] Ibid., 220.

[205] Ibid., 234-235.

[206] Ibid., 236.

each of these books was not published until after his death. I have selected these books because each reflects his unique nature mysticism revealed through his theological interpretation of the cosmos, God, humanity, and divinization. In the examination of each book, particular attention has been given to Teilhard's individual mystical experiences and his understanding of the omnipresence of God in the cosmos.

Writings in a Time of War (1968)

Writings in a Time of War is a collection of essays Teilhard wrote while he was serving as a stretcher bearer in World War I (1914-1918). The essays in this book that focus on mysticism and nature include "Cosmic Life," "The Mystical Milieu," "Forma Christi," and "The Universal Element." Each of these essays highlights certain characteristics of his unique nature mysticism, specifically the relationship between humanity and creation, mysticism and divinization, cosmic consciousness and cosmic Christology. Special attention will be given to the essay "Cosmic Life" since it is considered one of his most important essays, whereas the other essays will be considered together in terms of how they outline the characteristics of his nature mysticism.[207]

"Cosmic Life" is Teilhard's intellectual testament. This essay touches on much of his early theological interests, serving almost like a blueprint for his future theological writing. It is in this essay that Teilhard begins to really outline his nature mysticism as he begins the essay with the statement: "There is a communion with God, and a communion with earth, and a communion with God through earth."[208] Teilhard writes that his intention in this essay is to express the special place nature holds for him and how his relationship with nature is not in conflict with his faith; rather, it reflects "my love of matter and life, and…[my] unique adoration of the only absolute and definitive Godhead."[209]

Teilhard's nature mysticism begins by bringing humanity closer to creation by emphasizing humanity's material and spiritual connection to the earth. He argues that we cannot distance

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[207] Both Ursula King and Thomas M. King identify "Cosmic Life" as one of Teilhard's most important, and well known, essays. See: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Cosmic Life" in *Writings in a Time of War*, 13-71; Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* 2nd edition (2015), 55-57; Thomas M. King, *Teilhard de Chardin, The Way of Christian Mystics* (1988), 30-31.

[208] Teilhard de Chardin, "Cosmic Life," in *Writings in Time of War*, 14.

[209] Ibid.

ourselves from the natural world in order to grow spirituality; rather, we must open ourselves to the cosmos "by 'awakening to the cosmos'…[and] to do so, he [humanity] has only to learn to appreciate the value of *sacred evolution* as an instrument of beautification, and the eternal hope it contains."[210] Therefore, he emphasizes that upon realizing that all life "is in some way an extension of matter," humanity can become aware of its cosmic identity.[211] Coming to this realization, or awakening as Teilhard calls it, can unleash a powerful feeling of being overwhelmed by the cosmos because "suddenly, *beneath the ordinariness of our most familiar experiences*, we realize, with religious horror, that what *is emerging in us is the great cosmos*." Moreover, our response to this realization must be total; "it is not enough for man to throw off his self-love and *live as a social being*. *He needs to live* with his whole heart, in union with the totality of the world that carries him along, *cosmically*." [212]

Teilhard warns that this realization can lead one to the worship of nature; however, he identifies this as a non-Christian response that leads one to lose one's own self to nature. Teilhard speaks of experiencing this temptation first hand and how he soon realized that being entirely taken in by nature does not lead one to truly awaken to the depth of the cosmos and God's purpose within the cosmos.[213] He argues that instead of being consumed by nature that we need to see the genius of the cosmos, that

> *there is an absolute direction of growth*…and that *life advances in that direction*. …The true summons of the cosmos is a call consciously to share in the great work that goes on within it; it is not by drifting down the current of things that we shall be united with their one, single, soul, but by fighting our way, with them.[214]

This direction of growth leads Teilhard to express how Christianity, the cosmos, and evolution must be brought together. Christianity is a "*cosmic religion*" where God is understood to be the

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[210] Ibid., 17. Italics original to text.

[211] Ibid., 16, 23.

[212] Ibid., 27. Italics original to text. Teilhard de Chardin and the translator of this text, René Hague, both use male exclusive language here. I have left Hague's translation intact in order to reflect Teilhard's original work. The original French reads: "ce n'est pas assez pour l'homme, rejetant son égoïsme, *de vivre socialement*. *Il a besoin de vivre* d'un coeur total, en union avec l'ensemble du Monde qui le porte – *cosmiquement*." This male language is reflective of the time of Teilhard's writing and should not be interpreted to mean that Teilhard believes only men are called to come into a greater relationship with Earth. See: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "La vie cosmique," in *Écrits du temps de la guerre 1916-1919* (Paris, FR: B. Grasset, 1965), 33.

[213] Teilhard de Chardin, "Cosmic Life," in *Writings in Time of War*, 29-30.

[214] Ibid., 31-32. Italics original to text.

source and the goal of the cosmos guiding and desiring the "*world of souls*."[215] This is where Teilhard then begins to express his cosmic Christology, which builds off the New Testament Christology of John and Paul. Teilhard explains how the goal of the world is union with Christ and that evolution is part of the process of bringing humanity towards God. The cosmos then becomes an important location for this divine process since "the exclusive task of the world is the physical incorporation of the faithful in the Christ who is of God. This cardinal task is being carried out *with the rigour and harmony of a natural evolution*."[216] Teilhard continues to explain that in light of evolution, the Incarnation must now be understood as a much greater event that takes place within evolutionary history since "the Incarnation is a making new, a restoration, of *all* the universe's forces and powers; Christ is the Instrument, the Centre, the End, of the *whole* animate and material creation; through Him, *everything* is created, sanctified, and vivified." [217] In this perspective, the Incarnation then not only affects humanity but has transformed the entire cosmos. Furthermore, Teilhard reflects that since we are still awaiting the return of Christ, we are likewise awaiting Christ's fullness in the sense that "*the mystical Christ has not reached the peak of his growth—nor, therefore, has the cosmic Christ*."[218] This is why Teilhard boldly states that evolution is holy and that Christ is the goal of evolution.[219]

Since creation and evolution are so pivotal for Teilhard, he laments at how often the cosmos is underappreciated, which leads him to emphatically state, "There is one more thing, Lord: …if I am to have a share in your kingdom, I must on no account reject this radiant world in the ecstatic delight of which I opened my eyes."[220] He writes strongly of how our own spiritual development is happening within the world and urges humanity to experience "a reconciliation between cosmic love of the world and heavenly love of God."[221] This awakening, then, must not simply be an intellectual or spiritual exercise; rather, Teilhard argues that we must radically turn again to the world and put effort into caring for creation. Christians should therefore be held responsible

[215] Ibid., 47. Italics original to text.

[216] Ibid., 50. Italics original to text.

[217] Ibid., 58. Italics original to text.

[218] Ibid., 59. Italics original to text.

[219] Ibid.

[220] Ibid., 52-53.

[221] Ibid., 57.

for making this shift to creation since it is the Church, and specifically the sacraments, that call us to respect and care for our material world. He writes, "What, we now see, we have to do is not simply to forward a human task but, in some way, to bring Christ to completion; we must, therefore, devote ourselves with still more ardour, even in the natural domain, to the cultivation of the world."[222] This brings Teilhard to explain the meaning of the title of his essay, cosmic life. This awakening to Christ, creation, and evolution compels us into a cosmic life which means:

> To live the cosmic life is to live dominated by the consciousness that one is an atom in the body of the mystical and cosmic Christ. The man who so lives dismisses as irrelevant a host of preoccupations that absorb the interest of other men: his life is projected further, and his heart more widely receptive. …*Cosmic Life* describes the aspirations and formulates the practical activities of a *concrete life*. If one tries to bring out the presuppositions and principles it is based on, one finds that it introduces a completely new orientation into Christian ascetical teaching.[223]

In this essay, Teilhard has introduced a mystical theology that encompasses the value of the cosmos, the cosmic scope of the Incarnation, the beginnings of his mystical interpretation of evolution, and how an awakening to the cosmos leads one to enter into a cosmic life. In almost all of Teilhard's work after this essay, he is further developing these ideas, with particular attention to how Christians can engage with evolutionary theory in a positive way. These are essential characteristics of his nature mysticism. I will now examine how Teilhard further elaborates on each of these characteristics in a selection of the additional essays in *Writings in a Time of War*.

Beginning with his mysticism more generally, Teilhard's mystical theology is further expressed in his essays "The Mystical Milieu," "Forma Christi," and "The Universal Element." What is unique in Teilhard's mysticism is the role all of creation plays in a mystic's development. Engagement with and reflection upon the entirety of the cosmos, including that which is visible and invisible, is essential in his mystical theology. He identifies five circles the mystic passes through or experiences. When explaining each of these circles Teilhard also includes his own personal reflections demonstrating how he himself experienced each of these circles. These five mystical circles are the circle of presence, the circle of consistence, the circle of energy, the circle of spirit, and the circle of person. As mystics move through these circles, they will

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[222] Ibid., 62.

[223] Ibid., 70-71. Italics original to text.

eventually reach the universal milieu where "milieu" means God's work or presence in the cosmos, the kingdom of God, and the divinization of humanity.[224] Teilhard is not the first person to identify various mystical stages. In fact, Ursula King identifies a parallel between Teilhard's mysticism of five circles and St. Teresa of Ávila's *Interior Castle*.[225] Beginning with the first circle of presence, Teilhard writes of how being aware of the presence of God in the world is not the same as appreciating the beauty of the cosmos. This circle requires coming to a much deeper awareness of presence that leads mystics to realize that they are "immersed in a *universal Milieu*…a Milieu *that knows no change*," which further pushes mystics to seek more, to seek further into this milieu.[226] Movement from this circle into the next is described by Teilhard as a movement into greater consciousness of the cosmos.[227]

In the second circle of consistence, mystics begin to become aware of the universal element, which is the source of all that exists. While mystics experience a great sense of joy in this circle, they are, however, also more susceptible to feeling the tragedy of death (human and non-human) and are sensitive towards the decomposition of the material world. The only comfort the mystic can experience in this circle is further realizing that the world endures; "this means that the incorruptible principle of the universe is now and for ever found, and that it extends everywhere: *the world is filled*, and filled with the Absolute."[228] Teilhard goes on to explain that the circles of presence and consistence are not simply about being aware of how God is present in the cosmos but how "the mystical milieu has pursued its task of entering into and refashioning the Real." He also notes that that this circle of consistence may be misinterpreted as the worship of nature.[229]

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[224] Teilhard de Chardin, "The Mystical Milieu," in *Writings in a Time of War*, 137.

[225] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 62. The Spanish medieval mystic Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582) wrote many texts on the topic of mysticism and Catholic spirituality. In her most famous work, *Interior Castle*, Teresa explains in detail how the mystic's soul passes through seven specific stages as it journeys towards union with God. Each stage is described as its own mansion. Briefly listed, the process begins with the soul entering a mansion of grace, a mansion of prayer, a mansion of spiritual discipline, a mansion of quiet prayer, a mansion of prayer seeking union, a mansion of union, and lastly a mansion where the soul would experience spiritual marriage. Each stage becomes progressively more challenging as the soul endures periods of personal and religious growth all directed towards the goal of union with God. See: Teresa of Ávila, *Interior Castle*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers (Garden City, NY: Image, 1961).

[226] Teilhard de Chardin, "The Mystical Milieu," in *Writings in a Time of War*, 120. Italics original to text.

[227] Ibid., 121.

[228] Ibid., 123-124. Italics original to text.

[229] Ibid., 125-126.

The remaining three circles continue to build upon presence and consistence. The third circle of energy brings mystics into a greater understanding of the presence of God. Teilhard writes that they now see the "true essence…*Creative Action*."[230] At this circle, mystics balance between passivity and action as they come to see the various energies, powers, and hidden ways of the cosmos and realize their own potential. Mystics begin to become aware of and appreciate the immanence of God and the transfiguring action of God, the "creative energy," that each person can freely accept or reject.[231] As mystics then move into the next circle of spirit, they are not swept farther away from the world; rather, in this circle mystics begin to truly see the union among the cosmos, creation, evolution, and God. Teilhard describes how the circle of spirit forces mystics to break through the dualistic tendencies that influence our thought which then allows mystics to realize how they are intimately connected to God through God's creative process. It is also in this circle of spirit where mystics can enter into and consciously, actively participate in the *mystical divine milieu*.

> The mystical milieu *is not a completed zone* in which beings, once they have succeeded in entering it, remain immobilized. It is a *complex* element, made up of *divinized created being*, in which, as time goes on, the immortal distillation of the universe is gradually assembled. We cannot give it precisely the name of God: it is his Kingdom. Nor can we say that it *is*: it is in process of *becoming*.[232]

Each of these circles have been bringing mystics closer and closer to the last circle of person, where mystics finally reach the omnipresence, the universal element, which is Jesus Christ. Here emerges also Teilhard's cosmic Christology and mystical approach to divinization. He writes of how the presence of Christ in the world brings about the divinization of the world since "not only the bread of the altar but (to some degree) everything in the universe that nourishes the soul for the life of Spirit and Grace, has become *yours* and has become *divine*– it is divinized, divinizing, and divinizable."[233]

In order to encounter the universal element, Teilhard explains how it is necessary for one to develop an openness to the cosmos. He argues that those who seriously examine their own self

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[230] Ibid., 128.

[231] Ibid., 128-134.

[232] Ibid., 137. Italics original to text.

[233] Ibid., 146. Italics original to text. Teilhard concludes that while not every mystic will experience Christ this way, he does argue that each mystic will in some way experience each of the 'circles' he outlines (147-148).

and the world that they are immersed within (and a part of) will inevitably come to "feel the *need* and *capacity* of apprehending a *universal physical element* in the world, which establishes, at all times and in all things, a relationship between themselves and the Absolute—both in them and around them."[234] The cosmos then becomes an important place and space where we can encounter God, who is 'the universal element' who overwhelms humanity with a "vivid feeling of omnipresence," who also sustains reality, becomes the reason or value behind our actions, and who is a refuge where we can seek counsel during the trials and sufferings of life.[235] When we begin to personally experience this presence of God (the universal element) within the cosmos, we enter into what Teilhard describes as 'cosmic consciousness.' He describes this mystical cosmic consciousness as a new way of thinking "which enables [one] to do everything *cum respectu ad omnia* [with respect to all] and to see all things *sub ratione universi* [under the rationality of the universe or through the perspective of the universe]."[236] Furthermore, cosmic consciousness is not a rare mystical gift; rather, Teilhard argues that anyone who experiences the omnipresence of God in the cosmos has entered into this state of consciousness.

With a word of caution, Teilhard makes note of the need for clarity regarding how people respond to the universal element. It is possible for a person to misunderstand the universal element and to fall into pantheism, confusing God with the material world and missing how God is present within, the source, and goal of the cosmos. In order to correct this misinterpretation, Teilhard goes back to his definition of cosmic consciousness. "What, in fact, is cosmic consciousness? It is, essentially, the need for, and joy in, *union* with *Another* (this Other being the universal element). …Pantheism cannot satisfy a truly cosmic mind."[237] Teilhard emphasizes how necessary it is to understand Christ as the universal element because Christ embodies the union of the world with that which is holy. Furthermore, what we can learn from Christ, the universal element, is the goal of humanity and the cosmos since, "the Universal Element makes *the transcendent immediate; it unifies, by differentiating, the Multiple;* it allows us *to complete*

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[234] Teilhard de Chardin, "The Universal Element," in *Writings in Time of War*, 290. Italics original to text.

[235] Ibid.

[236] Ibid., 291. Italics original to source. This cosmic consciousness is connected with what Teilhard identifies as the noosphere. As humans became conscious and began to think, the mind developed; this is what Teilhard calls the process of *noogenesis*. "When for the first time in a living creature instinct perceived itself in its own mirror, the whole world took a pace forward." Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 181.

[237] Teilhard de Chardin, "The Universal Element," in *Writings in Time of War*, 293. Italics original to text.

what already exists and to win full possession of what we already hold; it detaches us from the world by attaching us to it."[238]

There is a great transformative potential contained within this cosmic life, this cosmic consciousness, and entering into this mystical milieu. Inherent with this cosmic consciousness is a cosmic Christology that reminds the Christian that Christ is not only the Messiah who brings salvation but is also the cosmic center of creation and the universal sanctifier.[239] To truly appreciate this cosmic scope of Christ, Teilhard calls for us to realize our own dependence upon and connection with Earth, since our survival and our sacraments require Earth. Moreover, we need to turn towards Earth, to care for creation, "to use human effort to extend in every direction that leads to the spirit the still unfinished work of visible creation."[240] Teilhard even cautioned how Christianity would be lacking if we did not emphasize the connectedness of Christ and creation, and calls for a return to Earth.[241]

Hymn of the Universe (1961)

Like Teilhard's essays in *Writings in a Time of War,* the essays in the *Hymn of the Universe* are very much connected with his time in the war. In this book we find some of Teilhard's most religious and personal reflections, often in the style of mystical poetry. The focus will be on his essays, "The Mass on the World," "Christ in the World of Matter," and "The Spiritual Power of Matter" since these three essays best express Teilhard's nature mysticism and are essential for understanding his cosmic Christology.[242] These three essays offer important insights into Teilhard's own personal spiritual life since they contain some of his own mystical experiences, visions, and reflections that inform much of his later work.

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[238] Ibid., 301. Italics original to text.

[239] Teilhard de Chardin, "Forma Christi," in *Writings in Time of War*, 253 and 257.

[240] Ibid., 260.

[241] Teilhard de Chardin, "The Soul of the World," in *Writings in Time of War*, 188.

[242] Like much of Teilhard's works, this book was compiled and published after Teilhard's death. In addition to these three essays, there is a fourth section of this book, "Pensées," which is a combination of selected pieces of Teilhard's writings put together by Fernande Tardivel which are intended to be a broad introduction to Teilhard's theology. See: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, trans. Gerarld Vann (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1965), 71-161.

"The Mass on the World" is one of Teilhard's most popular essays and is the final draft of an earlier essay written during the war.[243] Ursula King argues that this piece of writing "encapsulates Teilhard's mystical experience and vision" while also reaffirming his strong Catholic faith and his devotion to his priesthood.[244] In an introduction to this essay, N. M Wildiers sets the scene for this reflective and mystical poetry. In 1923, possibly on the feast day of the Transfiguration, Teilhard was travelling in the Ordos desert of China and desired to offer Mass but was unfortunately without the materials to do so. Since he could not offer Mass, "his thoughts therefore turned to the radiation of the Eucharistic presence of Christ through the universe."[245] Teilhard writes that since he lacks the proper materials for Mass, he will make Earth his altar and "will offer you [God] all the labours and sufferings of the world."[246] Since the focus of this essay is on the Liturgy of the Eucharist, Thomas M. King explains how the labours and sufferings of the world become the offering in this spiritual Mass.

> Teilhard offers the labours (bread) and suffering (wine) of the world; later the bread will be the harvest to be won by the day's labour and wine will be the sap pressed from the earth's fruits; the same two are also called the hopes and the miseries of the earth. The harvest is the growth of the world, while the sap is its diminishment.[247]

After this offering, Teilhard's spiritual Mass turns to the theme of fire, "the source of being," that is over and in Earth but does not come from Earth. This fire is God, "the inmost depths, the stability of that eternal milieu…in which our cosmos emerges gradually into being and grows gradually to its final completeness."[248] Ursula King notes the importance of the theme of fire for

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[243] Thomas M. King also argues that there is an earlier essay by Teilhard, "The Priest," (1918) where Teilhard wrote of being unable to offer a typical mass and so he offered instead a spiritual mass. King argues that in this essay, "The Mass on the World" (1923), Teilhard has further developed this earlier essay since both highlight the "sacramental priesthood." See: Thomas M. King, *Teilhard's Mass: Approaches to "The Mass on the World"* (New York, NY: Paulist, 2005), x, 96.

[244] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 103.

[245] N.M. Wildiers, "Introduction to *The Mass on the World*," in *Hymn of the Universe*, 5. Wilders makes two notes on the context of Teilhard's essay. First, it is disputed whether or not it was exactly the feast day of the Transfiguration when Teilhard was in the desert and experienced what is recounted in this essay. Second, Wilders stresses that while throughout this essay Teilhard discusses the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, this should not be confused with Teilhard's discussion of the omnipresence of God, specifically Christ, throughout the cosmos.

[246] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 11.

[247] Thomas M. King, *Teilhard's Mass: Approaches to "The Mass on the World,"* 97. "The Mass on the World" has a section on the offertory prayer, the liturgy of the Eucharist (under the sections "Fire Over the Earth" and "Fire In the Earth"), communion and the concluding prayer. There is no direct reflection on the liturgy of the Word.

[248] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 14.

Teilhard, which appears throughout his writings often when he is describing God, and when describing the driving force, or spark within humanity.[249] In "The Mass on the World," the theme of fire is central as Teilhard prays that God will become present in this Mass, and that within this "earthly travail," God will speak through Teilhard and announce over all that lives and grows, "This is my Body," and over everything that declines and dies, "This is my Blood."[250]

Teilhard also describes how this Fire (God) is intimately connected with all creation; it is "the higher Soul and the physical center of…creation…, the flame [that] has lit up the whole world from within."[251] Furthermore, he describes the world as God's flesh that has radically transformed him.

> Rich with the sap of the world, I rise up towards the Spirit whose vesture is the magnificence of the material universe but who smiles at me from far beyond all victories; and, lost in the mystery of the flesh of God, I cannot tell which is the more radiant bliss: to have found the Word and so be able to achieve the mastery of matter, or to have mastered matter and so be able to attain and submit to the light of God.[252]

Teilhard is quick to note his description of the world as God's flesh should not be interpreted as a monist or pagan perspective. He clarifies his meaning stating that as he immerses himself into God, "the all-inclusive One," he is received by God, he loses himself in God but then discovers "the ultimate perfection of my own individuality" in God.[253] Moreover, Thomas M. King argues that Teilhard's theme of the within and without helps explain Teilhard's meaning of the world as God's flesh and Christ as the Soul of the World: "Then the world is seen as flesh; the universe shows its 'within,' its Soul."[254]

Essential to the Mass is the Eucharist, so here Teilhard also offers a reflection on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the transformative effect of receiving the Eucharist. He

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[249] Ursula King, *Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 18-19. King also describes Teilhard as a "spirit of fire" (see also her biography of him and his work, *Spirit of Fire*) (18-19).

[250] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 15-16.

[251] Ibid., 16.

[252] Ibid., 20-21.

[253] Ibid., 19.

[254] Thomas M. King, *Teilhard's Mass: Approaches to "The Mass on the World,"* 111. This theme of the within and without is further explored in *The Phenomenon of Man* and, to a lesser extent, in *The Divine Milieu*.

describes the Eucharist as "fiery bread" that is "the source and secret of the destiny" that God desires for Teilhard.[255] In order to be changed by the Eucharist, it is necessary to surrender to God and to leave behind our ego so that we can truly receive all that God has to offer. Teilhard passionately writes, "The man who is filled with an impassioned love of Jesus hidden in the forces which bring increase to the earth, him the earth will lift up, like a mother, in the immensity of her arms, and will enable him to contemplate the face of God."[256] King notes here that it is in this passage where Teilhard affirms that "the earth does not oppose God; it raises Teilhard to God."[257]

"The Mass on the World" ends with a prayer; however, the source of this prayer is unclear.[258] "Lord, lock me up in the deepest depths of your heart; and then, holding me there, burn me, purify me, set me on fire, sublimate me, till I become utterly what you would have me be, through utter annihilation of my ego."[259] King notes that the prayer references Christian mystical theology on the dark night of the soul where one experiences a sort of darkness, or purging, in order to be made more like Christ.[260] In addition to this prayer, Teilhard personally reflects on Christ whom he describes as "the divine influence secretly diffused and active in the depths of matter" and as the heart of matter.[261] King explains that Teilhard's description of Christ as the heart of matter is a reference to the Sacred Heart of Christ, a devotion his mother had and one that is an important part of Jesuit devotion as well.[262] Teilhard's devotion to Christ and his ministry is reaffirmed in the final sentences of this mystical essay when he dedicates himself, his vows, and his priesthood to Christ as he asserts his desire to live and die to Christ, and to share

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[255] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 23

[256] Ibid., 24.

[257] Thomas M. King, *Teilhard's Mass: Approaches to "The Mass on the World,"* 114.

[258] Thomas M. King notes that Teilhard claims the prayers is from a 16th C. Jesuit, however, neither King nor Henri de Lubac can find the source for this prayer. See *Teilhard's Mass: Approaches to "The Mass on the World,"* 117-118.

[259] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 26.

[260] Thomas M. King, *Teilhard's Mass: Approaches to "The Mass on the World,"* 118.

[261] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 28.

[262] Thomas M. King, *Teilhard's Mass: Approaches to "The Mass on the World,"* 119. Ursula King also notes how important Teilhard's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was, and how the same year Teilhard entered the Jesuits as a novice in 1899, Pope Leo XIII consecrated all of humanity to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 14).

the presence of Christ in matter since "I can preach only the mystery of your flesh, you the Soul shinning forth through all that surrounds us."[263]

While the remaining two essays, "Christ in the World of Matter," and "The Spiritual Power of Matter," both contain a similar desire and love for Christ as the heart of matter, they both also contain detailed nature mysticism and visionary experiences that emphasize Teilhard seeing Christ in some new, mystical way that is always connected with Earth. Even though these essays discuss detailed visionary experiences, at no point does Teilhard explicitly state that he is the one having such mystical visions. He even claims in "Christ in the World of Matter" that these visions are from a deceased friend. Since both of these essays are written during and after WWI, Ursula King notes how extraordinary it is that Teilhard had such mystical encounters in such a context, "that he could feel the presence of God amid so much strife, see the human and divine intermingle and take face and shape in the person of Jesus who in truth *'must be loved as a world.'*"[264]

"Christ in the World of Matter" begins with the introductory subtitle "Three Stories in the Style of Benson," which Ursula King notes is a reference to the writings of the Catholic convert and priest, Robert Hugh Benson (1871-1914).[265] The three stories each recount mystical visions, which Teilhard writes as being experiences of an unnamed friend who has recently died: "I can repeat some of those words with which he initiated me one evening into that intense vision which gave light and peace to his life."[266] Teilhardian scholar Ursula King argues that these are actually Teilhard's visions, which seems very likely due to the amount of descriptive and emotional detail.[267] The three visionary experiences each involve a particular religious object. The first is a

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[263] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 31.

[264] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 63. Italics original to text.

[265] Benson was the youngest son of the Archbishop of Canterbury. He converted to Catholicism in 1903, after his father's death. He was a historical novelist whose stories include the dystopian futuristic book *Lord of the World* (1907), and other more mystical and religious books such as *The Light Invisible* (1903), *The History of Richard Raynal, Solitary* (1906), and *Confessions of a Convert* (1913).

[266] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 35.

[267] See: Ursula King, *Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin*, 29. Explaining one's own mystical experiences or visions as being from another person is a common practice within the Christian mystical tradition. Perhaps one of the best-known examples of this being St. Paul of Tarsus who describes a mystical journey of being taken up into heaven (2 Corinthians 12). Like Teilhard, Paul does not directly state that this mystical experience is his own but rather an experience of a person he used to know. Theologian Mary Milligan has also discussed the unique ways mystics often struggle to recount their mystical experiences, making use of analogies, stories, or images. See: Mary Milligan, "Christian Spirituality," in *The College Student's Introduction of*

picture of Christ, the second of the Monstrance (with the consecrated host), and the last of a pyx (a small container used to hold the consecrated host). Scattered throughout these visions are also some references to WWI, specifically to various battles where Teilhard was likely present.

The first vision occurs in a church when Teilhard is looking at a picture of Christ who is "offering his heart to men." At some point the image began to "melt away;" it was somehow moving and spreading. As he looked at the image, he could clearly see Christ, his clothing and his physical features, but when Teilhard began to look away, the image began to "merge as it were (though without vanishing away) into the rest of the picture. It was as though the planes which marked off the figure of Christ from the world surrounding it were melting into a single vibrant surface whereon all demarcations vanished."[268] Christ was no longer confined to the image but rather "radiated outwards to infinity," but the image and the objects around the image did not lose their individuality as the picture appeared to 'move.' This is why Teilhard exclaims, "*The entire universe was vibrant!*"[269] The centre of the image was Christ's heart, which appeared to be the source of this movement outward. Teilhard then describes how the clothing of Christ in this image was luminous (like it was during the Transfiguration) and it appeared to be "a bloom of matter…marvelously woven by the continuous cooperation of all the energies and the whole order of matter."[270]

Teilhard also shares his personal, emotional reaction during this vision. As he stared at the picture, he describes how the face, particularly the eyes, of Christ held his gaze most intently. He describes first how Christ's face shone brightly but also shimmered with the changing of colours. Christ's eyes appeared gentle, then passionate and pure, then noble and courageous. Teilhard explains how this vision was also an intense emotional experience: "I felt it touch and penetrate all my powers simultaneously, so that the very core of my being vibrated in response to it, surrounding a unique note of expansion and happiness."[271] Before this visionary experience

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Theology, ed. Thomas P. Rausch (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1993), 161-174. While Teilhard consistently describes all visions as being recounted by his friend, I will follow Ursula King's lead and present them as being Teilhard's own mystical experiences.

[268] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 37.

[269] Ibid., 38. Italics original to text.

[270] Ibid., 37-38.

[271] Ibid., 39-40.

comes to an end, Teilhard explains the most perplexing point of this mystical encounter. As he continued to look into the eyes of Christ, "which had become abysses of fiery, fascinating life," he describes how they began to change. Christ's gaze became more intense and then indecipherable. He explains, "I simply could not tell whether it denoted an indescribable agony or a superabundance of triumphant joy. I only know that since that moment I thought I caught a glimpse of it once again – in the glance of a dying soldier."[272] Once the vision had concluded, Teilhard writes that the picture appeared as it had always before, still beautiful but hanging on the church wall as always.

The second vision also takes place in a church, and similar to the previous vision, it involves a religious object. It begins when Teilhard is kneeling in front of a monstrance containing the host, which then appears to grow and contain within itself the whole world. Teilhard compares the growing image of the host to an optical illusion when you stare at one black spot long enough that it appears to grow, or when one is in a dark room but then turns on a lamp and can now see. He describes how the growth of the white host did not destroy the objects with which it came into contact; instead, the host "penetrated objects at the core of their being, at a level more profound even than their own life. It was as though a milky brightness were illuminating the universe from within, and everything were fashioned of the same kind of translucent flesh."[273] The host, described as "whiteness," transformed all with which it came into contact; "the whole world had become incandescent, had itself become like a single giant host."[274] Teilhard further describes an interior transformation that was occurring; "drops of pure metal were forming on the inner surface of things," which leads him to describe the host as active.

> *[T]he white glow was active*; the whiteness was consuming all things from within themselves. It had penetrated, through the channels of matter, into the inmost depths of all hearts…. And now that it had established its hold on them it was irresistibly pulling back towards its center all the waves that had spread outwards from it.[275]

As the whiteness began to recede, the vision came to an end, and Teilhard realized that the host had returned to its original size and was now contained within the monstrance.

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[272] Ibid., 41.

[273] Ibid., 43.

[274] Ibid.

[275] Ibid., 44. Italics original to text.

The third and final vision begins with Teilhard reflecting on how the two previous visions have affected him. He writes, "As I listened to my friend my heart began to burn within me and my mind awoke to a new and higher vision of things." He explains that he began to see a "multiplicity of evolutions" within the world which were all part of one great mystery, but that his soul was troubled because of feeling lost in the cosmos where "the dimensions of divine reality, of spirit, and of matter were also intimately mingled."[276] Teilhard describes this third vision to be more of a "general impression which affected, and still affects, my whole being." Unlike the previous two visions, however, this last experience was not in a church; rather, it was during a lull between fighting when Teilhard sat in the trenches and began to meditate on the Eucharist contained in the pyx he had been carrying.

His focus begins on the divine presence contained within the Eucharist and how he has on so many occasions carried God so closely; however, he writes of feeling

> how extraordinary and how disappointing it was to be thus *holding so close to oneself* the wealth of the world and the very source of life *without being able to possess it* inwardly, *without being able either to penetrate it* or to assimilate to it. How could Christ be at once so close to my heart and so far from it, so closely united to my body and so remote from my soul?[277]

Teilhard goes on to describe an "intangible but invincible" barrier between himself and the divine. Even after consuming the Eucharist he had been holding, he writes "*it remained outside of me*."[278] In order to be more united to the Eucharist, he begins to focus on prayer, on purifying his heart and seeking humility, yet "its [the host's] center was *receding from me as it drew me on*."[279] Rather than continue to seek to hold the host within, Teilhard writes of seeking now to simply hold the host in his hand and "to envelop the sacred particle in my love." But what he soon realized is that while he held the host, it continued to elude him in order to leave Teilhard "at grips with the entire universe" so that as he held the host he felt as though he was holding all that humanity experiences, "a suffering, a joy, a task, a friend to love or to console."[280]

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[276] Ibid., 45.

[277] Ibid., 46. Italics original to text.

[278] Ibid., 47. Italics original to text.

[279] Ibid., 48. Italics original to text.

[280] Ibid.

He describes how this realization produced a "feeling of rapture" which led him to two conclusions. First, Teilhard interpreted the distance he felt between himself and the host as the remaining time of his life and the divinization he was to still experience.[281] Second, he realized that he needed to enter the world and the trials of people more fully. "For the more fully I play my part and the more I bring my efforts to bear on the whole surface of reality, the more also will I attain to Christ and cling close to him."[282] It is also after this mystical experience that Teilhard discusses how he had always desired union with the centre of the universe, God, who is the "eternal Being-in-itself…[and] the heart of everything."[283] The essay then concludes with Teilhard reminding the reader again that these mystical experiences are those of a friend "whose soul was instinctively in communion with the life, the one life, of all reality."[284]

Lastly, Teilhard's essay "The Spiritual Power of Matter" in *Hymn to the Universe*, written in 1919 after the war, differs from the previous essays as it is a spiritual reflection of a story from the Old Testament. Within this essay is also a "Hymn to Nature," which is an excellent example of nature mysticism in the form of poetry. Ursula King describes Teilhard's essay "The Spiritual Power of Matter" as one of his pieces of writing that contains his "intensity of feeling, the celebration of exuberant life and sensuous beauty, the palpable concreteness as well as spiritual depth of his vision."[285] "The Spiritual Power of Matter" is a mystical commentary on Elijah being taken up into Heaven while Elisha is left behind.[286] The Scriptural account of this event describes how Elijah and Elisha were separated by "a chariot of fire and horses" and then immediately Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind. After Elijah is taken, Elisha calls out—"Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen"—until he can no longer see Elijah and all that

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[281] Ibid., 48-49.

[282] Ibid., 50.

[283] Ibid., 49-50. In this essay, Teilhard refers to himself as a pantheist. He does this a few times in other pieces of writing, however, it is important to note that while Teilhard uses this term, in actuality he means panentheism. Teilhard scholar Ursula King has noted this tendency in Teilhard and simply states that Teilhard sought to reintegrate into Christianity a Christian understanding of "living pantheism" that realized the omnipresence of God in the cosmos. God and the cosmos are still separate from one other, as is also explicitly stated by Teilhard in these mystical experiences (*Spirit of Fire*, 59, 86-87).

[284] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 51.

[285] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 65. King also describes Teilhard's essays "The Mystical Milieu," "The Soul of the World," The Great Monad," "My Universe," "The Universal Element," and "The Spiritual Power of Matter" as containing the same "intensity of feeling, the celebration of exuberant life and sensuous beauty, the palpable concreteness as well as spiritual depth of his [Teilhard's] vision." Ibid.

[286] 2 Kings 2.

remains is Elijah's cloak (2 Kings 2:11-12). While this event is only described in a few verses, Teilhard offers his own commentary on this mystical event by adding a conversation between Elijah and God, and then explaining Elijah's awakening to the cosmos which he experiences during his ascension into heaven. Throughout his commentary, Teilhard does not use the names of the prophets but simply refers to them as men, and to the power that separates them as the Thing or the wind.

Teilhard begins describing the Thing that separates the prophets as "roaming capriciously through the wilderness" until it came straight for the men. He writes that it was "*the moving heart of an immeasurable pervasive subtlety.*"[287] His commentary on this event quickly shifts into a personal conversation between a man (Elijah) and this whirlwind, which Teilhard now describes as a Thing that surrounds him and is felt within him. The conversation evolves into the man asking this whirlwind presence who it is, to which the whirlwind responds:

> I am the fire that consumes and the water that overthrows; I am the love that initiates and the truth that passes away. All that compels acceptance and all that brings renewal; all that breaks apart and all that binds together; power, experiment, progress—matter: all this am I.[288]

This Thing, who is now revealed to be God, continues to explain to the man that the wise fear Him and call Him names while the Pharisees condemn Him. The man is then instructed by God to open himself to "receive the spirit of the earth which is to be saved" but to also "do battle boldly against me."[289]

Following this conversation, the man begins to become more conscious of the development of humanity. Teilhard describes how the man sees the evolution of humanity as though it were a memory, which leads to an overwhelming feeling of the determined movement of humanity towards "increased being." In the midst of this awareness, God again speaks to the man calling him to immerse himself into creation. In a lengthy speech, God admonishes the man for condemning creation, but then explains how a true understanding of the cosmos is necessary.

> Son of earth, steep yourself in the sea of matter, bathe in its fiery waters, for it is the source of your life and your youthfulness. You thought you could do without it because

[287] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 56. Italics original to text.

[288] Ibid., 57.

[289] Ibid., 58.

> the power of thought has been kindled in you? You hoped that the more thoroughly you rejected the tangible, the closer you would be to spirit: that you would be more divine if you lived in the world of pure thought, or at least more angelic if you fled the corporeal? Well, you were like to have perished of hunger. You must have oil for your limbs, blood for your veins, water for your soul, the world of reality for your intellect: do you not see that the very law of your own nature makes these a necessity for you? Never, if you work to live and to grow, never will you be able to say to matter, 'I have seen enough of you; I have surveyed your mysteries and have taken from them enough food for my thought to last me for ever.' …[T]o understand the world knowledge is not enough, you must see it, touch it, live in its presence and drink the vital heat of existence in the very heart of reality.[290]

The speech continues with God encouraging the man to know the depths of the universe and the Essence that pervades and infuses the cosmos. The man is reminded that matter is not dead, nor is it evil, and that such statements challenge the goodness God's creation, particularly when Christ teaches how bread, which comes from Earth, is His body.[291]

After this conversation, Teilhard describes how the man began looking for his companion (Elisha) but instead began to experience another vision, this time of the earth "vanishing away yet growing in size." Just as part of his surroundings appeared to diminish, at the same time the surroundings also appeared to grow and become greater than before. The man soon realizes that "man has no value save for that part of himself which passes into the universe."[292] The man now saw humanity's pride and quest for power over all reality as foolish, and with this realization, "a heavy cloak slipped from his shoulders and fell to the ground behind him: the dead weight of all that is false, narrow, tyrannical, all that is *artificially contrived*, all that is merely *human* in humanity. A wave of triumph freed his soul."[293] With this newfound liberation, the man finally surrenders himself to the whirlwind "which was sweeping the universe onwards." As the fiery chariot takes him away, Teilhard writes that the man then speaks a "Hymn to Matter." The hymn starts with a series of blessings to the soil, to the water, to evolution, and to time. Next are a series of acclamations where Teilhard acclaims the "inexhaustible potentiality" of matter to exist and transform itself and as the material through which humanity is bound together. Teilhard acclaims the divine milieu, "charged with creative power, as the ocean stirred by the Spirit, as the

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[290] Ibid., 60-61.

[291] Ibid., 61.

[292] Ibid., 62.

[293] Ibid., 63. Italics original to text.

clay molded and infused with life by the incarnate Word."[294] The hymn ends with a message that in order to ever truly know matter we must come to know "the *single essence* of all subsistencies and all unions."[295] We must go to the heights of matter, which some saints think to avoid, in order to "embrace the universe." The essay concludes with the man (Elijah) now standing in the heights, looking down at the desert where a man (Elisha), standing next to a cloak, is weeping and calling out for his Father.

These personal, spiritual writings and reflections demonstrate Teilhard's own developing mystical theology, while also shaping his mystical understanding of nature. Most importantly, this particular book contains Teilhard's own mystical experiences, each of which involves a greater understanding of Christ and creation. These mystical experiences are therefore excellent examples of Teilhard's own nature mysticism. Moreover, these experiences and thoughts have undoubtedly also influenced some of his most recognized writing, *The Phenomenon of Man* and *The Divine Milieu*.

The Phenomenon of Man (1955)

After his time in the war, Teilhard wrote one of his most famous works, *The Phenomenon of Man*.[296] While the previous essays were more mystically oriented, this book is a unique piece of writing where Teilhard brings together science, evolution, and philosophy in order to explain his ideas of complexity-consciousness and the relationship between God and the cosmos.[297] Divided into four books (Book One: Before Life Came, Book Two: Life, Book Three: Thought, and Book Four: Survival), Teilhard covers a wide range of topics including evolution, cosmogenesis, thought and consciousness, the phenomenon of humanity, the Christian phenomenon, and the cosmic goal of the cosmos. While he makes use of many scientific ideas regarding evolution and the universe, Teilhard is really offering a very philosophical and arguably also a mystical interpretation of the function and purpose of the cosmos, and of humanity as a reflection of the

[294] Ibid., 67.

[295] Ibid., 68. Italics original to text.

[296] Ursula King describes how this book was a long work in progress. Teilhard began working on it in 1928 and completed it in 1940. See: Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 67, 122-124.

[297] For a detailed study of Teilhard's use and meaning of complexity-consciousness, see Teilhard's own work *The Phenomenon of Man*, and Noel Keith Robert, "Complexity-consciousness, Noosphere, Point Omega," in *From Piltdown Man to Point Omega: The Evolutionary Theory of Teilhard de Chardin* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2000), 131-156.

cosmos. In a postscript Teilhard wrote ten years after completing *The Phenomenon of Man*, he offers a concise statement regarding the purpose of this book:

> Reduced to its ultimate essence, the substance of these long pages can be summed up in this simple affirmation: that if the universe, regarded sidereally, is in process of spatial expansion (from the infinitesimal to the immense), in the same way and still more clearly it presents itself to us, physico-chemically, as in process of organic *involution* upon itself (from the extremely simple to the extremely complex)—and, moreover, this particular involution 'of complexity' is experimentally bound up with a correlative increase in interiorisation, that is to say in the psyche or consciousness.[298]

My use of *The Phenomenon of Man* focuses on Teilhard's explanation of the 'within' of the cosmos, why humanity is indeed a phenomenon, and how the process of evolution has a future and a purpose (the Omega) that is ultimately connected with Christianity.[299]

First and foremost, in this book Teilhard argues that the cosmos is alive, and therefore, a mechanistic or dualistic view of nature is inaccurate and misleading. To first understand the cosmos, then, Teilhard explains '*the without*' and '*the within*' of the material world. The without is the material world that we can see, study, and measure, and it is typically the without of the world on which many scientists are completely focused. The within of the material world moves beyond what we can easily see with the naked eye, but it is not separate from the without. It is the within that Teilhard argues we often overlook and neglect. "Things have their *within*; their 'reserve,' one might say; and this appears to stand in definitive *qualitative* or *quantitative* connections with the developments that science recognises in the cosmic energy."[300] The inner element, the 'within,' can be best demonstrated in humanity where, Teilhard argues, the reality of an inner life, particularly inner consciousness, cannot be denied. It is because of this 'interior' within the human that Teilhard suggests that some form of an interior is likewise present within the material world.[301] In his own words, "there is necessarily a *double aspect to its* [the

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[298] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 301. Italics original to text.

[299] Some of Teilhard's ideas in *The Phenomenon of Man* are hotly debated, such as: his understanding of consciousness, particularly his argument that it is evident in all forms of the cosmos; what happens to consciousness after death; and whether or not 'nature' and 'spirit' are elements or objects. Teilhard's discussion of the noosphere has also generated much conversation and critique. Noel Keith Robert addresses and summarizes some of these critiques in "Complexity-consciousness, Noosphere, Point Omega," in *From Piltdown Man to Point Omega: The Evolutionary Theory of Teilhard de Chardin*, 131-156.

[300] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 54. Italics original to text.

[301] Ibid., 56.

universe's] *structure*, that is to say in every region of space and time …*co-extensive with their Without, there is a Within to things*."[302] The within in not simply raw material deep within Earth; rather, Teilhard clarifies that the within is "the 'psychic' face of that portion of the stuff of the cosmos enclosed from the beginning of time within the narrow scope of the early earth."[303] Teilhard explains how it is the within of the cosmos that contains consciousness and also some form of energy that is intimately bound with the process of evolution.

To better understand 'the within,' some clarification of terms is needed since at times Teilhard will interchangeably use the terms energy, spiritual energy, and psychic to describe this within of the cosmos.[304] Teilhard defines energy as "the measure of that which passes from one atom to another in the course of their transformations. [It is] A unifying power, then, but also, because the atom appears to become enriched or exhausted in the course of the exchange, [it is also] the expression of structure."[305] Since energy is constantly present and exchanged, it is helpful to see how this energy is a further reflection of how the cosmos works. He also uses the term spiritual energy when expressing how the material world (the without) and the spiritual world (the within) are drawn and held together through this energy.[306] Moreover, Teilhard uses the term 'psychic' to explain how this energy within the cosmos has a psychic dimension.[307] Teilhard defines this psychic dimension as having two parts that are constantly engaging with one another: a tangential energy "which links the element with all others of the same order," and a radial energy "which draws it towards ever greater complexity—in other words forwards."[308] The engagement

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[302] Ibid., 56. Italics original to text.

[303] Ibid., 71-72. Teilhard further explains this stating a hypothesis that, "a certain mass of elementary consciousness was originally emprisoned in the matter of earth" (72).

[304] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 42-43, 62-66. These terms—energy, psychic, and spiritual—are often associated with new age religious movements. It is important to note here that Teilhard is simply using these terms as a way to begin to identify that which is the 'within' of the cosmos. He does not use these terms as new age religious movements would.

[305] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 42.

[306] Ibid., 62-66. Teilhard struggles to explain the term 'spiritual energy' noting that since this term/idea requires more research, he is limited in fully explaining this term.

[307]Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 64.

[308] Ibid., 64-65. Teilhard explains the relationship between tangential and radial energy as an ongoing exchange that contributes to an increasing growth of energy. He writes, "From this initial state, and supposing that it disposes of a certain free tangential energy, the particle thus constituted must obviously be in a position to increase its internal complexity in association with neighbouring particles, and thereupon (since its centricity is automatically increased) to augment its radial energy. The latter will then be able to react in its turn in the form of a new arrangement in the tangential field. And so on." Ibid., 65.

between tangential energy and radial energy results in an ever increasing growth of energy, and a continued complexification, towards the omega point.[309] It is important to note here, as well, that Teilhard's description of the psychic dimension of the cosmos should not be confused with cultural or religious ideas of psychic phenomenon involving telepathy or clairvoyance. Teilhard's psychic dimension of the universe emphasizes the 'quasi-mental' reality, or consciousness, of the cosmos.[310]

Teilhard constantly refers back to 'the within' throughout *The Phenomenon of Man* explaining how it is ultimately the source of evolution. He does not seek to reject scientific explanations of evolution, such as the realities of adaptation and mutations that bring about survival and evolutionary variability; rather, he is explaining how 'the within' is the driving force pushing life towards evolutionary development because all of the cosmos seeks greater fulfillment, greater consciousness, greater awareness.[311] He explains, "right at its base, the living world is constituted by consciousness clothed in flesh and bone. From the biosphere to the species is nothing but an immense ramification of psychism seeking for itself through different forms."[312]

This brings us to the phenomenon of man, "the most mysterious and disconcerting of all objects met with by science" and the noosphere or noogenesis, which is Teilhard's term for the human mind and the evolutionary process of conscious thought.[313] Teilhard argues that in order to fully comprehend and understand humanity we must consider the ability of reflection, meaning "the power acquired by a consciousness to turn in upon itself, to take possession of itself *as an object* endowed with its own particular consistence and value."[314] It is this level of consciousness, this ability of self-reflection, that separates humanity from all other creatures. Furthermore, this consciousness is connected with Earth since humanity is from and dependent upon Earth.

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[309] Ibid., 68.

[310] This term 'quasi-mental' is used by Maurice Keating and H.R.F. Keating in *Understanding Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: A Guide to the Phenomenon of Man* (London, UK: Lutterworth, 1969), 10. It is important to note too that some New Age religious movements make reference to Teilhard's work, particularly his discussion of the psychic dimension of the earth, however, Teilhard himself never participated in new age spirituality. On Teilhard's use in new age spirituality, see: David H. Lane, *The Phenomenon of Teilhard: Prophet for a New Age* (Macron, GA: Mercer University, 1996).

[311] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 149-151.

[312] Ibid., 151.

[313] Ibid, 163, 181.

[314] Ibid., 165. Italics original to text.

Teilhard argues further that for the human phenomenon to come to fruition, it must have been an intended goal.[315]

Since it is humanity's superior level of consciousness and reflection that makes humanity a phenomenon, Teilhard explores the role of consciousness in the cosmos outside of humanity. He identifies various spheres of Earth each reflective of a particular element of the planet (the barysphere, the lithosphere, the hydrosphere, the biosphere, and the stratosphere) with the most important being the noosphere. He presents the noosphere as a new era in evolution and as a "thinking layer" throughout Earth that is "outside and above the biosphere."[316] Noogenesis refers to humanity entering into consciousness and self-realization; "noogenesis rises upwards in us and through us unceasingly."[317] Since Teilhard emphasizes how reflection is one of the many reasons why humanity is such a phenomenon, he then explores how it is that humanity evolved in such a way to be able to have such complex consciousness and reflection. He calls this process *homonisation*, a term he coins for the moment the cosmos "leap[ed] from instinct to thought… [and] in a wider sense, the progressive phyletic spiritualisation in human civilisation of all the forces contained in the animal world."[318] Teilhard further stresses that understanding this intimate connection between humanity and the cosmos will help correct our false view that humanity is separate from and superior to all that which is non-human. In fact, he calls this false view "an error of perspective which deforms and uncrowns the whole phenomenon of the universe."[319] In essence, while all creation contains a within (a spiritual, psychic dimension), Teilhard emphasizes that the phenomenon of man refers to the unique role and identity contained within humanity, that humanity is the spirit of Earth.

Teilhard argues that understanding the role of thought and consciousness in evolution challenges the view that evolution is simply a process of material and biological transformations. Rather, we

[315] Ibid., 169.

[316] Ibid., 182.

[317] Ibid., 287.

[318] Ibid., 180, 182.

[319] Ibid., 182.

can now see how humanity *is* the universe that has become conscious of itself, and that evolution is the process that is, and always was, directed towards this reality.[320] He explains,

> Thus we see not only thought as participating in evolution as an anomaly or as an epiphenomenon; but evolution as so reducible to and identifiable with a progress towards thought that the movement of our souls expresses and measures the very stages of progress of evolution itself. Man discovers that *he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself,* to borrow Julian Huxley's striking expression. It seems to me that our modern minds (because and inasmuch as they are modern) will never find rest until they settle down to this view.[321]

This realization brings Teilhard to conclude that humanity is not the centre of the cosmos but instead, humanity is "the arrow pointing the way to the final unification of the world in terms of life. Man alone constitutes the last-born, the freshest, the most complicated, the most subtle of all the successive layers of life."[322] Now that humanity is coming to this awareness, that we are the cosmos conscious of itself, Teilhard proposes that we must now see the greater goal, the greater purpose for humanity, otherwise we risk impeding the future if we become overwhelmed or isolated by this reality.[323]

If, then, "evolution is an ascent towards consciousness," Teilhard argues that there is a greater point of consciousness, which he calls the Omega, which is the source of all consciousness and also the goal that the cosmos is directed towards.[324] Teilhard identifies four particular attributes of the Omega (autonomy, actuality, irreversibility and transcendence) which further reveal how this Omega is a force that is intimately connected with the cosmos.[325] In addition to these attributes, the Omega is supremely present, personal, loving and loveable; however, the Omega is also not under the control of the cosmos but rather is "independent of the collapse of the forces with which evolution is woven."[326] When explaining how it is that humanity is connected with

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[320] Ibid., 221.

[321] Ibid. Italics original to text.

[322] Ibid., 224.

[323] Teilhard discusses how realizing the role of thought in evolution can have an overwhelming affect if one remains only at this point of realization. Ibid., 226-234.

[324] Ibid., 258-259.

[325] Ibid., 271.

[326] Ibid., 269-270. Teilhard offers an interesting digression on love and consciousness discussing how both are present in all creatures, but to varying levels, and how this love is like an energy that unites the world; i.e.,

this Omega Point, Teilhard writes "the idea is that of noogenesis [consciousness] ascending irreversibly towards Omega through the strictly limited cycle of a geogenesis [evolutionary formation of Earth]."[327] The Omega is therefore the focus, the goal of the cosmos, and as humanity strives towards the Omega point, Teilhard argues that humanity will "shift its centre on to the transcendent centre of its increasing concentration. This will be the end and the fulfilment of the spirit of the earth."[328]

It is in the brief epilogue of the book where Teilhard brings together the phenomenon of man and the Christian phenomenon. Here Teilhard begins to describe the Omega, the centre and connecting point for all that exists, as the "great Presence," as the personal God of Christians who directs the universe and who communicates His own presence to humanity.[329] This connection helps Teilhard conclude that only Christianity can allow for a complete understanding of the cosmos. Rather than being overwhelmed and challenged by the scientific discoveries of the modern world, Teilhard argues that, from a Christian perspective, emerging scientific discoveries about the cosmos provide an opportunity of coming to know God better. In fact Teilhard suggests that Christianity can "save and even take the place of evolution."[330] In order to explain this we must consider Teilhard's Christology where he presents the idea that Christ's relationship with the cosmos can be better understood now that more is known about the process of evolution. Turning to the Incarnation, Teilhard argues for a closer connection between Christ and creation since

> Christ…put himself in the position (maintained ever since) to subdue under himself, to purify, to direct and superanimate the general ascent of consciousness into which he inserted himself. By a perennial act of communion and sublimation, he aggregates to himself the total psychism of the earth.[331]

"driven by the forces of love, the fragments of the world seek each other so that the world may come to being." Ibid., 264-268.

[327] Ibid., 273.

[328] Ibid., 287.

[329] Ibid., 292-293. The use of the personal pronoun His for God is used here out of necessity. I am not arguing that God is male or of that God should be understood as confined to a particular gender.

[330] Ibid., 297.

[331] Ibid., 294.

Moreover, referring to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians when he is explaining the resurrection and the eschatological primacy of Christ, Teilhard interprets Paul's statement that "God shall be all in all" as a reference to Christ's intimate relationship with the cosmos and how Christ contributes to the eschatological union between the Triune God and the cosmos.[332] Since "Christ invests himself organically with the very majesty of creation," Teilhard concludes that the Christian can come to know, experience, and discover God throughout creation and that our devotion to and love of God is a response of our own human self as the embodied "unified universe."[333]

Ian Curran describes Teilhard's *The Phenomenon of Man* as a book that attempts to explain how "the evolution of matter, life, and consciousness is a temporal expression of the spatial image of a milieu through which the divine manifests itself in the world."[334] While this particular book and the ideas contained within it have received significant criticism from some theologians, whose arguments are succinctly explained by Curran, it is important to note that in order to truly understand and appreciate Teilhard's work, one must be familiar with his earlier essay "Cosmic Life" and his mystical theology as outlined in *Writings in a Time of War* and *Hymn to the Universe*.[335] Moreover, Curran argues that Teilhard's use of figural imagery in his theology is also essential for understanding Teilhard's work. He explains,

> Teilhard's figural re-imagining of biological and human evolution holds together the transcendence and immanence of God, as well as reconciling the central claims of Christian revelation with the modern, scientific view of the world. In our own time, fraught with ecological perils that Teilhard did not envision, the benefits of including the whole web of earthly life within the scope of God's saving grace cannot be underestimated.[336]

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[332] Ibid. See also 2 Corinthians 15:28.

[333] Ibid., 297.

[334] Ian Curran, "Theology, Evolution, and the Figural Imagination: Teilhard de Chardin and His Theological Critics" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (2019): 289.

[335] Curran focuses on the critiques provided by Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Dietrich von Hildebrand, David Lane, and Jürgen Moltmann. See: Curran, "Theology, Evolution, and the Figural Imagination: Teilhard de Chardin and His Theological Critics," 292-297.

[336] Ibid., 304.

Moving now to the last of Teilhard's books to be considered, *The Divine Milieu*, Teilhard's mystical theology and his Christian understanding of evolution will become further developed through a greater explanation of the presence of God in creation and the role of human actions.

The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life (1957)

Teilhard scholar and translator Bernard Wall writes that, "if *The Phenomenon of Man* contained the kernel of Teilhard's scientific thought, *Le Milieu Divin*, written somewhat earlier, is the key to the religious meditation that accompanied it."[337] Teilhard wrote *The Divine Milieu* between 1926-1927 while in China. In a letter to a friend, he described the book as containing spiritual and mystical teaching reflecting his own Christian life. He also expressed his desire to have the book published because "it would spread ideas which I believe might open new frontiers for many minds, and at the same time my efforts might be rewarded by some sort of approval from the Church."[338] Since many of Teilhard's Jesuit brothers enjoyed the book, it was sent to Rome for the ecclesiastical imprimatur; it was, however, not approved for publication.[339]

Similar to *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard's book, *The Divine Milieu*, explores the presence of God in the cosmos and how this influences our spirituality and our actions within the world. Louis M. Savary describes *The Divine Milieu* as "an evolving love story told by a recipient of that love."[340] In the "Preface," Teilhard himself states that the intent of this book is for it to be a spiritual reflection on the "spiritual ascent" of humanity towards God.[341] *The Divine Milieu* is not a theological textbook nor does it offer detailed explanations of doctrine; rather, it is a spiritual work intended for Christians and for "waverers," meaning those who have not fully committed and devoted themselves to God, but who seek to understand the relationship between God and

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[337] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, Note.

[338] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "7 November 1926" in *Letters from a Traveller*, 134. Ursula King notes in her work *Spirit of Fire* that this letter was sent to his cousin Marguerite.

[339] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire*, 118. The explanation as to why this book was not published is left open. King only states that while Teilhard received an acknowledgment from Rome that the book's content was in keeping with Church teaching and theology, but ultimately it was not to be published. Ibid., 118. In the "Introduction" of *The Phenomenon of Man*, Sir Julian Huxley notes that early on Teilhard's writing and lecturing that brought together theology and evolution was "regarded as unorthodox by his religious superiors," which limited his teaching and resulted in his writing on this topic to not be published. See: Sir Julian Huxley, introduction to *The Phenomenon of Man*, by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 23-24.

[340] Louis M. Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin 'The Divine Milieu' Explained: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Paulist, 2007), xix.

[341] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 43-44.

the cosmos. This book contains Teilhard's own interpretation of Christianity and the cosmos as he seeks to help us see the divine milieu, and

> …to teach how to see God everywhere, to see him in all that is most hidden, most solid, and most ultimate in the world. …[And] the true God, the christian (sic) God, will, under your gaze, invade the universe. …He will penetrate it as a ray of light does a crystal; and, with the help of the great layers of creation, he will become for you universally perceptible and active—very near and very distant at one and the same time.[342]

This book is very much a spiritual text in the sense that Teilhard is exploring how God's presence and action within the world creates a divine milieu in the cosmos. Moreover, Teilhard's own mystical theology is evident at the conclusion of each section of the book where he shares a personal reflection or experience of the divine milieu. It is important to also note that the French word *milieu* is not translated since the term carries greater meaning in French.[343] Savary describes Teilhard's meaning of milieu as "images of light, inner luminosity, or fire," and more specifically, "*Christ is the divine milieu*."[344] The divine milieu is also described as our spiritual atmosphere, that which sustains reality and transforms humanity.[345] My focus on *The Divine Milieu* will be on Teilhard's understanding of divinization and how the divine milieu transforms the cosmos.

Based on the letters of St. Paul, where Paul reminds the faithful to do all things in the name of Jesus Christ, Teilhard declares that "human action can be sanctified," meaning that all actions of one's life, religious and ordinary, should be carried out in light of this call to imitate and seek union with Christ.[346] He explains divinization as enhancing, improving, or making holy humanity; "to divinise does not mean to destroy, but to sur-create."[347] Teilhard first describes

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[342] Ibid., 46-47.

[343] Ibid., Note. The translator, Bernard Wall, briefly explains the preference for the term milieu in a note, stating that "the word 'milieu' has no exact equivalent in English as it implies both centre and environment or setting." Ibid. Milieu can be translated as middle, centre, medium, or environment (*Webster's French-English Dictionary Concise Edition* (Toronto, ON: Strathearn, 2000), 102).

[344] Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin 'The Divine Milieu' Explained*, 18-19, 24. Italics original to text.

[345] Ibid., 18-19.

[346] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 50.

[347] Ibid., 154. To sur-create refers to what has happened to the divinized person who has been made into Christ, whose body and actions have been divinized. The divinized person is not simply holy, they are perfected in Christ. How exactly this sur-creating shall happen is to some extent unknown. Teilhard notes that one must pursue Christ, but at the same time, "we shall never know all that the Incarnation still expects of the world's potentialities."

how our human life can be divided into action and passivity, and how both offer opportunities for divinization. Our actions are all that we physically do, and this includes not only religious actions but all actions that are simple and complex.[348] In contrast, our passivities are things we receive or experience, such as the living situation we are born into or the way other people treat us. Teilhard also describes passivities as part of our "conscious deeds, in the form of reactions which direct, sustain or oppose our efforts."[349]

Both our actions and our passivities can either be experiences of growth or diminishment. Our actions of growth and our actions of diminishment are often determined based on our intention, which Teilhard describes as the "foundation of all else…[as] a golden key which unlocks our inward personal world to God's presence. …[I]t reveals a sort of unique *milieu*."[350] Although, intention is not the only key to our actions since Teilhard also explains in a personal reflection that he believes that people also act when they are moved "by the conviction that [they are] contributing infinitesimally (at least indirectly) to the building of something definitive—that is to say, to your work, my God."[351] Apart from intention, Teilhard also addresses the issue of action and "spiritual dualism" which encourages Christians to detach themselves from the world in order to only fulfill religious actions (which from the perspective of spiritual dualism, are assumed to be far superior to all other actions). In response to this perspective, Teilhard argues that a necessary part of human life is not only religious devotion but a relationship with creation since each person "*makes his own soul* throughout all his earthly days; and at the same time he collaborates in another work…which infinitely transcends…the perspectives of his individual achievement: the completing of the world."[352] In essence, Teilhard highlights how human action

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Although, Teilhard does stress that the divinization of humanity, and human action, is very much connected to the divine milieu. Ibid.

[348] Ibid., 49-50.

[349] Ibid., 75. While Teilhard distinguishes between action and passivity, he discusses detachment in relation to the former. On the topic of detachment, Teilhard discusses how actions can involve a sense of detachment, meaning that while a Christian is aware of his/her actions and the role his/her actions play in completing the kingdom of God, each Christian is called to detach his/her own selfish desires from their actions. He writes, "over and over again he [the Christian] must go beyond himself, teach himself away from himself, leaving behind him his most cherished beginnings. …[G]radually the worker no longer belongs to himself." Ibid., 71-72.

[350] Ibid., 55. Italics original to text.

[351] Ibid., 56.

[352] Ibid., 51, 60-61. Italics original to text.

is very complicated since human action cannot be reduced only to intentions, and because spiritual directors can misguide Christians towards spiritual dualism which can unknowingly result in actions of diminishment rather than actions of growth. According to Teilhard, the solution to the complexity of human action is to understand how human action is tied up with bringing about the world in Jesus Christ which he explains in this syllogism:

A. At the heart of our universe, each soul exists for God, in our Lord.
B. But all reality, even material reality, around each one of us, exists for our souls.
C. Hence, all sensible reality, around each one of us, exists, through our souls, for God in our Lord.[353]

Briefly explained, Teilhard uses this syllogism to express how all creation is sustained and directed towards and brought together in Christ. Through the incarnation, Christ enters into all matter, and humanity, which is guided by Christ, contributes to the fulfillment of the world through actions.[354] The world is not separate from God and the soul is not separate from the world; all are to be brought together in Christ.[355] In fact, the human soul is very intimately connected with creation, and moreover, Teilhard argues that the soul transforms all that we encounter and experience.[356] Our actions therefore have great consequences because we are building up Earth and completing the work of Christ in our actions. Teilhard explains how this is the meaning of our actions:

> Owing to the interrelation between matter, soul and Christ, we bring part of the being which he desires back to God *in whatever we do*. With each one of our *works*, we labour—in individual separation, but no less really—to build the Pleroma; that is to say, we bring to Christ a little fulfilment.[357]

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[353] Ibid., 56. Savary substitutes the term soul for human since he interprets Teilhard's use of the term soul to refer to the entire human (body, soul, mind, spirit). Savary rewrites the syllogism as:

"We humans find our fulfillment in God.

Everything else finds its fulfillment in us.

Hence, everything finds its fulfillment, through us, in God."

See: Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin: 'The Divine Milieu' Explained*, 65.

[354] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 61.

[355] Ibid.

[356] Ibid., 60.

[357] Ibid., 62. Italics original to the text.

Humanity is therefore an instrument of and a "living extension [of the]…creative power of God."[358] This does not only refer to human actions that are strictly spiritual; rather, Teilhard describes all actions as being bound with God and brining about God's kingdom. In the following quote, Teilhard expresses in his own words how each person's actions are bound with the world and Christ.

> Try, with God's help, to perceive the connection—even physical and natural—which binds your labour with the building of the kingdom of heaven; try to realize that heaven itself smiles upon you and, through your works, draws you to itself…. If your work is dull or exhausting, take refuge in the inexhaustible and becalming interest of progressing in the divine life. If your work enthrals you, then allow the spiritual impulse which matter communicated to you to enter into your taste for God whom you know better and desire more under the veil of his works. Never, at any time, 'whether eating or drinking,' consent to do anything without first of all realizing its significance and constructive value *in Christo Jesu*, and pursuing it with all your might. This is not simply a commonplace precept for salvation: it is the very path to sanctify for each man according to his state and calling.[359]

In essence, according to Teilhard, this is "the *intrinsic* divinization of human endeavour[s]."[360] Even though human action is complex, if directed towards building the kingdom of God, human action can enter into this divinization.

While human action is an important part of the phenomenon of man, Teilhard also discusses the role of passivity, specifically how there are many opportunities for the divinization of our passivities, where one is drawn to "not develop himself so much as lose himself in God."[361] Even though many people prefer the action dimension of life, Teilhard argues that it is the passivities of our lives that contain numerous opportunities for greater depth and development.[362] Like our actions, there are both passivities of growth and passivities of diminishment. The passivities of growth refers to the "friendly and favourable forces" in our lives, as well as our own search for our self when "we must try to penetrate our most secret self, and examine our being from all

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[358] Ibid.

[359] Ibid., 66.

[360] Ibid., 70. Italics original to text.

[361] Ibid., 74.

[362] On the relationship between action and passivity in our life, Teilhard notes that there is an unequal relationship between these two because many people prefer action, leaving passivity either ignored or not explored more seriously (Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 75).

sides."[363] In a personal reflection on the passivity of growth, Teilhard writes of realizing how his self is given to him rather than formed by him. This realization overwhelmed him as he now felt like "a particle adrift in the universe" where only the Gospel message "It is I, be not afraid" brought him any calm.[364] Teilhard uses this reflection to demonstrate the "two hands of God" in our lives. In our passivity of growth, we can experience inward development and outward success, each one a hand of God influencing our life through the *within* and the *without*.[365] Savary notes that Teilhard's description of the passivities of growth encourages a spirituality that views each person as "a product of many layers of events, experiences, decisions…that brought you to this point in your process."[366]

Different from the passivities of growth are the passivities of diminishment which can be divided into passivities within us, such as illness, pain, or "intellectual or moral weaknesses," and the passivities outside of us, such as bad luck, how others treat us, tragedies, or natural but serious environmental events.[367] In the face of such passivities, Teilhard argues that we must seek to find God in these terrible events, and that in some cases these passivities provide opportunities for us to enter further into the process of divinization. He specifically focuses on the potential opportunities of both death and time, two passivities of diminishment that we cannot control, that are both intertwined, and that influence all creatures since all that lives is in some sense pushed undesirably through time towards death.[368] Teilhard describes death as a physical evil, because it brings about the destruction of the organic, living world, and as a moral evil, in the way that people misuse freedom and create disorder and corruption. In the face of this great passivity of diminishment, Teilhard writes, "We must overcome death by finding God in it."[369] While death

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[363] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Diving Milieu*, 76.

[364] Ibid., 77-78.

[365] Ibid., 79-80. Teilhard's reference here to the within and the without ties together with his previous discussion of these topics in *The Phenomenon of Man*.

[366] Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Divine Milieu Explained*, 102.

[367] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 81. It is important to note here that when discussing passivities, Teilhard does not discuss the role of individual sin. He mentions in a footnote that his focus here is on how sin in general corrupts the world and society. He writes, "sin only interests us here in so far as it is a weakening, a deviation caused by our personal faults (even when repented), or the pain and the scandal which the faults of others inflict on us." (See: footnote 1, 80).

[368] Ibid., 81-82.

[369] Ibid., 82.

is evil and the severest passivity of diminishment, Teilhard writes of the divinization of such a passivity through Christ because "Christ has conquered death, not only by suppressing its evil effects, but by reversing its sting." The resurrection is a further example of this divinization because now "nothing any longer kills inevitably but everything is capable of becoming the blessed touch of the divine hands…."[370]

The topic of death as a passivity of diminishment leads Teilhard to reflect on evil and how God seeks to free us from the evils of the world. Teilhard argues that decreasing the evil experienced by each person is "unquestionably the first act of our Father who is in heaven."[371] Moreover, one of the ways God does this is by inspiring those who do good deeds and those who discover ways to heal. In response to the problem of evil, Teilhard does not dismiss the suffering of the world but pulls our attention towards the reality that God triumphs over death and evil, and that God alone is able to transform the evil of this world into something greater.

> But God will make it good—he will take his revenge, if one may use the expression—by making evil itself serve a higher good of his faithful, the very evil which the present state of creation does not allow him to suppress immediately. Like an artist who is able to make use of a fault of an impurity in the stone he is sculpting or the bronze he is casting so as to produce more exquisite lines or a more beautiful tone, God, without sparing us the partial deaths, nor the final death, which form an essential part of our lives, transfigures them by integrating them in a better plan—*provided we lovingly trust in him*…everything is capable of becoming good.[372]

Provided we are repentant, Teilhard explains not only how our actions can be divinized but also how the passivities of diminishment, specifically death, over which we have no influence, can even be transformed through Christ.

While Teilhard argues that some passivities of diminishment can be divinized, he does not encourage us to seek out and immerse ourselves into such difficult trials. In fact, the first response to passivities of diminishment should be to avoid the trial and "cleave to the heart and action of God."[373] When the passivity persists and avoiding it is not possible, Teilhard proposes that as we endure, we should remember how God can bring good out of evil. For example, when

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[370] Ibid.

[371] Ibid., 84.

[372] Ibid., 86. Italics original to text.

[373] Ibid., 84.

we fail, it is possible for us to come out of that situation with a new perspective and a greater desire for our goal; it can "make us shoot up higher and straighter. The collapse…is thus transformed into a success."[374] The transformation of such passivities of diminishment is also possible through union with God. Teilhard explains that union with God requires each one of us to endure a degree of detachment, "dying partially in what one loves," so that we can be more fully attached and united with God.[375] This brings Teilhard to explain how the transformation of death allows us to enter into communion with God. "The function of death is to provide the necessary entrance into our inmost selves. …*Teach me* to treat my death as an act of communion."[376] Savary concisely summarizes Teilhard's explanation of the divinization of our passivities as a spiritual process involving three phases, "The first phase involves our *struggle* against evil, the second the *defeat* of evil, the third its 'transfiguration.'"[377]

Even though death is experienced by the whole cosmos, Teilhard's focus here is how our own death, when united with God, is capable of being divinized. Furthermore, this event happens within the material world which Teilhard says functions as the place where all is "...build[ing] up mysteriously, first what can be divinised, and then, through the grace of Christ coming down upon our endeavour, what is divine."[378] Human experiences of action and passivity are not isolated from the material world. Therefore, before discussing in detail the divine milieu, where this divinization occurs, let us consider Teilhard's understanding of this divinization in light of the cross and the spiritual power of matter.[379]

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[374] Ibid., 87.

[375] Ibid., 88.

[376] Ibid., 89-90. Italics original to text. The second part of this quote is from Teilhard's personal reflection on death as communion with God. Teilhard also discusses, here, the role of Christian resignation toward death and communion with God. He clarifies that this should not be interpreted to mean that we should simply resign from resisting death and evil; rather, Christian resignation encourages us to see how God could transform this suffering into something greater. Ibid., 90-93.

[377] Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Divine Milieu Explained*, 107. Italics original to text.

[378] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 93. This quote is from a letter Teilhard sent to Père Auguste Valensin where he describes his book, *The Divine Milieu*. This letter was included in this edition of *The Divine Milieu* as part of the "French Editor's Note" (93-94).

[379] As part of Teilhard's conclusion to his discussion of the divinization of actions and passivities, he includes discussions on attachment and detachment, the meaning of the Cross, and the spiritual power of matter. The following discussion here includes references to each of these topics.

The cross is the best example of how God can transform the world and human action/passivity. Teilhard first corrects what he calls an unchristian view of the cross as only a sad event forcing each person into an ascetic life detached from the world. The cross is rather an example of how life "*climbs upward.*"[380] Savary argues that it is here where Teilhard presents a cosmic Christology that incorporates an evolutionary understanding of the world when he argues that "*the doctrine of the Cross supports the belief that all creation is part of an evolutionary movement*."[381] It is in the cross where we can see Christ not only offering salvation for humanity but also pointing towards the great future of the cosmos. In Teilhard's own words he explains,

> To sum up, Jesus on the Cross is both the symbol and the reality of the immense labour of the centuries which has, little by little, raised up the created spirit and brought it back to the depths of the divine *milieu*. He represents (and in a true sense, he is) creation, as, upheld by God, it re-ascends the slopes of being, sometimes clinging to things for support, sometimes tearing itself from them in order to pass beyond them, and always compensating, by physical suffering, for the setbacks caused by its moral downfalls. The Cross is therefore not inhuman but superhuman.[382]

Since the pascal mystery demonstrates the future for all life, Teilhard expresses how matter, meaning broadly the material world full of energy and creatures, plays an important role in the divinization of humanity.[383] Even though Teilhard does not agree with the simple view that matter is evil, he does see a distinction between two types of matter because firstly, matter contains an "impulse towards failure," but secondly, because of the Incarnation, matter also contains an "allurement [towards]…heightened being."[384] It is because of the Incarnation that Teilhard calls matter holy and also because our survival relies on matter (nourishment, shelter, etc.); "to be deprived of it [matter] is intolerable."[385] Similar to Teilhard's distinctions between the potential growth or diminishment of actions and passivities, he argues there is a spiritual power of matter (matter that supports growth) but also a negative side of matter that brings about

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[380] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 102. Italics original to the text.

[381] Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Divine Milieu Explained*, 143. Italics original to text.

[382] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 104. Italics original to text.

[383] Ibid., 106. Teilhard's definition of matter is: "matter, as far as we are concerned, is the assemblage of things, energies and creatures which surround us in so far as these are palpable, sensible and 'natural' (in the theological sense of the word). Matter is the common, universal, tangible setting, infinitely shifting and varied, in which we live." Ibid.

[384] Ibid., 107.

[385] Ibid., 106.

decay (matter that leads to diminishment). Teilhard calls this negative side of matter material and carnal, which is matter we must move past. Alternatively, the spiritual sense of matter "which is good, sanctifying and spiritual" is a source of growth and provides opportunities for our own divinization.[386] Discerning between these two types of matter, however, is relative to each person since what may be the spiritual sense of matter for one person could be for another the material and carnal type of matter. There is, then, no universal distinction between these types of matter, only individual interactions with matter. "In other words, the soul can only rejoin God after having traversed *a specific path* through matter…. Thus it is not our business to withdraw from the world before our time…."[387] There is, however, a "*general 'drift' of matter* towards spirit" as the Holy Spirit is present throughout creation guiding humanity towards Christ and towards a spiritual sense of matter that will prepare the cosmos for the Parousia.[388] In a personal reflection on this spiritual power of matter, Teilhard writes,

> *Matter, …I surrender myself to your mighty layers, with faith in the heavenly influences which have sweetened and purified your waters.* The virtue of Christ has passed into you. *…[L]et your whole being lead me towards Godhead.*[389]

Teilhard's discussion of human action and passivity, the cross, and the spiritual power of matter further strengthen his explanation of the pervading omnipresence of the divine throughout the cosmos. This is the divine milieu, the presence of God that sustains and fulfills all creation. The divine milieu is the permeation of divinity within and throughout the cosmos (the milieu), and it is through this divine milieu that opportunities for divinization emerge. Teilhard urges Christians to cultivate a sense of openness to the divine milieu so that we can also be open to opportunities for divinization because when we enter into these opportunities, not only do we draw closer to God but also God draws closer to us. Here Teilhard describes what it is to be truly aware of the divine milieu throughout creation:

> All around us, to right and left, in front and behind, above and below, we have only had to go a little beyond the frontier of sensible appearances in order to see the divine welling up and showing through. …By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us and moulds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible,

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[386] Ibid., 108.

[387] Ibid., 108. Italics original to text.

[388] Ibid., 109-110. Italics original to text.

[389] Ibid., 110-111. Italics original to the text.

> whereas in fact we live steeped in its burning layers. …Let us withdraw to the higher and more spiritual ether which bathes us in living light.[390]

In order to best explain the divine milieu, Teilhard highlights its many different attributes.[391] The divine milieu "harmonizes within itself qualities which appear to us to be contradictory"; it is everywhere yet "eludes our grasp so consistently that we can never seize it," but it is also personal and "in reality a *centre*" that can purify matter and unite all creation.[392] The source, the centre, and the goal of the divine milieu is God, whom Teilhard refers to as the universal milieu because "God reveals himself everywhere, beneath our groping efforts, *as a universal milieu*, only because he is *the ultimate point* upon which all realities converge. …God is infinitely near, and dispersed everywhere."[393] Humanity is called to consciously enter into the divine milieu, and Teilhard argues that in the divine milieu "we shall find ourselves where the soul is most deep and where matter is most dense."[394] Moreover, entering the divine milieu does not mean leaving the world and matter or becoming a pantheist; rather, within the divine milieu we will come to understand more clearly how "the world is full of God."[395] Lastly, it is through the divine milieu that the world is transformed because, "at the heart of the divine *milieu*, as the Church reveals it, things are transfigured, but from within."[396]

Teilhard further explains that since the divine milieu is formed by the omnipresence of God, the most essential attribute of the divine milieu is the immensity of God and how we can experience this immensity throughout the world.[397] The attributes of the divine milieu previously listed demonstrate God's presence and immensity. When explaining the nature of the divine milieu,

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[390] Ibid., 112.

[391] Teilhard lists many different attributes of the divine milieu but does not explain many of them in detail. This is also noted by Savary who has tried to collect and explain Teilhard's attributes of the divine milieu. See: Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Divine Milieu Explained*, 173-188.

[392] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 113-114. Italics original to text.

[393] Ibid., 114. Italics original to the text.

[394] Ibid., 115.

[395] Ibid., 116. Teilhard is quoting the 13th C. Italian saint and mystic Blessed Angela of Foligno who made this statement. He applies it here to explain how entering into the divine milieu allows for a correct understanding and relationship with creation rather than a rejection of matter. Teilhard explains, "To the Christian's sensitized vision, it is true, the Creator and, more specifically, the Redeemer (as we shall see) have steeped themselves in all things and penetrated all things to such a degree that, as Blessed Angela of Foligno said, 'the world is full of God.' Ibid.

[396] Ibid., 118. Italics original to text.

[397] Ibid., 121.

Teilhard's cosmic Christology emerges as he stresses that the divine milieu is held together through Christ. "[I]t is he in whom everything is reunited, and in whom all things are consummated—through whom the whole created edifice receives its consistency—Christ dead and risen."[398] Teilhard refers to the omnipresence of Christ throughout the divine milieu as "*an omnipresence of action*" because God continually creates opportunities for divinization, inviting each person to experience "*a unitive transformation*."[399] Teilhard argues that this is the consummation of creation that St. Paul and St. John discuss and part of our incorporation into the mystical body of Christ; "it is the mysterious Pleroma, in which the substantial *one* and the created *many* fuse without confusion in a *whole* which, without adding anything essential to God, will nevertheless be a sort of triumph and generalization of being."[400] Teilhard adds that since Christ is the center of the divine milieu and because of the Incarnation, the divine milieu is also "*the omnipresence of christification*" through the divinization of our actions, passivities, and the material world.[401] It is through the divine milieu that we are made to be like Christ, a process that occurs within creation, through the divinization of our activities and our passivities, and in our relationship with the cosmos. In order to demonstrate how the divine milieu transforms humanity through our divinization and Christification, Teilhard points to the Eucharist as an example of how God permeates and transforms the world. "[A]s our humanity assimilates the material world, and as the Host assimilates our humanity, the Eucharistic transformation goes beyond and completes the transubstantiation of the bread on the altar. Step by step it irresistibly invades the universe."[402]

Teilhard concludes his discussion of the divine milieu by explaining in more detail how humanity and the cosmos experience the growth of the divine milieu. The growth of the divine milieu refers to the Parousia, and to our own growth in the divine milieu which first requires we become aware of the divine milieu, specifically of the omnipresence of God. Teilhard describes

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[398] Ibid., 122. Teilhard adds that his understanding of Christ as the divine milieu is based on the theology of Paul.

[399] Ibid. Italics original to text.

[400] Ibid. Italics original to text.

[401] Ibid., 123. Italics original to text.

[402] Ibid., 125. Teilhard also offers here a personal reflection on the Eucharist, calling it the sacrament of life. He prays he will always see how the Eucharist "reveals itself to me as communion with you through the world." Ibid., 127.

this awareness to be like gaining a new sense, "*the sense of a new quality* or *of a new dimension*" that transforms our own self and how we view the cosmos.[403] This awareness allows us to see a deeper meaning to the cosmos, which as Teilhard claims, reaffirms how "the great mystery of Christianity is not exactly the appearance, but the transparence, of God in the universe."[404] Moreover, this awareness is a gift; it cannot be sought after and achieved through work or merit which also makes it an example of a passivity of growth.[405] After receiving this gift, however, Teilhard offers more details regarding ways we can grow individually *in* the divine milieu, specifically through what he calls the active virtues of purity, faith, and fidelity. Purity is not simply not doing what is wrong or being chaste; instead, Teilhard describes purity as placing the desires of Christ before one's own desires because purity can "bring the divine to birth among us."[406] For faith, Teilhard is not referring to our intellectual commitment to Christian teaching; rather, he writes that faith "means the practical conviction that the universe, between the hands of the Creator, still continues to be the clay in which he shapes innumerable possibilities according to his will."[407] Teilhard references here again how God can bring good from evil in the world, specifically how our passivities of diminishment can, through our faith in Christ, be transformed; "we have only to believe."[408] Lastly, Teilhard describes fidelity as connected to faith since "*Faith consecrates the world. Fidelity communicates with it.*"[409] It is through fidelity that Teilhard explains we open ourselves to God, allowing God to enter and transform our lives and divinize our actions and passivities. This is why fidelity is held as one of the most important

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[403] Ibid., 129. Italics original to text.

[404] Ibid., 131. Teilhard stresses, here, that becoming aware of the omnipresence of God does not in any way modify or change the world; rather, it changes the individual who can now see the cosmos in a somewhat more complete way. The word "transparence" was used by Teilhard in the French *Le Milieu Divin*, and the translator, Bernard Wall, kept this specific word in the English translation of *The Divine Milieu*. In French the sentence reads: "S'il est permis de modifier légèrement un mot sacré, nous dirons que le grand mystère du Christianisme, ce n'est pas exactement l'Apparition, mais la Transparence de Dieu dans l'Univers." Teilhard's preference for this term here would suggest he desires to emphasize how God is not simply present in creation at one time and place but, rather, is consistently immersed throughout creation and is interacting with every creature, element, and part of the cosmos, making God's presence known. See: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin: essai de vie intérieure* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1957), 125.

[405] Ibid., 131.

[406] Ibid., 134. Teilhard uses, here, the example of Mary and the Annunciation, writing that in Mary we see that "it is in faith that purity finds the fulfilment of its fertility." Ibid.

[407] Ibid., 134-135.

[408] Ibid., 137.

[409] Ibid., 138. Italics original to text.

virtues because "it is fidelity and fidelity alone that enables us to welcome the universal and perpetual overtures of the divine *milieu*."[410]

While purity, faith, and fidelity are individual ways one can grow in the divine milieu, Teilhard also emphasizes how part of this growth requires caring for one's neighbour, our community. We must place our own soul and sanctification first, and then we should all "pray, each one of us, that the world may be transfigured for our use…[because] the task of each one of us is to divinize the whole world in an infinitesimal and incommunicable degree."[411] The key virtue here is charity, which Teilhard defines as loving our neighbour and loving the other.[412] This is why Savary describes Teilhard's spirituality in *The Divine Milieu* as "ecumenical, totally interfaith, and all encompassing. Moreover, it is interplanetary and intergalactic."[413]

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's Nature Mysticism

Thomas M. King highlights in one succinct statement the foundation for Teilhard's mysticism and how Teilhard understood the cosmos, which was outlined in his first piece of writing, "Cosmic Life." According to King's interpretation, Teilhard boldly states that we are "linked organically and psychically with all that surrounds us with the result that we are 'essentially cosmic,'" and that in order to become aware of this, we must break through our own individual self, and instead turn ourselves "intellectually and emotionally to the dimensions of the universe."[414] This concise statement is also very much the essence of Teilhard's nature mysticism, which is evident in the four books just considered. Based on Teilhard's own mystical theology, his scientific research, and his spiritual reflections, his nature mysticism contains an emphasis on: the relatedness among Christ, humanity and the rest of creation; the need to come to an awareness of this relatedness (cosmic consciousness); living a 'cosmic life'; and how opportunities of divinization not only make us holy but invite us to enter into a deeper connection with the cosmos.

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[410] Ibid. Italics original to text.

[411] Ibid., 142.

[412] Ibid., 144.

[413] Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin 'The Divine Milieu' Explained*, 232.

[414] Thomas M. King, "Teilhard and the Environment" in *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin on People & Planet*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond (London, UK: Equinox, 2006), 179; Teilhard de Chardin, "Cosmic Life" in *Writings in a Time of War*, 13-71.

On the relatedness of humanity and creation, Teilhard stresses that evolution has allowed us to become aware that we are not simply from Earth but in a sense the consciousness of Earth. "Man discovers that *he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself*."[415] He explores this sense of consciousness in some of his more mystical essays where Teilhard expresses his own personal awakening to the cosmic life. What is key in these essays is how he becomes aware of the omnipresence of God in the cosmos and how the cosmos is moving towards God, the Omega.[416] But creation is not simply moving through the motions; there is something deeper, something Teilhard explains in *The Phenomenon of Man* as "the within" of the cosmos. This within is not simply a pantheistic or pagan god pushing creation along; rather, it is an integral part of God's creation that is often neglected when examining evolutionary development.[417] As described earlier, Teilhard explains that the within is "the 'psychic' face of that portion of the stuff of the cosmos enclosed from the beginning of time within the narrow scope of the early earth."[418] Moreover, the goal of evolution is Christ, the Omega, since ultimately "evolution is an ascent towards consciousness" and the greatest point of consciousness is the Omega.[419]

Reading *The Phenomenon of Man* and *The Divine Milieu* together, we can gain a better sense of how awakening to this cosmic life involves an awareness of 'sacred evolution' and an understanding of the spiritual ascent of humanity towards God. Teilhard describes how throughout the world there is the divine milieu, through which humanity can experience divinization and the world can be transformed because "at the heart of the divine *milieu*, as the Church reveals it, things are transfigured, but from within."[420] Even our own divinization involves a transformation that God can bring about through that which we do (actions) and that which we endure (passivities). This divinization is intimately connected with the earth, since the *spiritual sense* of matter "which is good, sanctifying and spiritual" provides more opportunities for our own divinization.[421] Again, Teilhard stresses awareness. In order to enter into the divine

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[415] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 221. Italics original to text.

[416] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*.

[417] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 42-72.

[418] Ibid., 71-72.

[419] Ibid., 258.

[420] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 118. Italics original to text.

[421] Ibid., 108.

milieu, we must become aware of it by coming to see the omnipresence of God throughout the cosmos. This awareness further allows us to enter into a cosmic life by gaining a new sense, "*the sense of a new quality* or *of a new dimension*" that transforms our own self and how we view the cosmos.[422]

While Teilhard is not an ethicist, and never claims to be one, the ethical potential of his nature mysticism is evident in his general discussion on human action and passivity, because, as noted earlier, "human action can be sanctified." [423] We can pursue actions of growth that bring about the kingdom of God, which as Teilhard stated, includes a variety of human actions. Human actions have the potential to lead creation to fulfillment in the divine milieu because each person is a "living extension [of the]…creative power of God."[424] Just as human action that is directed towards the kingdom of God can be divinized, so too can human passivity. God's transformative divinization of the world not only demonstrates God's limitless love for the entire cosmos but also calls each person to enter into communion with God, and to participate more fully in the divine milieu and the divinization of creation. Teilhard's discussion on human action and passivity is therefore worthy of further consideration into how our behaviour, specifically our ethical decisions regarding caring for creation, can be informed with a greater understanding of the divine milieu.

Teilhard's cosmic Christology is also an essential part of his nature mysticism since he emphasizes in each one of his writings reviewed here how Christ is the goal of evolution (the Omega), the heart of matter, and the model for divinization. Teilhard's strong Christology is evident in his mystical essays from *Writings in a Time of War* and *Hymn to the Universe*, particularly "Cosmic Life." It is here where Teilhard first announces his understanding of Christ and creation; "the Incarnation is a making new, a restoration, of *all* the universe's forces and powers; Christ is the Instrument, the Centre, the End, of the *whole* animate and material creation; through Him, *everything* is created, sanctified, and vivified."[425] Teilhard further shares his personal experiences of how he became aware of this cosmic dimension of Christ during his own

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[422] Ibid., 129. Italics original to text.

[423] Ibid., 50.

[424] Ibid., 62.

[425] Teilhard de Chardin, "Cosmic Life," 58. Italics original to text.

mystical experiences regarding the Mass, an image of Christ, and the Eucharist. Teilhard explains that Christ is not simply present within the cosmos but permeates all creation, touching the 'within' of all creation.[426] When discussing the Eucharist, Teilhard again describes the cosmic scope of this sacrament claiming that this 'fiery bread' that is of Earth, transformed into Christ, points to the future of the cosmos.[427] The cross too is a further reflection of how the cosmos has been moving upwards, through evolution, into the divine milieu towards the universal milieu, God. Teilhard rejects a view of the cross that emphasizes it as purely sacrificial and ascetic, preferring instead to view the cross as a "mysterious drama" involving all of creation, it is an example of how life "*climbs upward.*"[428]

Teilhard's cosmic Christology involves bringing together his scientific understanding of the world and his theological interpretation of reality. In *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard outlines his understanding of evolution, consciousness, and Christ, and turns to the Christology of St. Paul as a way to express the cosmic scope of Christ. Henri de Lubac explains how Teilhard understood Christ as cosmic, not only because he brought together humanity and divinity but also because the Christ event was an historical and cosmic event that further reminds us of God's love for the world.[429] This is why Teilhard describes Christianity as a phenomenon because Christ unifies the world by "partially immersing himself in things, by becoming 'element,' and then, from this point of vantage in the heart of matter, assuming the control and leadership of what we now call evolution." Furthermore, Teilhard adds that the return of Christ, the Parousia, "will reach its consummation at the same time as the universe."[430] When Teilhard calls Jesus the Omega Point, he is not simply identifying him as the Christ but he is also identifying Christ as

[426] Teilhard de Chardin, "Christ in the World of Matter" in *Hymn of the Universe*, 43.

[427] Teilhard de Chardin, "Mass on the World" in *Hymn to the Universe*, 23.

[428] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 102-104. Italics original to the text.

[429] I am not reinforcing, here, Teilhard's view that Christ has a third nature, a cosmic nature; rather, I am arguing in agreement with Henri de Lubac that Teilhard was trying to simply express the cosmic scope and dimension of Christ and the Christ event. De Lubac argues that Teilhard in actuality did not really believe or argue for a third nature, rather, his imprecise language has led to this confusion. See: Henri de Lubac, "O Christ, Ever Greater" in *The Faith of Teilhard de Chardin*, trans. René Hague (London, UK: Burns & Oates, 1964), 39-48.

[430] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 294.

the center of evolution; "Christ occupies for us…so far as his position and *function* are concerned, the place of the point Omega."[431]

In conclusion, Teilhard's nature mysticism has much to offer ecological theology, and has the potential to encourage an ecological ethic. Teilhard's own mystical experiences demonstrate how the tradition of Christian mysticism is not confined to an asceticism that rejects the world as only evil and fallen. His "Hymn to Matter" is a strong example of his own prayerful and spiritual love of nature. Likewise, his cosmic Christology also reinforces the belief that creation has value and also a role to play in our own salvation and divinization. Since Teilhard's nature mysticism also makes use of a cosmology of cosmogenesis, he provides an opportunity for Christianity to appreciate the mystical dimension of evolution. Evolution here is not simply a random, pointless process but rather a great movement of complexification and divinization toward Christ. We can also build from Teilhard a sense of ethical responsibility towards sharing his understanding of the cosmic life, where one is called to live out an awareness of the omnipresence of God in the cosmos and of the transformative action God continually carries out within us through the divine milieu.

[431] N. M. Wildiers, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1968), 135. Wildiers also notes how Teilhard's theology builds strongly from the medieval Franciscan theologian John Duns Scotus (d. 1308).

Chapter 3
The Nature Mysticism of Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton's Life and Mystical Theology in his Writing

This chapter will focus on the nature mysticism within the writing of the Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915-1968). Similar to the previous chapter on Teilhard, this chapter will begin with a brief discussion on Merton's life, highlighting pivotal moments that Merton himself would reflect upon in his own writing. Merton was a prolific writer producing numerous books, many essays, personal letters and journals. In order to focus most on Merton's nature mysticism, particular attention will be given to his books *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1962), *Seeds of Destruction* (1964), *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966), and selected portions from his poetry in *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (1977). This chapter will conclude with an examination and analysis of Merton's nature mysticism and consider how this can contribute to ecological theology and ecological ethics.

There is a significant amount of information about Merton's life within his own autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, which was published in 1948, when he was 32. The book became an unexpected bestseller, resulting in Merton gaining a level of popularity rather unique for a Trappist monk living within an isolated community in rural Kentucky. In the book, Merton outlined in detail many of his childhood memories, his life before becoming a monk, and his eventual conversion and vocation to the priesthood. While this autobiography offered a rare glimpse into Merton's own personal reflections on his life, biographers of Merton have noted that "Merton was not always fair to his younger self."[432]

In his own words, Merton describes the beginning of his life on January 31, 1915 in Prades, France: "free by nature, in the image of God, I was nevertheless the prisoner of my own violence and my own selfishness, in the image of the world into which I was born."[433] His parents, Owen Merton and Ruth Jenkins, each had their own unique influence on their son, as well as his only sibling, his younger brother John Paul (born in America on November 2, 1918). His father, born in New Zealand with Welsh and Scottish ancestry, met Merton's mother in Paris, an American

[432] Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), xxv.

[433] Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948), 3.

living abroad. Merton describes both his parents as artists who, though not devoutly religious, each had their own simple interest and connection with Christianity. His mother, suspicious of organized religion, attended the Quaker meeting house alone and kept her faith private.[434] According to Merton, she thought that "if I [Thomas] were left to myself, I would grow up into a nice, quiet Deist of some sort, and never be perverted by superstition."[435] His father, however, was more connected to the Church of England, which is why Merton was baptized in the Anglican Church as an infant.[436] When the family moved to America when World War I began, his maternal grandparents became more involved in his life, and they too had some influence on Merton's religious life.[437] He describes his grandfather as a Mason who had a tendency to critique Catholicism, which left Merton with a negative view of this denomination.[438] The only person he mentions providing any basic Christian catechesis was his paternal grandmother who visited once from New Zealand and taught Merton the "Our Father," which he declared he never forgot.

It was when Merton's mother was diagnosed with stomach cancer that he recalled attending the local Anglican Church on Sundays where his father had taken a job as the organist. He looked back on this memory as a positive experience writing that, "it was very good that I should have got at least that much of religion in my childhood."[439] As for his mother's cancer, this remained more of a mystery to Merton since no one ever really explained the state of her health, and according to his mother's wishes, he never visited her in the hospital. Even though he knew his mother was unwell, it was not until he received a handwritten note from her that he realized "that she was about to die, and would never see me again."[440] On October 21, 1921, Merton's mother

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[434] Ibid., 11. Merton wrote of going to the Quaker meeting house on a couple of occasions, but for the most part it was not a regular event.

[435] Ibid., 6.

[436] Ibid., 37. Merton wrote of his father's interest in Catholicism, and his possible desire to become Catholic, even though he never officially converted. Ibid.

[437] Merton noted that while his maternal grandparents identified as Protestant, he never discovered what type of Protestant. He only recalled them mailing donations to the Zion Church (again, Merton stated that the particular denomination was unknown to him) and to the Salvation Army Church; however, they themselves never attended or participated in any events at these churches. Ibid., 27-28.

[438] Ibid., 28-29.

[439] Ibid., 15.

[440] Ibid., 16.

died in the hospital while Merton and his younger brother John Paul sat in a hired car waiting for their grandparents and father to emerge from the hospital. Merton described feeling very sad and unhappy with his mother's death, but also grateful that he did not see her dying in her last moments.[441] While his mother's death was a pivotal moment in his life, he did not describe this event as one that induced any religious interest.[442]

After his mother's death, Merton's life became more transient. While his younger brother lived with their maternal grandparents in New York, Merton himself was frequently with his father travelling either within America, or to Bermuda, where his father painted various landscapes. Merton described his time of travel with his father as unusual but adventurous: "for days on end I could run where I pleased, and do whatever I liked, and life was very pleasant."[443] Eventually, Merton's father decided Merton should be more settled and live with his maternal grandparents in New York where he could attend school more regularly. Merton's father, however, continued to travel abroad and paint. Merton lived a simple life with his grandparents and younger brother for many years until one day the family received a letter from a friend of his father's informing them that their father had become severely ill. The illness induced some sort of coma from which many presumed his father would die; however, in a couple days he emerged from the coma, resumed his painting and soon after he returned to New York. Merton described the notice of his father's illness as extremely upsetting, particularly since his father was in Africa at the time and the family had almost no way to get in touch with him other than waiting for letters.[444] With his father's return came some more unexpected news; his father wanted both Merton and him to live in France, and in August of 1925, Merton and his father set off for Europe.[445]

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[441] Ibid., 17-18.

[442] Ibid., 30.

[443] Ibid., 21.

[444] Based on Merton's autobiography, it seems his father experienced this brief illness during the fall of 1924, since Merton notes his father's return to New York was in early 1925. Ibid., 30-31.

[445] Merton's time in Europe also helped with his health since he would often experience periods of weakness, and frequent colds. In Mott's biography of Merton, Mott writes of Merton's father discovering through the help of friends in France that Merton was tubercular. See: Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 37.

While in France, Merton's father became even more devoted to his painting. His father also desired to establish a family home in France where he could bring John Paul to live with them.[446] It was also during this time that Merton began writing novels. He describes these early days of writing as a shared venture with his friends, as they often met to discuss and encourage each other's work, offering support and constructive criticism. Merton's youthful writing was in the style of adventure novels, one of which was a medieval adventure with Spanish Catholic villains attacking the Welsh.[447] Merton also started to come into more contact with Catholicism both through his visits of many Catholic churches throughout the countryside, and through his classmates who were mostly Catholic. During these years Merton references many conversations he had with his father on the subject of faith, noting: "Father was not afraid to express his ideas about truth and morality to anybody that seemed to need them—that is, if a real occasion arose. He did not, of course, go around interfering with everybody else's business."[448]

When their family home was completed in the spring of 1928, Merton's father announced they were now moving to England, which excited Merton for many reasons, one being that he would see more of his Aunt Maud and Uncle Ben who resided just outside London in Ealing.[449] Merton's aunt proved to be a great supporter of his writing, encouraging him to pursue it as a profession. She held a special place for Merton and when she died in 1933, he writes of feeling at her funeral that they "buried my childhood with her."[450] Prior to her death, however, Merton describes going through his "religious phase" when he attended the local church, spent time praying, and described himself as "happy and at peace."[451] It was also during this time that Merton's father started to become ill again; but much like when his mother was ill, it was some time before Merton finally learned that his father had been diagnosed with a brain tumour. Merton recounts one emotionally painful hospital visit during this summer; his father could no longer speak and appeared to be in a significant amount of pain. Merton writes: "the sorrow of

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[446] Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 37, 66. Regarding this family home, Merton laments that "it is sad, too, that we never lived in the house that Father built. But never mind! The grace of those days has not been altogether lost, by any means." Ibid., 67-68.

[447] Ibid., 58.

[448] Ibid., 60.

[449] Ibid., 67-68.

[450] Ibid., 135.

[451] Ibid., 72.

his [Father's] great helplessness suddenly fell upon me like a mountain. I was crushed by it. The tears sprang to my eyes. Nobody said anything more. …It was excruciatingly sad. We were completely helpless. There was nothing anyone could do."[452] Unlike the slow death of his mother, which was for the most part hidden from him, Merton was now thrust into witnessing the suffering of his father. When his father died in 1931, shortly after the Christmas holidays, Merton was informed by telegram, since he had returned to school.[453] Merton would write about the effect the death of his father had on him.

> The death of my father left me sad and depressed for a couple of months. But that eventually wore away. And when it did, I found myself completely stripped of everything that impeded the movement of my own will to do as it pleased. I imagined that I was free. And it would take me five or six years to discover what a frightful captivity I had got myself into. It was in this year, too, that the hard crust of my dry soul finally squeezed out all the last traces of religion that had ever been in it. There was no room for any God in that empty temple full of dust and rubbish which I was now so jealously to guard against all intruders, in order to devote it to the worship of my own stupid will. And so I became the complete twentieth-century man. I now belonged to the world in which I lived. I became a true citizen of my own disgusting century: the century of poison gas and atomic bombs. A man living on the doorsill of the Apocalypse, a man with veins full of poison, living in death.[454]

Merton, now sixteen years old and without both parents, remained living in England apart from his brother and grandparents. Tom Bennett, Merton's godparent and a friend of his father, was now his legal guardian. The next decade of Merton's life would be spent immersed in reading, education, and writing. During school breaks he travelled around Europe, often on his own, and took summer trips back to America to see his family.[455] For the most part, Merton lived a very independent life for such a young man. Before entering university, he became a bit of a wanderer. He describes himself during this time as believing (and living) "in the beautiful myth about having a good time so long as it does not hurt anybody else."[456] His only interest in religion involved a fascination with the art and architecture of old European churches. Nonetheless, it was during his tours of Catholic churches in Rome that he writes of beginning to

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[452] Ibid., 91.

[453] Merton attended Oakham School, a boarding school in Oakham England, between 1929-1932. Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 50-65.

[454] Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 94-95.

[455] Ibid., 98-105.

[456] Ibid., 115.

truly find out more about Christ: "it was there I first saw Him, Whom I now serve as my God and my King, and Who owns and rules my life."[457] His interest led him to read the Gospels, but not to any deep or serious conversion; not yet.[458]

In the fall of 1933, Merton began his university studies at Cambridge University. Even though this was an excellent opportunity to further his education, Merton's own reflections on his time at Cambridge highlight his own unhappiness. While he does not provide much detail in his autobiography regarding his behavior while at Cambridge, he does write of how his guardian, Bennett, summoned him to London where he questioned Merton's conduct, of which Merton reflects: "as soon as I was placed in the position of having to give some kind of positive explanation or defense of so much stupidity and unpleasantness,…the whole bitterness and emptiness of it became very evident to me."[459] Merton scholar Michael Mott argues that while Merton does not share extensive details of this time, his year at Cambridge is something he reflects on in his later writing.[460] While Merton completed the year and planned to return for a second, Bennett wrote to him while he was in America for the summer and suggested he give up on Cambridge and stay in America. Merton did not fight Bennett on this suggestion; rather, he described it as the best choice since "there was some kind of subtle poison in Europe, something that corrupted me."[461]

When he lived in the state of New York, Merton became interested in Communism, and when he enrolled at Columbia University in the winter of 1935, he met many more communist

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[457] Ibid., 121-122.

[458] Merton recounts during this time of peaked interest in churches and the Bible that one night he had a fleeting moment where he suddenly felt the presence of his father in his room with him. This experience overwhelmed him and led him to review his own life. He soon felt horrified at the "misery and corruption of my own soul." He concludes this was a moment of grace, but not the moment he was pushed to serious conversion. Ibid., 124.

[459] Ibid., 139-140.

[460] Mott summarizes that Merton's year at Cambridge involved heavy drinking, little time spent on his schoolwork, and many relationships with women. There is even speculation he fathered an illegitimate child, however, this has never been confirmed. As for Merton referencing this period of his life in his writing, Mott argues that Merton's Cambridge experience is somewhat loosely referenced and discussed in later journal entries, in his poetry, and in his novel *My Argument with the Gestapo* (published in 1969). See: Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 74-84.

[461] Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 140. Merton clarifies that he does not blame England for the choices he made, nor does he condemn the country. In a later reflection, he notes that his feelings stated here are "mostly subjective." Ibid., 141.

sympathizers.[462] While at Columbia, Merton studied literature and languages, where he developed a friendship with his literature professor Mark Van Doren. Merton's time at Columbia proved to be an important period of his life as it is where he continued writing (for the university's newspaper, his course work, and his own personal writing).[463] It was during this time that both his maternal grandparents died (his grandfather died in 1936, and then his grandmother in 1937), which pushed him towards some very honest realizations. He writes of suddenly becoming more fearful and of feeling that his behavior up to now demonstrated a total disregard for "moral laws."[464]

After he had lost almost all of his immediate family, and was faced with his own personal failings, Merton became interested in Catholicism. He records his opening towards Catholicism as a result of reading Étienne Gilson's book *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*. However, Merton emphasizes that he did not intend for this book to have such an influence on him; rather, once he saw the *Nihil Obstat Imprimatur* within the first few pages of the book he had "the feeling of disgust and deception."[465] Nevertheless, once he completed the book, he realized that "I had never had an adequate notion of what Christians meant by God."[466] His conversion began, then, with a newfound desire to attend church; specifically, the Anglican Church. It was here where Merton began some degree of regular church attendance and involvement, but his church attendance was not nearly as influential on his conversion as some of his friends. He writes, "God brought me and a half dozen others together at Columbia, and made us friends, in such a way that our friendship would work powerfully to rescue us from the confusion and the misery in which we had come to find ourselves."[467] The friends of particular interest for Merton's conversion were Robert Lax, Ed Rice, Bob Gerdy, and Bob Gibney. Each were studying at Columbia, and each had their own interest in Catholicism. Conversations on scholastic

[462] Ibid., 148. In retrospect, Merton notes that he was not entirely sure why he developed this interest or maintained this belief for as long as he did. Merton did join the Young Communist League while at Columbia (but under the name Frank Swift); however, he only ever attended one meeting, after which he decided he was no longer interested in actively participating in the Communist movement. Ibid., 165.

[463] Ibid., 172-174.

[464] Ibid., 182-183.

[465] Ibid., 190.

[466] Ibid., 193.

[467] Ibid., 197.

philosophy and Catholic thought helped to encourage each of them on their journey to formal conversion. Merton in particular emphasized how his own reading of Gilson's work pushed him towards studying Christian asceticism and mysticism.[468]

After he completed his Bachelor of Arts degree (1938), he enrolled in graduate school to complete a Master of Arts degree in English in order to pursue a teaching career. He considered his graduate studies to be "the first remote step of a retreat from the fight for money and fame, from the active and worldly life of conflict and competition."[469] One interesting event during this period was his eventual friendship with the travelling Hindu monk Bramachari (also referred to as Doctor Bramachari) who Merton met through his friends, who encouraged Merton to read more Christian mystical texts, such as the work of St. Augustine, and *The Imitation of Christ*.[470] After this, Merton immersed himself into Christian classics and mystical theology, while also completing his master's thesis. By September 1938, Merton writes that "the groundwork of my conversion was more or less complete" and he concluded he had been drawn to Catholicism.[471] He describes the importance of his first Catholic mass at Corpus Christi Church: "I will not easily forget how I felt that day. First, there was this sweet, strong, gentle, clean urge in me which said: 'Go to Mass! Go to Mass!'"[472]

After months of studying and catechesis, on November 16, 1938 Merton was baptized, participated in his first sacrament of reconciliation, and received communion in the Roman Catholic Church of Corpus Christi. The day brought forward feelings of anxiety, relief, excitement, and the overwhelming love of God: "He [God] called out to me from His own immense depths."[473] Next, Merton would be faced with a call to become a priest, a call he felt

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[468] Ibid., 206-207.

[469] Ibid., 209. Merton's master's degree focused on 18th C. English literature, specifically the work of William Blake. On the influence of Blake's poetry and life, Merton wrote: "as Blake worked himself into my system, I became more and more conscious of the necessity of a vital faith, and the total unreality and unsubstantiality of the dead, selfish rationalism which had been freezing my mind and will for the last seven years." Ibid., 211.

[470] Ibid., 219. This monk had been sent abroad to America by his monastic order. His order had been founded by Jagad-Bondhu (1871-1921), a popular Vaishnavite saint who Merton learned was known as a "Hindu Messiah, a savior sent to India in our own times." Ibid., 212.

[471] Ibid., 227.

[472] Ibid., 229.

[473] Ibid., 249-250. Merton's good friend Ed Rice was his Godparent and a great supporter of Merton's conversion. Ibid., 247.

before his official conversion but one he kept to himself. At first, he set aside all thoughts of the priesthood because to become a priest meant he would have to give up even more of his life, something he was not yet prepared to do.[474]

By winter 1939, before World War II erupted later that year, Merton completed his Master of Arts degree at Columbia, and began a Ph.D. in English on the work of Gerald Manley Hopkins. As he worked on his dissertation, Merton also became interested in writing poetry while actively avoiding news about the war. His interest in the priesthood continued to grow, and when he shared this with his friends they were in disbelief of Merton's seriousness.[475] After consulting with other Catholics on this matter, Merton initially planned to join the Franciscans, of which he later admitted, "it was the lyricism that attracted me more than the poverty."[476] Dan Walsh, one of Merton's professors and a good friend, suggested Merton visit the Trappist (Cistercian) monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani, near Louisville, Kentucky. Walsh described it as an almost silent community of monks living together out of the world, working in the fields and praying together daily. Initially Merton thought the Trappist life "sounded cold and terrible," but after being denied entry into the Franciscan novitiate, he attended a Holy Week retreat (April 1941) at Our Lady of Gethsemani and quickly changed his mind.[477] It was during this time at Our Lady of Gethsemani that Merton was overwhelmed by the amazing devotion of the community. He writes:

> The logic of the Cistercian life was, then, the complete opposite to the logic of the world, in which men put themselves forward, so that the most excellent is the one who stands out, the one who is eminent above the rest, who attracts attention. But what was the answer to this paradox? Simply that the monk in hiding himself from the world becomes not less himself, not less of a person, but more of a person, more truly and perfectly himself: for his personality and individuality are perfected in their true order, the spiritual, interior order, of union with God, the principle of all perfection.[478]

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[474] Ibid., 256.

[475] Ibid., 282.

[476] Ibid., 290.

[477] Ibid., 293, 331. Merton was asked to retract his application to the Franciscans after meeting with the Franciscan Fr. Edmund where he shared with him his troubled past and recent conversion. After this rejection Merton began to struggle with his call to the priesthood and decided instead to accept a position teaching English at St. Bonaventure University in New York. It would be over a year before Merton would again seriously pursue the Trappist monastic life. Ibid., 331.

[478] Ibid., 368-369.

After this retreat, Merton returned to New York, and continued teaching at St. Bonaventure University. He was now seriously considering joining the Trappist community he had just visited, but he remained uncertain. Fortunately, Merton was encouraged to revisit his vocation by a friend, Catherine Doherty, known also as the Baroness, who had been running the charity organization "The Friendship House" in Harlem. The Baroness asked Merton if he was going to come to Harlem for good, or become a priest.[479] Her forward question was "the knife in that old wound."[480] Within months of this conversation, prayer and more advice, he felt the Trappist community was where he was meant to be. He left teaching in December, 1941, sent his belongings to the Baroness's Friendship House in Harlem, and set off for Our Lady of Gethsemani without any formal invitation.[481] The timing of his entrance to Gethsemani not only coincided with the attack on Pearl Harbour but also reflected his growing dissatisfaction with the world. Thus, "by entering a Trappist monastery he was disengaging himself from the world."[482] Upon his acceptance as a postulant soon after his arrival, he was given the name Brother M. Louis Merton and after a few more months he was accepted as a novice.[483] He enjoyed his new contemplative life in the monastery; the days were simple, full of prayer, work in the field, and daily mass.[484] In July, 1942, John Paul came to see Merton before being sent off to the war, and he expressed to Merton a desire to be baptized.[485] This was the last meeting between Merton and his brother, and though they exchanged letters for the first few months while John Paul was in

[479] Ibid., 400. Merton's friendship with Doherty was initiated by his many letters to her and her invitation that he come see what they do in Harlem.

[480] Ibid., 401.

[481] Around the same time that Merton made his decision to return to Our Lady of Gethsemani as a postulant, he also received a notice from the American Draft Board. Even though Merton had initially been excluded from service due to health issues, now that America had joined the war, the military eligibility requirements were subsequently loosened and Merton faced a real possibility of being drafted. In the end, Merton was not drafted and remained at Gethsemani. Ibid., 409-411.

[482] James T. Baker, *Thomas Merton Social Critic* (Lexington, KY: Kentucky University, 1971), 17.

[483] Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 432.

[484] Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 215. Since communication insider the monastery was limited, a unique insider Trappist sign language was used by the monks to silently communicate with one another (when necessary).The Trappist sign language, in which Merton became proficient, contains roughly 400 signs. Ibid.

[485] Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 445.

Europe, Merton soon learned John Paul had died April 17, 1943 when his plane fell from the sky.[486] This is where Merton's autobiography concludes with a poem to his brother.

While Merton may have initially enjoyed his isolation from the world (not even leaving Gethsemani until seven years into his monastic life), the majority of his monastic life at Gethsemani was spent immersed in theology and writing about practical spirituality and current social issues. Writing had always been a passion of Merton's but after entering the monastic life, he often struggled with the role his writing should play in his new life. Rather than giving it up entirely, he decided "he should write only what was worthy of God and keep only what reached this standard."[487] Abbot Dom Frederic Dunne had instructed Merton to write and translate particular religious texts, which introduced Merton to more contemplative and mystical theology.[488] His writing also became a way to support the community, which is something Merton was happy to do since he knew the monastery had fallen into debt.[489] By the end of 1948, Merton's autobiography had become a bestseller (selling 2,000 copies a day) which provided much needed financial support, and recognition for Merton and Gethsemani.[490] There was an increase in postulants at Gethsemani, many of whom expressed interest in the contemplative life.[491] In the midst of the success of Merton's writing, he was ordained to the priesthood on May 26, 1949. This was not simply a long-awaited achievement since "he knew already that, like baptism and conversion, ordination was no end but a starting off in a different direction."[492]

From 1951-1955 Merton served as the master of scholastics, which involved educating the choir monks and providing spiritual advice.[493] He soon began to share with some friends, and eventually with the abbot, that he had become interested in the Carthusian Order where he

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[486] Ibid., 451.

[487] Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 212.

[488] Ibid., 212-214.

[489] In a letter to his publisher, James Laughlin, Merton wrote of his desire to find a way to make some money from his writing for the monastery, stating: "where there is a choice of projects, I ought, under the circumstances to be always choosing the one that will mean more bread and butter. So if you get any ideas along that line, let me know." Ibid., 228.

[490] Ibid., 247.

[491] Ibid., 261. This increase was followed by the "drop-out phenomenon" in the 1960s. Ibid.

[492] Ibid., 251.

[493] Ibid., 262-263.

thought he could live more like a hermit. The abbot during that time, James Fox, worked with those within the Trappist community to try and accommodate Merton so he could pursue more solitude while remaining at Gethsemani.[494] Rather than leave the abbey, Merton was assigned the position master of novices, which involved teaching and spiritual advice. Some of his novices recount trips when Merton took them to plant trees in Gethsemani.[495] James Finley, who was a novice at Gethsemani under the mentorship of Merton for a short time, describes Merton as a man who

> mentors our hearts. He tells us *how it's going with him*. And the things he writes are so honest, you pause to take in the experiential truth being shared, such that it invites you to listen to yourself. I always felt that when I went to see Merton that it was going to include the necessity of me encountering myself.[496]

The 1960s were a time of great growth and change for Merton and the Abbey of Gethsemani, in part due to the changes prompted by the Second Vatican Council. It is during this decade that Merton expanded his writing to include topics such as interreligious dialogue, social justice, war, and race issues in America (the latter two topics were often threatened with censorship).[497] He was also granted permission to live out his desire for greater solitude as a hermit in a cottage on Gethsemani's acreage. Initially he had been granted a few hours a day at the cottage, but by August 1965, he retired as the master of novices and made a permanent move to what he now referred to as his hermitage.[498] While he did admit to some degree of loneliness, overall he describes life at the hermitage as exactly what he needed.

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[494] Ibid., 286. One early suggestion was for Merton to take the role of fire watcher at Gethsemani (after the barn had been destroyed by a fire). Merton, however, did not take this role. Mott suggests that Merton's abbot and friends at the time believed that he did not take this offer out of fear. Moreover, it is also necessary to note the Merton did not always get along with Abbot James Fox, particularly on the matter of Merton desiring more solitude and his constant letter writing with those outside the monastery. The abbot also seemed to raise concerns regarding Merton's obedience. To some extent, these issues were partially resolved when Merton agreed to no longer discuss leaving Gethsemani. Instead, Merton expressed an interest in the position of master of novices, which he was assigned and occupied until 1965. Ibid., 340-342.

[495] Ibid., 288.

[496] James Finley, "Thomas Merton: Mystic Teacher for Our Age," *The Merton Annual* 28 (2015): 182. Italics original to the text.

[497] Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 372-374. This issue of censorship was one Merton wrote about in some of his letters. One example would be his involvement with *Breakthrough to Peace: Twelve Views on the Threat of Nuclear Extermination*, a collection of essays on peace he was to edit. His introductory essay, "Peace: A Religious Responsibility," was included but heavily edited, and it was decided the book would not identify Merton as the editor in order for the book to avoid censorship. Ibid., 374.

[498] Ibid., 424.

> He walked up to the hermitage on Mount Olivet free of almost all obligations to the monastery. He would go down each morning at ten-thirty to say Mass in the library chapel and to eat one meal (usually on his own) in the infirmary refectory. He had been asked to give a conference each Sunday, and at the last minute the abbot had asked him to write a new manual for postulants. Except for the hunters after squirrels, the solitude was now perfect, and Merton celebrated the feeling that this gave "different horizons" to his life.[499]

Eventually Merton's health began to decline as he experienced severe back pain which at times made his hand numb meaning writing became more of a challenge.[500] By February 1966, his back pain required an operation that was scheduled for March 24, 1966. His student nurse, who cared for him during his recovery at St. Joseph's hospital, became a great companion to Merton, showing an honest interest in his work and corresponding with him even after he had returned to the monastery. Mott declares that "he [Merton] loved greatly and was greatly loved. He was overwhelmed by the experience and it changed him forever."[501] Over the course of year, he would arrange many meetings and telephone calls where he could talk to the student nurse, often enlisting the help of his friends, each of whom cautioned him on his risky behaviour.[502] It was generally noted by those closest to Merton who were assisting him with meeting the student nurse that he "was being so wildly indiscreet he hardly needed a betrayer." When he eventually sat down with the abbot to discuss this affair of the heart, Merton finally accepted his actions as dangerous for his monastic life.[503] For the remainder of his life he struggled to reduce contact with her. Though there were months of silence between them, and eventually no further face-to-

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[499] Ibid., 424-425.

[500] Ibid., 433.

[501] Ibid., 438. In Merton's journals he identifies the student nurse as "M." The influence this student nurse had on Merton is hard to summarize. She was not simply his friend, she was a woman that he truly loved; however, their relationship did not progress beyond a loving friendship. She became an essential voice contributing to his writing as he notes in a journal entry: "I think I really understand the whole thing better, not when I read my own notes but her notes and her letters, because these are necessary to complete my own ideas and aspirations and love. Also I write much more sanely when I am writing not just for myself (as here) but for her." This specific passage is from a journal entry dated September 6, 1966. It is important to note that this personal reflection is from his private journals, which Merton wanted destroyed: "it is certainly not for publication." See: Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom*, vol 6 of *The Journals of Thomas Merton*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1997), 126.

[502] Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 438-444. The student nurse herself even expressed her own unease with the situation, yet she continued to meet and speak with him at his request. Ibid., 439.

[503] Ibid., 444. The relationship with the student nurse had become serious enough that Merton even discussed with her by phone the possibility of marriage. After the conversation, Merton feared he had been overheard by the monk working the switchboard. Ibid., 445.

face meetings, Mott documents there was at least one phone call Merton made to her during the summer of 1968.[504]

The end of Merton's life came during a trip to Asia. The initial reason for the trip was his invitation to a Benedictine meeting for monastic superiors in Bangkok in December 1968.[505] The new abbot, Flavian Burns, had agreed to Merton's Asia journey, during which he would attend many conferences and speak about Western and Eastern mysticism.[506] It was decided he would go from September 10 until sometime in January (the return date was constantly changing, even while Merton was abroad), but he did not arrive in Bangkok until October 16.[507] During his Asia journey he attended conferences in Calcutta, met with the Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatsho) in Dharamshala, spent some time in Sri Lanka, and attended the Benedictine meeting in Bangkok. It was at this final event in Bangkok where Merton gave his last talk December 10, on "Marxism and Monastic Perspectives." After the talk that afternoon, tragedy struck. Merton, back in his hotel room taking some time to himself, had a shower, but upon exiting the shower he accidentally electrocuted himself with a large standing fan.[508] His death, exactly 27 years after the day that he arrived at Gethsemani desiring the monastic life, appeared to be a tragic accident.[509] His body was flown back to America in a military bomber plane, and his funeral mass was held December 17 at Gethsemani, where the epilogue of *The Seven Storey Mountain* was read as he was laid to rest.[510]

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[504] Ibid., 454.

[505] Ibid., 514.

[506] Ibid., 542. The goal of the trip was to bring back helpful research on Eastern mysticism that could contribute to further developing Western mysticism, which Merton believed was in crisis. Ibid.

[507] Merton was instructed by his abbot to not participate in any press interviews or television coverage during his time away. This was only a real challenge in Bangkok. Ibid., 539-542.

[508] Ibid., 565. After the tragic event, it was determined that the fan had had a faulty repair meaning that any person who touched the fan itself would be electrocuted. It was concluded by the police in Bangkok that Merton died as a result of heart failure, the electrocution of the fan, and the fall to the floor. Ibid., 566.

[509] Mott notes that there were many rumours and questions surrounding Merton's death. He even suggests himself some warranted confusion regarding a lack of burn marks on Merton's hands, and the large wound on the back of his head. In response to rumours regarding suicide or murder, Mott concludes that suicide can be ruled out easily, whereas the possibility of murder is more complicated: "there is no evidence whatsoever that Thomas Merton was murdered, only a situation in which he *could* have been murdered." Ibid., 567-568. Italics original to text.

[510] Ibid., 570.

Merton's life and writing had a significant impact on his community. Mott emphasizes how Merton, a dynamic and gifted writer, forever changed Gethsemani. "With 150 monks, Our Lady of Gethsemani was the largest monastery of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance in the world. It had prospered, and it had led others in monastic renewal at a time when there were questions of survival in many monasteries of the Order."[511] Merton's work left an impact outside of Gethsemani too, particularly within Catholic theology. A voice ahead of his time, who among other notable Christian figures of the twentieth century not only "captured the modern Christian and Catholic consciousness," but engaged with challenging topics relevant during Merton's own life and beyond.[512] As we will see in his mystical theology, however, Merton's personal life and experiences become key reference points and moments of reflection that appear throughout his writing.

Mystical Theology in Thomas Merton's Writing

While Merton is not technically a trained theologian, his spiritual poetry, writing, and thought evident in *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1962), *Seeds of Destruction* (1964), *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966), and *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (1977) demonstrate his strong understanding of Christian spirituality and Christian morality. The first three books, and many of the poems contained in *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, were edited and completed by Merton during the 1960s, and they reflect his increasing interest in social justice and Christian ethics.[513] His writing between 1950 and 1960 has been identified by some Merton scholars as the writing of "later Merton" since it engages more heavily with social issues.[514] Particular themes of interest within the works listed here that will be considered in more detail

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[511] Ibid., 434.

[512] Francis X. Clooney, "Thomas Merton's Deep Christian Learning across Religious Borders," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2017): 49.

[513] James T. Baker, *Thomas Merton Social Critic*, vii.

[514] Ibid.,27. Baker explains that Merton's work demonstrates such diverse thinking that categorizing his writing into early or later Merton helps break down his thinking and spirituality. Using the delineation of "the 'early Merton' and the 'later Merton' [helps] to distinguish between his two careers, the one as a silent mystic who celebrated the virtues of monastic life in glowing prose and poetry, the other as a social commentator of great skill and imagination." While we cannot perfectly separate all of Merton's work into these categories, Baker does argue that such a distinction at least reflects the profound change in his perspective since the majority of Merton's work in the 1940s contains less of a concern for social issues when compared to his work in the 1950-1960s. Some examples of early Merton work would include *Seven Storey Mountain* (1948), *Seeds of Contemplation* (1949), and *The Ascent to Truth* (1951). Ibid., 27-28, 30-31.

include his theology of the self, contemplation, mystical theology, Christology, nature poetry, social and environmental issues, and his spirituality of peace.

New Seeds of Contemplation (1962)

In 1947, shortly before his ordination, Merton began working on an earlier version of this book titled *Seeds of Contemplation*, which was published in 1949. The intention of the book was to instruct one "on preparing the spiritual *ground*," but it was not to be a book about how to contemplate.[515] Merton knew writing a strict instructional book for contemplation was useless since each person's life is different. Therefore, each person's identity and experiences must be part of one's contemplative life. Merton asserted that "it is the very nature of the mystic's journey that he or she go alone [and thus] …a map is the most useless of impediments."[516] According to Mott, however, Merton was not happy with *Seeds of Contemplation*, finding it cold and uninviting. Moreover, he was also critical of his writing style believing it to be lacking in punctuation.[517] At the same time, he was still glad he completed the book, and when he returned to it to rework the material in 1960, his years of advising many novices and meeting with others who also lived in solitude was evident in a now much warmer and open book about contemplation. Anne E. Carr argues that *New Seeds of Contemplation* is "less absolute, elitist, [and] severe" and could be easily read and understood by those inside and outside the monastery.[518] In Christopher Pramuk's opinion, "*New Seeds of Contemplation* numbers among the most beloved in Merton's vast corpus."[519] According to Merton's own opinion, *New Seeds of Contemplation* "is in many ways a completely new book."[520] While the book does not discuss ecological theology or ethics, it is a critical book for understanding Merton's theology of the self, which becomes an essential component of his later developed ecological ethics.

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[515] Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 238. Italics original to text.

[516] Ibid. Merton himself writes that contemplation cannot be taught, it must be experienced. His writing can only hint at contemplation. See: Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 6.

[517] Ibid., 249-250.

[518] Anne E. Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 1988), 27. Carr notes how *New Seeds of Contemplation* also demonstrates the influence of Jacques Maritain on Merton, particularly Maritain's personalist theory. Ibid.

[519] Christopher Pramuk, "*Hagia Sophia*: The Unknown and Unseen Christ of Thomas Merton." *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2006): 192.

[520] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, ix.

New Seeds of Contemplation begins with two chapters that offer an initial explanation of contemplation. In a series of what appear to be contradictions, Merton first states that contemplation is "the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive."[521] But contemplation is not simply being fully aware of our own existence; it is focused on the source of all life (God); it is a way "we know by 'unknowing.' Or, better, we know *beyond* all knowing or 'unknowing.'"[522] Merton emphasizes that contemplation can be summarized as an experience of "I AM." It is not an intellectual or philosophical idea we can pursue and debate; rather, it is a "religious and transcendent gift."[523] Merton's theology of contemplation is tied to the true, interior self, and to realizing that our false, exterior self is not in fact our true self.[524] He explains:

> we must remember that this superficial "I" is not our real self. It is our "individuality" and our "empirical self" but it is not truly the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God. The "I" that works in the world, thinks about itself, observes its own reactions and talks about itself is not the true "I" that has been united to God in Christ. It is at best the vesture, the mask, the disguise of that mysterious and unknown "self" whom most of us never discover until we are dead. Our external, superficial self is not eternal, not spiritual. Far from it. This self is doomed to disappear as completely as smoke from a chimney. It is utterly frail and evanescent. Contemplation is precisely the awareness that this "I" is really "not I" and the awakening of the unknown "I" that is beyond observation and reflection and is incapable of commenting upon itself.[525]

Merton adds that contemplation is not an individual pursuit; rather, it is a call from God "Who chooses to awaken us," to awaken us to our own "existential mystery."[526] The goal of contemplation is for the contemplative to realize that God is not an object; God is "a pure '*Who*.'"[527]

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[521] Ibid.

[522] Ibid., 1-2, 3 Italics original to text.

[523] Ibid., 4.

[524] At no point does Merton state that the true self is the soul and the false self is the body. He does not make use of Platonic dualism in his theology of contemplation. He emphatically states that, "the 'false self' must not be identified with the body. The body is neither evil nor unreal. It has a reality that is given it by God, and this reality is therefore holy." Ibid., 26.

[525] Ibid., 7. Merton adds a note here that hell could be where one experiences "a perpetual alienation from our true being, our true self, which is in God." Ibid.

[526] Ibid., 8-9, 10

[527] Ibid., 13. Italics original to text.

In order to prevent misunderstanding, Merton goes on to further emphasize what contemplation is not. It is not being only passive, or quiet, or acting like "one who sits around with a vacant stare."[528] It is not prayerfulness, the pursuit for inner peace, or feeling fulfilled during the liturgy (even though these are all good things that can be part of a strong spiritual life). Moreover, a contemplative does not need to experience prophetic or emotional ecstasy, or any other spiritual gift in order to prove they are a contemplative. In response to the misunderstood critique that contemplation is an escape from life's problems of struggles, "a pain-killer," Merton writes that in actuality, "the deep, inexpressible certitude of the contemplative experience awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depths of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding."[529]

New Seeds of Contemplation continues to explain how the contemplative life calls one to action, not to isolation. While contemplation does involve a degree of detachment (from your false self, and from the evil of the world), the contemplative "can never allow himself to become insensible to true human values, whether in society, in other men or in himself."[530] The world does not pull us away from God because all that God has created is good; instead, "the obstacle is in our 'self.'" Merton argues that those who see the world as that which tears them away from God "are like Adam blaming Eve and Eve blaming the serpent in Eden. …These are the thoughts and attitudes of a baby, of a savage and of an idolater."[531] When we turn to the saints to consider their approach to the world, Merton argues that great saints and contemplatives do not hate the world or those in it; rather, they see how all persons are made in the image of our loving God. The incorrect, yet common perception, that to be a Christian saint means you must deny the world misleads one to conclude the contemplative life involves denying all that is material while obsessively focusing only on God. To this Merton argues that "it was because the saints were

[528] Ibid., 9.

[529] Ibid., 12-13.

[530] Ibid., 20. Merton's exclusive language is representative of the time he was writing and should not be interpreted as male preference. There are many examples of important women, such as Dorothy Day, Catherine Doherty, Rosemary Radford Reuther, and Rachel Carson, who each influenced Merton and were an essential part of his lifelong theological formation.

[531] Ibid., 22.

absorbed in God that they were truly capable of seeing and appreciating created things and it was because they loved Him alone that they alone loved everybody."[532]

Returning to the focus of contemplation, God, Merton explains how one finds their true self within God. I can only "discover myself in discovering God. …The only One Who can teach me to find God is God, Himself, Alone."[533] This is where contemplation and salvation come together because "to be 'saved' is to return to one's inviolate and eternal reality and to live in God." Since we cannot ascend to the heavens and find God, God comes down to us, to find us, and "our contemplation of Him is a participation in His contemplation of Himself."[534] But the picture is still imperfect because we still struggle with sin, we are continually pulled towards illusions that oppose God and entangle our desires. This is where the pursuit of true solitude can enable one to have real love for humanity and God.[535] This true solitude does not mean we cut ourselves off from the world; rather, it is sharing one's contemplation with others. Merton refers to this as "one of the paradoxes of the mystical life."

> *A man cannot enter into the deepest center of himself and pass through that center into God, unless he is able to pass entirely out of himself and empty himself and give himself to other people in the purity of a selfless love*.[536]

This leads Merton to explain the Christological dimension of his theology of contemplation, since the contemplative life brings one into the mystical life drawing us into the One Mystical Christ. Christopher Pramuk reminds us that, "Merton's high Christology, in other words, must never be separated from his high anthropology, his robust doctrine of the 'true self'."[537] George Kilcourse reiterates this point when he argues that for Merton, "everything radiates from the

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[532] Ibid., 23. On this issue of denying the world, Merton also explains the issue of dualism and separating the soul and the body. To say the true self is the soul is angelism; to say the true self is the body reduces humans to animals. Both of these are illusions. Ibid., 27.

[533] Ibid., 36.

[534] Ibid., 38-29.

[535] Ibid., 52-53. Merton explains, "true solitude is the home of the person, false solitude the refuge of the individualist." Ibid., 53.

[536] Ibid., 64. Italics original to the text. Understanding true solitude is a topic Merton discusses at length in *New Seeds of Contemplation*. See: "Chapter 10: A Body of Broken Bones," "Chapter 11: Learn to be Alone," and "Chapter 12: The Pure Heart."

[537] Christopher Pramuk, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2009), 183.

Christocentric mystery," and so contemplation brings forth his kenotic Christology.[538] First, Merton reiterates the centrality of Christ, that "faith in Christ, and in the mysteries of His life and death, is the foundation of the Christian life and the source of all contemplation."[539] It is imperative that contemplation focuses on who Christ is in order to avoid focusing only on Christ's humanity or divinity, or an imaginary Christ created in our own image.[540] The contemplative life, orientated towards Christ, brings the contemplative into Christ. Merton explains, "I become a 'new man' and this new man, spiritually and mystically one identity, is at once Christ and myself."[541] The contemplative's soul is molded and sealed with the stamp of Christ as it is immersed into the mystery of the Cross and sacrifice. According to Merton, sacrifice is not simply a hard, moral act of suffering; rather,

> a sacrifice is an action which is *objectively sacred*, primarily of a *social* character, and what is important is not so much the pain or difficulty attached to it as the *meaning*, the *sacred significance* which not only conveys an idea but *effects a divine and religious transformation* in the worshipper, thus consecrating and uniting him more closely to God.[542]

The social dimension of sacrifice is emphasized by Merton again when he declares that, "thus the whole creation as well as the labor of man in all his legitimate natural aspirations are in some way elevated, consecrated and transformed. The whole world enters into a hymn of glory in honor of the Creator and Saviour. This is the perfect sacrifice."[543]

In order to best live this contemplative life in Christ, Merton cautions against the risk of falling into hatred, actions that condemn those who struggle in their faith, and the pursuit of wealth.[544] He suggests that Mary, the Mother of God, is an excellent model of a human who lived a

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[538] George Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 1993), 105.

[539] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 151-152.

[540] The key to moving past our imagination of Christ is faith. Merton explains, "faith brings together the known and the unknown so that they overlap: or rather, so that we are *aware* or their overlapping. …[F]aith incorporates the unknown into our everyday life in a living, dynamic and actual manner." Ibid., 135-136. For more of Merton's reflections on faith, see: "Chapter 18: Faith," and "Chapter 19: From Faith to Wisdom."

[541] Ibid., 158. Merton explains that this union is possible through "the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of Christ." Ibid.

[542] Ibid., 164. Italics original to text.

[543] Ibid., 166.

[544] See: "Chapter 24: He Who is not With me is Against Me."

contemplative life hidden in the mystery of Christ with "absolute emptiness…poverty…[and] obscurity."[545]

Merton's theology of contemplation concludes with a discussion on detachment and prayer. On detachment, he carefully outlines the dangers of being attached to anything outside of God because it "blinds your intellect and destroys your judgment of moral values" by distorting reality, which makes it hard to discern between what is good and evil.[546] Contemplation requires a level of detachment that many, even those in the religious life, may never reach if they become attached to spiritual practices, or "spiritual pleasures," such as prayer, fasting, a particular devotion or a religious text.[547] Detachment does not call for one to live a miserable life, but rather a life of obscurity, like the life of Mary. "The way to contemplation is an obscurity so obscure that it is no longer even dramatic."[548] This is a life of renunciation where one lives simply and humbly, with the poor and the forgotten, to have only what you need to continue to the next day, but to be full of joy and love. In his call for detachment and renunciation he does not condemn the world, creatures, and every person, because "God's creatures are all good and that our moderate, temperate use of them brings us to closer union with Him."[549] In fact, those closest to God, who are "detached from their exterior self," see the beauty and goodness of all creation, and the material world is no longer an obstacle.[550] Instead, a correct understanding of detachment calls for a mystical death where we "undertake a *total renunciation of all attachments*" in order to reach mystical union with Christ.[551] As the contemplative continues on this mystical journey he/she must also not become attached to common experiences, such as the feeling of peace, that comes with contemplation; "if we attach too much importance to these

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[545] Ibid., 174. For Merton's thoughts on the relationship between the spiritual life and the topics of despair, humility, obedience, and freedom, see chapters 25-27.

[546] Ibid., 203.

[547] Merton also discusses the dangers of becoming attached to, or obsessed with the pursuit of emotional highs connected with contemplation. The pursuit of religious experiences can become "one of the most dangerous obstacles in his interior life." The best way to respond to such experiences is to see that they bring "no real fruit and no lasting satisfaction." Ibid., 247-248.

[548] Ibid., 250.

[549] Ibid., 209.

[550] Ibid.

[551] Ibid., 210.

accidentals we will run the risk of losing what is essential, which is the perfect acceptance of God's will."[552]

While the need to avoid incorrect attachments is essential for the contemplative life, so too is prayer, particularly mental prayer, such as meditation. Merton does not emphasize any particular approach to mental prayer or meditation, arguing instead for the need to be open to the grace of God. Meditation should not be something strictly relegated to a time when we can sit in silence; rather, we need to learn how to meditate through writing, drawing, walking, talking, reading, and menial tasks anywhere and anytime.[553] Ultimately, meditation has two purposes: "to give you sufficient control over your mind and memory and will to enable you to recollect yourself and withdraw from exterior things…and second…it teaches you how to become aware of the presence of God."[554]

Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation* outlines a theology of contemplation arguing that we have been created to contemplate God, that this is "the reason for our creation by God."[555] Just as the journey of finding one's true self is a long process, one does not immediately become a contemplative; rather, it is a slow process that requires "gradual steps" involving periods of struggle and moments of understanding. Merton compares the challenges of contemplation to our spirit wandering blindly in the wilderness, uncertain of how each new step could lead towards God.[556] Union with God through contemplation comes only with surrender since "what you most need in this dark journey is an unfaltering trust in the Divine guidance, as well as the courage to risk everything for Him. In many ways the journey seems to be a foolish gamble."[557] The ongoing battle to rid ourselves of our false self and to embrace our true self in Christ plagues contemplatives for their entire life. It is in this book that Merton takes the reader on his own journey of finding his true self in Christ. Susan Rakoczy observes that if Merton's false self (described by Merton himself) is his self that seeks to exist outside of God, then we can see the

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[552] Ibid., 212.

[553] Ibid., 216.

[554] Ibid., 217. Merton includes a detailed explanation on dealing with common challenges that may arise during meditation (such as the mind being flooded with distractions). Ibid., 222-224.

[555] Ibid., 225.

[556] Ibid., 237.

[557] Ibid., 243.

difference in "Merton's 'true self' [which] was his monk-writer-hermit-social critic self in search of profound union with God…[whose] stance towards the world was no longer condemnation and flight from it but compassion."[558] Moreover, Carr explains how for Merton this journey of finding our true self "depicts the individual as the microcosm in which the great motifs of creation, sin, and redemption unfold. And the reality of redemptive grace is experienced by the Christian in the prayer that is contemplation."[559]

Even though this book is a reworking of an earlier work, it is an excellent example of Merton's evolving spiritual life, his reflections on the true self and the false self, his strong Christology, and his emerging interest in the social and active dimensions of contemplation. Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation* is relevant for this dissertation because of the critical theology of the self he outlines. As Merton's theology progresses, he continues to stress the relationship between how we see our own self and how we live and act in the world. Since the false self is superficial and not who we are truly called to be, a life immersed in the false self leads one to selfish, destructive actions. On the contrary, our true self is that self which has removed the mask of the false self so that we truly see who we are in God and act like Christ in the world. This is why Merton describes contemplation as "an intuitive awakening in which our free and personal reality becomes fully alive to its own existential depths, which open out into the mystery of God."[560] Furthermore, the contemplative life calls one to action, which again challenges the idea that a monk living a monastic life is somehow separate from the world or current social issues.[561] If the contemplative treats the world and social issues with contempt, then Merton's response is that they have confused the false self with the world.[562] While Merton instructs the contemplative to

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[558] Susan Rakoczy, "Thomas Merton: The True Self and the Quest for Justice," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 4-5.

[559] Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*, 32.

[560] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 9.

[561] Baker argues that for Merton contemplation is very much a part of his social action. Early on Merton shows preference for contemplation considering it to be "the only real Christian vocation" but, as Merton's theology develops, Baker argues that Merton further develops his understanding of the relationship between contemplation and action. He explains, "Merton's early writings all expressed this same basic spiritual approach to social problems, an approach that could be found in the contemporary works of Bishop Fulton Sheen, Norman Vincent Peale, and Billy Graham, the popular religious writers and lecturers of the day. Each of these men, riding the same wave of postwar religious euphoria, had his own personal approach to religion (Merton's was contemplation), but none of them seemed to understand or speak to social issues." See: Baker, *Thomas Merton Social Critic*, 29.

[562] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 22.

avoid incorrect attachments, such as unnecessary objects, praise, and even certain experiences, he emphasizes that those closest to God, who are "detached from their exterior self," see the beauty and goodness of all creation, and the material world is no longer an obstacle.[563] Many of these themes explored in *New Seeds of Contemplation* inform his nature mysticism. More specifically, later on in Merton's writing on ecological issues, he again returns to his theology of the self when accusing humanity of acting improperly in creation, which he concludes is a result of humanity embracing the false self.[564]

Seeds of Destruction (1964)

While still concerned with the topic of contemplation and action, *Seeds of Destruction* differs from *New Seeds of Contemplation* with its direct engagement with social issues in America. *Seeds of Destruction* contains a series of essays by Merton, each of which focuses on the Christian responsibility towards social issues of race, war, and peace. James Barker argues that this particular book demonstrates Merton's unique ability to address current social issues as a self-identified guilty bystander. It is also a good example of Merton's evolving social conscience as "a man who, while primarily a monk, became toward the end of his life a man of the world."[565] It is not that Merton no longer viewed the world with "his pessimistic analysis"; rather, "he did arrive at a new understanding of himself and his role in society."[566] In *Seeds of Destruction,* we begin to see Merton specifically engage with Christian ethics and theology in order to respond to civil rights issues in America. Particular attention will be focused on his essay regarding race issues, as expressed in "Letters to a White Liberal," and his theology on peace and the Christian responsibility in "The Christian in a World Crisis: Reflections on the Moral Climate of the 1960s."[567] In these essays, Merton's emphasis on the Christian

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[563] Ibid., 209.

[564] See Merton's letter to Rachel Carson. Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letters of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963,* ed. William H. Shannon (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994), 70-71.

[565] Baker, *Thomas Merton Social Critic*, viii.

[566] Ibid., 28.

[567] My focus is on these two essays: "Letters to a White Liberal," and "The Christian in a World Crisis." The other essays within *Seeds of Destruction*—"The Christian in Diaspora," Merton's essay on Gandhi ("A Tribute to Gandhi"), an essay on William M. Kelley's novel *A Different Drummer* ("The Legend of Tucker Caliban"), and a series of brief, personal letters collected together under the title "Letters in a Time of Crisis"—do not contain the same systematic reflections on peace and ethics compared to the aforementioned essays. See: Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Destruction* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1961).

responsibility to build peace, promote the common good, hearing the prophetic voice of the oppressed, will eventually become a key component of his own ecological ethic. While these essays do not explicitly discuss environmental ethics, they form the base for a peacemaking ethic, which later on Merton includes when explaining the need for an ecological conscience.[568]

"Letters to a White Liberal" contains four short letters he wrote in the summer 1963. Each focuses on the race issues in America before the Civil Rights Bill would be passed in 1964, a bill that Merton suggests will be a challenge to enforce and will push the conflict into a new direction, into "*the beginning of a new and more critical phase in the conflict*."[569] In these letters, Merton argues that in order for the civil rights movement to be a success, "*society is going to be radically changed*."[570] In fact, change is the only option as he encourages each person to participate in this movement, to embrace the need to "*grow into a new society.* Nothing else will suffice."[571]

One of the main points Merton emphasized in these four letters is the issue with American civil laws and Christian responsibility. He urged Catholics to remember that the church is not meant to be separated from the suffering of humanity; rather, "Christianity is concerned with human crisis, since Christians are called to manifest the mercy and truth of God."[572] The Catholic response to any human crisis must be for each Catholic to first examine one's own conscience, to evaluate one's actions as an individual and as a member of the Christian community, and ask whether one truly realizes and actualizes one's responsibility to "manifest Christ to the world."[573] Moreover, in response to civil law, Merton argues that we have a responsibility to determine when laws and civil liberties are actively being ignored or suppressed. In the case of the civil rights movement, while there are laws in place to protect all Americans and ensure each

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[568] Merton uses the term, "ecological consciousness," in his letter to Barbara Hubbard (1967). Later in his book review, "The Wild Places," he uses the term "ecological conscience" (1968). His explanation of both are related and build from one another. See: Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letter of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 73-75, and, "The Wild Places" in *Thomas Merton: Selected Essays*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013), 442-451.

[569] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 13. Italics original to text.

[570] Ibid., 16. Italics original to text.

[571] Ibid.. Italics original to text.

[572] Ibid., 18.

[573] Ibid., 19.

American, regardless of race, has access to basic rights (such as education and adequate housing), Merton argues that there is also the reality that such laws are not regularly or equally enforced. In response to this issue, he forcefully declares that if civil laws are not followed and are only selectively enforced, they are, in essence, meaningless.

> [T]he laws have been framed in such a way that in every case their execution has depended on the good will of white society, and the white man has not failed, when left to himself, to block, obstruct, or simply forget the necessary action without which the rights of…[others] cannot be enjoyed in fact.[574]

According to Merton's opinion, the oppression and abuse of African Americans demonstrates a lack of ability to protect all persons. He poignantly reflects that "we have little genuine interest in human liberty and in the human person. What we are interested in, on the contrary, is the unlimited freedom of the corporation. Where we call ourselves the 'free world' we mean first of all the world in which *business* is free."[575] Merton's astute observation can be applied to many other ethical issues where the rights of people are at risk of being superseded by the desires of corporations and shareholders.[576] Merton's explanation as to why we are often unable to protect others is rooted in our false self. We are consumed with the value of objects rather than the dignity of people to the point where we struggle to even respond to those who suffer.[577] It is not just those who actively oppress or exploit others that Merton condemns; rather, he specifically includes "the well-meaning liberal" who is confused in a pursuit of the good. They are the "political catalyst" who, according to Merton, must be part of the necessary change.[578]

This leads Merton to argue that the civil rights movement is not only about the rights of African Americans; rather, it is about every American, it is about the society as a whole. African Americans "are seeking by Christian love and sacrifice to redeem him [the 'white American'], to enlighten him…to awaken his mind and his conscience, and stir him to initiate the reform and

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[574] Ibid., 24.

[575] Ibid., 26. Italics original to text.

[576] Merton will again refer to the greed of humanity and the Christian responsibility to care for all creation in his letter to Rachel Carson in response to her book *Silent Spring* (1962). See: Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letters of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963,* 70-71.

[577] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 27-28.

[578] Ibid., 33-35.

renewal which may still be capable of saving our society."[579] In Merton's opinion, the civil rights movement, specifically the racial discrimination within America, is "a *white* problem: that the cancer of injustice and hate which is eating white society and is only partly manifested in racial segregation with all its consequences, *is rooted in the heart of the white man himself*."[580] It is the African Americans who have invaluable spiritual insight into this crisis, and they must be heard in order for true change to begin.[581] The 'white liberal,' then, must listen to African Americans; both must participate in reforming "the social system which permits and breeds such injustices" with changes that are inspired by African Americans "who [have] received from God enough light, ardor and spiritual strength to free the white man in freeing himself from the white man."[582] It is on this note that Merton concludes with a final call to heed the prophetic voice of so many African Americans participating in this civil rights movement, "otherwise, the moment of grace will pass without effect."[583] Unfortunately, after *Seeds of Destruction*, Baker argues that Merton did indeed become more pessimistic about the civil rights movement and feared that the voices of change had been ignored.[584] Even though Merton's outlook became pessimistic, his essays here are, however, not fruitless. Rather, as Merton continues to explore the ethical and spiritual dimension of these social issues in America, his work continues to be awakened to other ethical issues.

As Merton explains the Christian responsibility to the civil rights movement, he begins to reflect on the topic of peace in the essay "The Christian in a World Crisis: Reflections on the Moral Climate of the 1960s." He raises the question: "can we choose peace?"[585] He clarifies that the purpose of this question is to discuss whether the Christian is responsible for building peace, whether this is part of Christian ethics. In order to truly answer this, Merton argues that

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[579] Ibid., 40.

[580] Ibid., 41. Italics original to the text.

[581] Ibid., 55.

[582] Ibid., 54.

[583] Ibid., 56. Baker observes that Merton's interpretation of the civil rights movement in America led him to conclude the possibility of a grim future for America if true change did not occur. If white Americans did not ensure equal treatment for all persons regardless of race, but rather continued to feel threatened by change, then the possibility of a violent backlash from white Americans could create a sort of American Nazism. See: Baker, *Thomas Merton Social Critic*, 102.

[584] Baker, *Thomas Merton Social Critic*, 106.

[585] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 73.

Christians need to be sure they understand what it means to be a Christian. According to Merton this means,

> the Christian is not only bound to avoid certain evils, but he is responsible for very great goods. This is often forgotten. The doctrine of the Incarnation leaves the Christian obligated at once to God and to man. …Whoever believes that Christ is the Word made flesh believes that every man must in some sense be regarded as Christ.[586]

According to Merton, this Christologically based ethic can be applied to many ethical dilemmas. It is imperative Christians remember that we are always "facing the questions that were asked of Cain and Judas" because we are always "our brother's keepers."[587] Therefore, in response to the question, can we choose peace, Merton declares yes and he reminds his readers that it is "irresponsible and unchristian [to] consent to the demonic use of power for the destruction of a whole nation, a whole continent, or possibly even the whole human race."[588]

Merton also makes frequent references to Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963) considering it a source of immense wisdom for the conflicts in America. Baker argues that this particular encyclical, and more generally the work of Pope John XXIII, produced significant changes in the Catholic Church by emphasizing the church as "God's servant in the world and as God's instrument of redemption for man's social and spiritual life."[589] For Merton, this encyclical was an invaluable document that addressed the war by discussing the many social and human rights issues in modern society.[590] The great success of this document, in Merton's opinion, is that it seeks to "clear the air" by challenging the current "climate of thoughtlessness," which has made it hard to objectively see our own plight.[591] Instead, Pope John reinforces the rights to which each person is entitled, the inherent dignity of the human person, and the common good.[592] However, Merton stresses that it is important to clarify that Pope John does not seek to reinforce the rights of the individual alone; rather, Pope John is describing the inherent

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[586] Ibid., 75.

[587] Ibid.

[588] Ibid.

[589] Baker, *Thomas Merton Social Critic*, 41.

[590] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 78.

[591] Ibid., 77-78.

[592] Ibid., 78-82. See: *Peace on Earth: Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII, 'Pacem in terris'* (Rome, ITL: Vatican, 1963), n.12-13, n.20, n.30, n.35-36, n.48, n.53-64, n.74-75, n.85, n.98-100, n.104, n.121-125, n.132-145.

rights and dignity endowed within each person within society.[593] By emphasizing the inherent value of each person in communion with every other person, Pope John is helping to build an atmosphere where moral decisions can be honestly discussed and formed so that a climate of violence can be avoided. When applying this to the Christian responsibility, Merton echoes Pope John's call for us to free ourselves from a "climate of confusion" that is fed through the information popularized by mass media and the voices of corrupt leaders.[594] The misinformation that these sources provide makes building an atmosphere of peace even more challenging since the truth becomes engineered by publicists who prefer particular versions of events, or interpretations of reality. We must, therefore, be open to honestly learning about and seeing the truth by cultivating an "attitude of openness." Merton explains: "only if we remain open, detached, humble in the presence of objective truth and of our fellow man, will we be able to choose peace."[595]

The Christian responsibility is to be a peacemaker, which means Christians are called to continually strive to build genuine peace. This does not mean one must be a pacifist who protests, but rather to be one who builds peace by building new relationships with others.[596] According to Merton, the Christian ought to know that "peace demands the most heroic labor and the most difficult sacrifice."[597] Peace is not defeatism; it is essential to the Christian gospel.

> Christian peace…was an eschatological gift of the Risen Christ. …It was given with the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit, making men spiritual and uniting them to the 'mystical'

[593] On the difference between the individual and the person, Merton explains that the individual considers only the one person, who they are and only their specific needs separate from all others. This differs from speaking about the person since, "the person can never be properly understood outside the framework of social relationships and obligations, for the person exists not merely in order to fight for survival, not only to function efficiently, and overcome others in competition for the goods of this earth which are thought to guarantee happiness. The person finds his reason for existence in the realm of truth, justice, love and liberty." Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 117-118.

[594] Ibid., 80-81.

[595] Ibid., 87.

[596] Merton discusses the issue of pacifism arguing that it is often misunderstood to be a form of extreme optimism that can only exist apart from society. Alternatively, pacifism can also be treated by some as if it were its own religion, where the "pacifist is then regarded as one who 'believes in peace' so to speak as an article of faith." In Merton's opinion, Christian pacifism must be connected to the Christian faith as "an integral part of Christianity." Ibid., 90-91.

[597] Ibid., 93.

> Body of Christ. Christian peace is in fact a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and a sign of the Divine Presence in the world.[598]

The role of the Christian peacemaker also involves a social element where one seeks to build the common good. On this note, Merton briefly addresses the issue of authority, referring once again to *Pacem in Terris*, where those who hold power and authority are called to never put their own desires before the common good, and if they do, they "are no better than bandits."[599] Moreover, those in authority should not use force, or the threat of force, in order to ensure authority. True authority can only be founded on reason and conscience, and according to both Pope John and Merton, humanity will freely follow an authority based on truth that builds up the common good.[600] The Christian responsibility to be a peacemaker is therefore not only possible, but a necessary requirement of the Christian faith that will contribute to the common good since it embodies the Gospel message of love and truth. This response to the civil rights movement not only demonstrates Merton's interest in the social and political issues of his time, but it also outlines his ethics as he explains how humanity is responsible for building an ethic of peacemaking. He writes:

> where there is a deep, simple, all-embracing love of man, of the created world of living and inanimate things, then there will be respect for life, for freedom, for truth, for justice and there will be humble love of God. But where there is no love of man, no love of life, then make all the laws you want, all the edicts and treaties, issue all the anathemas; set up all the safeguards and inspections, fill the air with spying satellites, and hang cameras on the moon. As long as you see your fellow man as a being essentially to be feared, mistrusted, hated, and destroyed, there cannot be peace on earth. And who knows if fear alone will suffice to prevent a war of total destruction? Pope John was not among those who believe that fear is enough.[601]

While Merton outlines the Christian responsibility to build genuine peace, he also acknowledges the challenges of doing so in our modern world, specifically amidst the growing sense of pessimism, and the reality that the Church is now living in diaspora with communities scattered throughout the world.[602]

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[598] Ibid., 95.

[599] Ibid., 119.

[600] Ibid., 119-120 and *Peace on Earth: Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII, 'Pacem in terris'*, n. 47.

[601] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 130-131.

[602] Ibid., 132-133. See Merton's essay, "The Christian in Diaspora."

The essays contained in *Seeds of Destruction* can be interpreted as quite radical, particularly during the time in which Merton was writing and publishing these ideas. Baker himself notes that Merton's social activism and writing in the 1960s "seemed at times decidedly anti-American."[603] There was some backlash regarding Merton's critique of the 'white liberal' in *Seeds of Destruction*. This is most evident in a review by Martin E. Marty who felt Merton's reflections on the responsibilities of the white liberal were exaggerated.[604] However, within a few years of posting this review, Marty wrote an open letter to Merton retracting his first review and arguing instead that Merton's view of the civil rights movement was indeed accurate.[605] Regardless of this backlash, the relevance and importance of Merton's social critiques have been emphasized by many Merton scholars, such as Patricia A. Burton, who states that Merton's writing on social issues in the 1960s contain this reoccurring theme, "his worry about what appeared to be the moral passivity of American Catholics."[606] Ross Labrie has also noted how the topic of war and peace contributed to Merton's evolving sense of "Christian humanism as a collaborative ethic," particularly when he described the Christian peacemaker as becoming vulnerable in order to emulate Christ the peacemaker, but who also protects "human beings caught up in a concrete situation where 'rights are denied' and 'lives are threatened.'"[607]

Seeds of Destruction demonstrates Merton's growing sense of his own responsibility in the world. Just as Pope John was beginning his papacy in 1958, Baker writes that "Merton was in the process of reevaluating his own responsibility to the world," and that his increasing interest in social activism was also influenced by his desire to "emulate the saints and become one himself."[608] While these essays demonstrate Merton's demand for a Christian ethic that seriously addresses issues of civil rights and peace, Merton's own arguments and reasoning for such an

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[603] Baker, *Thomas Merton Social Critic*, 42.

[604] Martin E. Marty, "Sowing Thorns in the Flesh," *Book Week* 2 (17 January 1965): 4.

[605] Martin E. Marty, "To: Thomas Merton. RE: Your Prophecy" in *The National Catholic Reporter* 3, no 43 (30 August, 1967): 6. Merton replied to this open letter and his response was posted in *The National Catholic Reporter* the following month. See: Thomas Merton "Negro Violence and White Non-Violence" in *National Catholic Reporter* 30, no 44 (6 September 1967): 8.

[606] Patricia A. Burton, "Introduction: The Book that Never Was" in *Thomas Merton: Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia A. Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004) xxvi.

[607] Ross Labrie. "Christian Humanism and the Roots of Peace in Thomas Merton" *Renascence* 59, no. 4 (2007): 301.

[608] Baker, *Thomas Merton Social Critic*, 42.

ethic extend beyond these issues. His concern with building peace, the common good, hearing the prophetic voice of the oppressed, and the need to address misinformation and the abuse of power each align with an ecological ethic that also calls for such Christian responsibility.

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (1966)

This is perhaps one of Merton's most unique pieces of writing because of the book's flexible writing style, and in part due to the wide variety of topics on which the book touches. In the preface, he explains how this book is not meant to be a spiritual journal or a theological textbook; rather, it contains theological reflections and questions relevant to the current time (the 1960s). Merton engages in some simple systematic theological reflection and makes frequent reference to influential protestant theologians, such as Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), often pointing out areas of agreement and disagreement.[609] There are also many references to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, particularly his theological writing about the Incarnation, science, and creation.[610] Overall, this book is a collection of "personal reflections, insights, metaphors, observations, [and] judgements on readings and events" which Merton has woven together to create a "personal and monastic meditation, a testimony of Christian reflection in the mid-twentieth century, a confrontation of twentieth-century questions in the light of a monastic commitment, which inevitably makes one something of a bystander."[611] It is also important to note that many of the reflections in this book are perhaps influenced by some of Merton's important personal and spiritual experiences, which according to Anne E. Carr would explain the "radically new tone" of the book.[612] Merton's personal and spiritual growth is also relevant for his clear concern regarding how the monastic life should support the Catholic

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[609] While Merton does engage frequently in this book with Barth and Bonhoeffer, he notes in the preface that this "ecumenical view is not what is most important in this book." Rather, he is simply "a Catholic sharing the Protestant experience," even though as a Catholic he does not share their Protestantism. See: Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 6-7.

[610] George Kilcourse has also commented that Merton's engagement with Teilhard here reflects his own excitement and agreement with Teilhard's Christology. He argues, "Merton's reading of his [Teilhard's] revolutionary theory of the universe converging toward a Christogenesis, or Christ consciousness, warrants special attention." See: George Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ*, 116. Merton's Teilhard references are scattered throughout *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. See: Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 17-18, 51, 321.

[611] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 5-6.

[612] Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*, 55. The notable personal and spiritual experiences include Merton's friendship with the student nurse, and his mystical experience which is recounted in detail in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (157-158).

Church's engagement with the modern world, and the need for each monk to enrich one's contemplative life by becoming "open to the life and experience of the greater, more troubled, and more vocal world beyond the cloister."[613]

Since the book contains a series of reflections that range between the years 1956 and 1965, each page contains multiple passages, some quite short, resulting in a text that moves between topics in a rather disjointed manner. Nonetheless, the book is held together with the constant theme of Merton as a bystander. The term bystander is very telling of Merton's own reflection on his relationship to the issues of the world. Carr succinctly explains that this term "refers to those who, like Merton himself, are intellectuals and believe that their innocence in the face of world crisis is preserved by their position as detached observers, on a plane above politics."[614] Much of Merton's writing here is specifically challenging this separation between the monk and the world by particularly addressing and rejecting his own role as a bystander. Keeping this bystander perspective in mind, the key topics and themes relevant for Merton's nature mysticism include his reflections on the monastic vocation, his personal spiritual growth (of particular importance is his mystical experience in Louisville), the relationship between the Church and the modern world, and some brief reflections on nature. Tying each of these topics together is Merton's call for each person to turn towards the world and to be aware of the current "profound spiritual crisis of the whole world."[615] These sections of the book repeatedly call for a turning toward the world, an essential characteristic of nature mysticism.

On the monastic vocation, Merton revisits the Rule of St. Benedict urging monks to reacquaint themselves with the actual rule, rather than misinterpreting the rule as instructing monks to live forever alone and afraid of the world and those in it.[616] This misinterpretation risks monasteries

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[613] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 7.

[614] Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*, 56. Carr provides some history to this title explaining that Merton had written a previous essay, "Letter to an Innocent Bystander" which is included in his book *Behavior of Titans* (1961). In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Merton revisits some of the themes also discussed in this essay, but according to Carr, Merton's approach to those outside the monastery has now been softened, and "the pious hostility and suspicion of the world, characteristic of the early Merton, have disappeared." Ibid., 57.

[615] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 67.

[616] Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict: A Norman Prose Version*, ed. Ruth J. Dean and Dominica Legge (Oxford, UK: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1964).

turning in on themselves, something he warns monastic communities to avoid. According to Merton, St. Benedict's Rule should be understood differently.

> St Benedict never said the monk must *never* go out, *never* receive a letter, *never* have a visitor, *never* talk to anyone, *never* hear any news. He meant the monk should distinguish what is useless or harmful from what is useful and salutary, and *in all things* glorify God. Rejection of the world? The monk must *see Christ* in the pilgrim and stranger who come from the world, especially if they are poor. Such is the spirit and letter of the Rule.[617]

The Rule of St. Benedict is crucial for Western monasticism, but its interpretation by monastic communities is what Merton finds concerning.[618] Much of this strict monastic separation is perhaps related to how monastic communities view the world, which is why Merton calls for each traditional monastic community to reassess their *contemptus mundi* (contempt of the world). While perhaps *contemptus mundi* was originally intended to free the monk from the pursuits of the material, political world, he is concerned that the way monastic communities demonstrate *contemptus mundi* today seems more focused on strict obedience to Church politics.[619] In fact, Merton cautions that too much detachment from the world could result in spiritual loss, or a stunted spiritual life since "those who are more 'human' make better monks precisely because they are more human and because they simply do not believe the injunctions of those who try to tell them that they must be less human."[620] This is an important point for Merton since he continues to discuss in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* how the Church is struggling to deal with the modern world. He stresses that the monk is part of the entire Christian community, the Church, and together each member of the Church is called to share the Gospel with the world, not create divisions that isolate those who are assumed to be "spiritually elite." We must reject the "glorification of monasticism" because it limits the relationship between monasticism and the world. [621] What is required, according to Merton, is a much simpler, general, and inclusive

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[617] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 15. Italics original to text.

[618] The Rule of St. Benedict has a specific role in the monastic life. Merton explains that "St. Benedict's principle is that the Rule should be moderate, so that the strong may desire to do more and the weak may not be overwhelmed and driven out of the cloister." Ibid., 96.

[619] Ibid., 45.

[620] Ibid., 213.

[621] Ibid., 179. Merton includes himself in the move to reject the glorification of monasticism, and he also discusses the need to reduce distinctions between types of Catholics, such as the emerging distinction between conservative Catholics and progressive Catholics. He writes, "For my own part I consider myself neither conservative nor an extreme progressive. I would like to think I am what Pope John was – a progressive with a deep respect and love for tradition – in other words a progressive who wants to preserve a very clear and marked *continuity* with the past and not make silly and idealistic compromises with the present – yet to be *completely open*

understanding that monks, priests, nuns, and lay people together are each called to be Catholic. For Merton, to be Catholic requires one to enter into the pain and suffering of the world, and the only way we can do this is to first face our own problems.[622]

In light of Merton's call that each person needs to face one's own problems, he includes in this book a very detailed account of a significant experience that helped him address his own contempt for the world. This particular story is "one of the most often remarked passages in the writing of Thomas Merton."[623] On March 18, 1958, Merton recounts going to Louisville with a fellow monk, Yvo, with the job of printing postulants' guides.[624] It was during this trip out of the monastery that Merton recounts an overwhelming emotional and mystical experience.

> In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. Not that I question the reality of my vocation, or of my monastic life: but the conception of "separation from the world" that we have in the monastery too easily presents itself as a complete illusion: the illusion that by making vows we become a different species of being, pseudoangels, "spiritual men," men of interior life, what have you.[625]

Merton's mystical experience, while only a fleeting moment, had a lasting impact upon him and also became a source of theological reflection. His mystical experience awakened an

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to the modern world while retaining the clearly defined, traditionally Catholic position." Ibid., 312. Italics original to text.

[622] Ibid., 184-185. This call to enter into the pain and suffering of the world is a topic Merton also discussed with the novice monks at Gethsemani. James Finley, a novice who received advice from Merton, recounts that once when he was complaining to Merton, Merton instructed him to shift his perspective. "He said, you know we did not come to this monastery to find a rarified place beyond the suffering of this world. We came to this monastery to feel the suffering of the world in our heart. The paradox of true solitude is that it re-immerses us in the beauty of this world." See: Finley, "Thomas Merton: Mystic Teacher for Our Age," 193.

[623] Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*, 57.

[624] This experience is recounted in Merton's book *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Merton biographer, Michael Mott, provides the date of this event. See: Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 313.

[625] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 156-157. There is a significant amount of theological reflection by Merton scholars on this mystical experience. Carr and Mott are two important Merton scholars who both discuss this experience in relation to a dream Merton had just prior to the experience at the corner of Fourth and Walnut. The dream centered on a visit from a young Jewish girl named Proverb. Both Carr and Mott see these events (Merton's mystical experience, his dream, and his poem *Hagia Sophia*) as evidence Merton was in some way addressing his issues with the feminine and love for others. See Carr, "Chapter 3: Conjectures at a Turning Point," in *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self* (54-74), and Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 311-313.

understanding of his role as a monk in the world, not as a monk who is somehow completely superior to and separate from the world. He realizes that "we [monks] are in the same world as everybody else."[626] His love for all and his feeling of communion with every other person led him to declare, "I have the immense joy of being *man*, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate." The only downside to this great experience is realizing that he cannot even fully express this experience of love to the strangers he sees in Louisville since "there is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."[627]

As Merton continues to record this experience, he explains how he not only felt a deep love for all the strangers around him in the city, but that he was allowed to see the beauty of each stranger around him and that this was a special gift.

> Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really *are*. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. …I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other. But this cannot be *seen*, only believed and "understood" by a peculiar gift.[628]

This beauty of the soul that he witnessed leads Merton to conclude that there is some part of our soul that is "untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal." This specific beauty of the soul is "the pure glory of God in us."[629] Since this experience is a peculiar but unique gift, Merton does not attempt to explain how another person can also see this in others.

This pivotal mystical experience of Merton's is perhaps one of the reasons his work in the 1960s carries more of an interest in social issues than his previous work. As Carr states, "while *Conjectures* is not as personal a statement as his earlier monastic journal, *The Sign of Jonas*, it does provide indications of new directions in Merton's life."[630] These new directions include Merton's reflections on the world (secularism and modernity), politics, science, technology, and

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[626] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 157.

[627] Ibid. Italics original to the text.

[628] Ibid., 158. Italics original to text.

[629] Ibid.

[630] Carr., *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self*, 62. Italics original to text.

ethics. These are all very much connected for Merton, and throughout *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, he is frequently describing how issues in each of these areas is contributing to the current

> profound spiritual crisis of the whole world, manifested largely in desperation, cynicism, violence, conflict, self-contradiction, ambivalence, fear and hope, doubt and belief, creation and destructiveness, progress and programs that only dull the general anguish for a moment until it bursts out everywhere in a still more acute and terrifying form. We do not know if we are building a fabulously wonderful world or destroying all that we have ever had, all that we have achieved![631]

Similar to some of Merton's earlier theological writing on the self, he once again reasserts that the secular world is our false self and is therefore full of illusions. His description of the world includes the media, the false depiction of society as a peaceful place with ideal beauty, expensive unnecessary products, and unattainable perfection.[632] Technology is also another area of concern, one that he argues is to blame for much of the breakdown of society. While he admits that technological advancements are amazing to see, there is very little conversation regarding how to handle the uncontrollable explosion of technology in society, where "the very splendor and rapidity of technological development is a factor of disintegration."[633] Merton is not against science or technology; rather, he is raising questions regarding the purpose of these human advancements. After his own mystical experience, he is now addressing specific issues of the world rather than looking at the entire world as a problem. This is why he targets technology and science, and why he questions how much control these advancements have over the world. Moreover, Merton argues that a dangerous trend of dismissing ethical questions that challenge technology and science is emerging. There is now a stigma surrounding questions about technology and science.

> [It is] the unforgiveable sin in the eyes of modern man…science can do everything, science must be permitted to do everything it likes, science is infallible and impeccable,

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[631] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 67.

[632] Ibid., 48. The topic of the world is one Merton sporadically refers to in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. One of his clearer descriptions of his meaning of this term is how world represents the false self. He explains, "what do you mean by 'the world' anyway? …My concrete answer is…what I abandoned when I 'left the world' and came to the monastery was the *understanding of myself* that I had developed in the context of civil society—my identification with what appeared to me to be its aims. …But it did mean a certain set of servitudes that I could no longer accept—servitudes to certain standards of value." (Ibid., 47)

[633] Ibid., 72.

> all that is done by science is right. No matter how monstrous, no matter how criminal an act may be, if it is justified by science it is unassailable.[634]

Merton's view of technology has been the subject of Donald P. St. John's research, who analyzes how Merton brings together a concern for technology and ecological issues in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. According to Merton, technology has become a continually evolving "modern self," where new products and overconsumption raise serious ethical questions that the majority of people seek to avoid.[635] St. John explains that Merton was sensitive to the tendency for humans to avoid such challenges. He was not a complete pessimist, because as St. John states, "Merton would undoubtedly agree that the recovery and exercise of a sense of justice and mercy in the human order is essential. But…this recovery would be inextricably linked with the rediscovery of the justice and mercy of God manifest in creation."[636]

This brings Merton to the issue of ethics and politics. On the few occasions when ethical questions regarding science and technology must be addressed, Merton observes that it is now politicians who are given authority on these matters. This reality has created a strange dynamic within the modern conversation on morality, leading him to conclude that the focus now is not about how to do what is good, but rather the "apparent virtues of the evil" in a world where evil "is no longer threatened by goodness."[637] This reality has a serious impact on how society and people function, and according to Merton, this has also created a society that is "strictly servile." By strictly servile he is referring to the focus on creating and preparing the best material results, the best products or technologies, which will help society complete other tasks in the moment. This has created a society where the end in itself is ignored, and humanity is valued in terms of how one can serve, not in terms of true, inherent dignity. Merton emphasizes that this servile society has made us "so obsessed with *doing* that we have no time and no imagination left for *being*."[638] This is also why Merton refers to the current time as a suicidal age, where "there is

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[634] Ibid., 75.

[635] Donald P. St. John, "Technological Culture and Contemplative Ecology in Thomas Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*" *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 6 no. 2 (2002): 164-165.

[636] Ibid., 181.

[637] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 65-66. Merton notes here that this is also Bonhoeffer's perspective on the topic of morality in the modern world. See: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith, ed. Eberhard Bethge (London, UK: SCM Press, 1955).

[638] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 308. Italics original to text.

only one remedy—the surrender that seeks faith in God as a gift that is not our due, and that is willing to suffer great indigence and peril while waiting to receive it."[639]

This modern suicidal age that is obsessed with science and technology, which generates a servile society, has resulted in a lack of ethical questioning and Christian ethical engagement. Merton takes the opportunity to explain that perhaps an incorrect understanding of Christian ethics is part of the current issue. Christian ethics are not simply about addressing questions on what is right and what is wrong, or what is good and what is evil. Rather, the purpose of Christian ethics should be to seek the truth with love. "To imprison ethics in the realm of division, of good and evil, right and wrong," Merton argues, "is to condemn it to sterility, and rob it of its real reason for existing, which is *love*. Love cannot be reduced to one virtue among many others prescribed by ethical imperatives."[640]

The goal of Christian ethics should not be to generate fear or to exile the heretic; rather, Christian ethics requires one to examine one's self and to realize we each hold the freedom to choose since "to know good and evil is to know oneself as the subject of choice confronted with indefinite possibilities."[641] Since Merton argues that no subject should be free from ethical reflection, it is imperative Christians incorporate Christian social action into their lives. Christian social action considers all that humanity does, whether in society or individually, as spiritual; it "conceives man's work itself as a *spiritual* reality."[642] Christian social action does not seek to encourage only the success of the Church; rather, Merton explains how Christian social action rests on the call to imitate Christ, "because God became man, because every man is potentially Christ, because Christ is our brother, and because we have no right to let our brother live in want, or in degradation, or in any form of squalor whether physical or spiritual."[643] Christian social action, therefore, is one way to bring Christianity and Christian ethics back into engagement with the

[639] Ibid., 223, 225.

[640] Ibid., 166. Italics original to text.

[641] Ibid., 167.

[642] Ibid., 81. Italics original to text.

[643] Ibid., 81-82.

many serious ethical dilemmas that face the modern world today. Moreover, it will also "liberate man from all forms of servitude."[644]

In addition to Merton's reflections on the modern world, monasticism, and the lack of ethical accountability, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* also includes many poetic and reflective passages referring to the natural surroundings of the monastery's lands. Some of these passages demonstrate serious theological reflection on the human responsibility towards all creation.[645] St. John interprets these nature meditations "as presentations of attitudes and states of consciousness intended to contrast with the narrow vision of the technological mind."[646] While many of these passages are short and often function like an introduction for an entirely different topic, they each demonstrate the influence of nature on Merton's spiritual and theological writing.[647] Some of his more direct Christian interpretations of nature include descriptions of the fresh air to be like the "clean breath of the Holy Spirit," and the valuable role of natural elements in the Easter Vigil liturgy. On this latter topic he writes, "fire, water, spring, made sacred and explicit by the Resurrection, which finds in them symbols that point to itself."[648] Another example includes his comments on a successful growing season for corn, of which Merton reflects that perhaps the Mayas and Incas, who appreciated this natural resource, may have unknowingly encouraged "a pre-Eucharistic rightness and wisdom."[649]

Merton also emphasizes the beauty of some of the animals that live in the woods of the monastery, such as the beauty of the woodpecker, the green heron, the black widow spider, and a colt running around the hills freely and happily.[650] Merton spent a good amount of time in the

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[644] Ibid., 83.

[645] While some of these nature passages create a sense of dualism where Merton is separate from nature, I do not believe these passages were intended to generate this kind of dualism (as evident in Merton's discussion on the need for the monk to re-evaluate his *contemptus mundi*). Most of these nature passages are included as simple, but meaningful, reflections that appear to be great sources of inspiration for Merton.

[646] St. John, "Technological Culture and Contemplative Ecology in Thomas Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*," 170.

[647] An example of a nature reflection functioning like an introduction to a serious topic would be Merton's reflection of the fresh air of the outside world as being like the "clean breath of the Holy Spirit." This reflection is then directly followed with Merton's emphasis on the need for the monk to engage with the world, to develop a better understanding of the Rule of St. Benedict. Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 14-15.

[648] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 14, 160.

[649] Ibid., 306.

[650] Ibid., 16, 23, 24, 304.

monastery's woods and saw many sunrises, and so the sunrise becomes a frequent source of aesthetic appreciation and of mystical reflection. In one passage Merton describes the sunrise to be like a forest fire when "the sun became distinguished as a person and he shone silently and with solemn power through the branches, and the whole world was silent and calm."[651] In another sunrise reflection on the morning of a retreat (that focused on the topic of sin), Merton is overwhelmed by the sunrise, prompting him to describe how all creation calls upon humanity to worship God the Creator.

> Sunrise is an event that calls forth solemn music in the very depths of man's nature, as if one's whole being had to attune itself to the cosmos and praise God for the new day, praise Him in the name of all the creatures that ever were or ever will be. I look at the rising sun and feel that now upon me falls the responsibility of seeing what all my ancestors have seen, in the Stone Age and even before it, praising God before me. …When the sun rises each one of us is summoned by the living and the dead to praise God.[652]

Once again, when describing another sunrise, Merton seems to become lost in creation. He is unable to focus on praying the Psalms because he is distracted by nature. It is in this moment that Merton shares one of his most systematic nature mysticism reflections. He writes:

> How absolutely central is the truth that we are first of all *part of nature*, though we are a very special part, that which is conscious of God. In solitude, one is entirely surrounded by beings which perfectly obey God. This leaves open only one place for me, and if I occupy that place then I, too, am fulfilling His will. The place nature "leaves open" belongs to the conscious one, the one who is aware, who sees all this as a unity, who offers it all to God in praise, joy, thanks. To me, these are not "spiritual acts" or special virtues, but rather the simple, normal, obvious functions of man, without which it is hard to see how he can be human. [653]

We lose our place in nature when we become immersed in the world, distracted by technology, desires, or social demands. In order to find our place in nature we must go into nature. Merton goes on to challenge the suggestion that Christianity creates this separation between humanity and nature, arguing rather that this separation is a result of "man's own technocratic and self-centered 'worldliness'…which separates him from the reality of creation." [654] In order to repair our relationship with the cosmos, Merton instructs that we must humbly accept that we too are

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[651] Ibid., 179.

[652] Ibid., 280.

[653] Ibid., 294. Italics original to text.

[654] Ibid., 295.

part of nature. Without this, our false self can run rampant as we isolate ourselves from the world and we make our own self a 'god.'

Not all of Merton's nature reflections are always praising the beauty of creation. There are also examples where he laments the human impact on nature, or the absence of human awareness that we are part of nature. One example is his description of how the valley awakens with monastery bells, after which the birds chirp as the sun appears. He writes, "the most wonderful moment of the day is that when creation in its innocence asks permission to "be" once again, as it did on the first morning that ever was."[655] He compares how the birds awake in response to the gift of light which comes from God while people awake with plans and expectations of the day which are of their own making. This reflective moment concludes with Merton describing all creation as

> an unspeakable secret: paradise is all around us and we do not understand. It is wide open. The sword is taken away, but we do not know it: we are off "one to his farm and another to his merchandise." Lights on. Clocks ticking. Thermostats working. Stoves cooking. Electric shavers filling radios with static. "Wisdom," cries the dawn deacon, but we do not attend.[656]

In another nature passage about a rainy day, Merton expresses concern wondering what poison is in the rain as a result of nuclear weapon testing.[657] There are also occasions where he appears very annoyed with human behavior, such as hearing a chain saw cutting down trees in the forest outside the monastery, and again when he hears some loud farm vehicle in the distance from the monastery. He cannot identify what new piece of technology the vehicle is so instead he names it Behemoth.[658] There are also a few occasions where Merton's reflections on humanity and nature begin to enter into ethics, specifically how Christians ought to interact with nature. He returns again to his theology of the self and suggests that "our attitude towards nature is simply an extension of our attitude toward ourselves, and toward one another. We are free to be at peace with ourselves and others, and also with nature."[659] How we treat the world, therefore, needs to be understood in terms of how we treat and view our own self. Elsewhere, in a call for respecting

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[655] Ibid., 131.

[656] Ibid., 132.

[657] Ibid., 230.

[658] Ibid., 305.

[659] Ibid., 139.

creation, he cautions that our continued destruction of the world will only lead to continued conflict between people.

> A respect for "the world" that does not rest on a real intuition of the act of being and a grateful, contemplative, and Christian sense of being will end only in the further destruction and debasement of the world in the name of a false humanism which has no other fruit than to make man hate himself, hate life, and hate the world he lives in.[660]

According to Patrick O'Connell, Merton's many meditations on nature, found within *Conjectures* and much of his other writing, demonstrate Merton's growing sense of environmental spirituality. He writes, "Merton thus sees ecological consciousness as an essential part of an authentic contemporary contemplative awareness, a necessary way of being responsive to the revelation of wisdom in creation."[661] These nature reflections offer much now to the theological task of responding to the current climate crisis. While some of these passages on nature may appear to be scattered thoughts, they reflect Merton's own serious nature reflections which are very much an extension of his theological writing. Dennis Patrick O'Hara argues that nature is a constant source informing Merton's theology; "this connection between our symbols—based on our appreciation of nature—and the way we are able to speak of God was also apparent to Merton. …Merton contends that nature informs our prayers, acting as cables, medium, and message. Creation has a sacramental quality."[662] As we turn now to his poetry, the theme of nature continues with the added emphasis of the presence of God throughout nature.

The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton (1977)

Throughout his life, Merton was always writing poetry, and so his poetry has become an essential partner for this theology.[663] Most of his poetry that contains significant reflections on nature, which can be considered part of his nature mysticism, was written during the years just prior to and while living at the hermitage at Gethsemani (1963 to 1968). In a journal entry written at the hermitage, Merton reflected on the centrality of nature in his life, writing that "the

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[660] Ibid., 222-223.

[661] Patrick O'Connell, "The Traditional Sources of Thomas Merton's Environmental Spirituality" *Spiritual Life* 56, no. 3 (2010): 167.

[662] Dennis Patrick O'Hara, "'The Whole World … Has Appeared as a Transparent Manifestation of the Love of God': Portents of Merton as Eco-Theologian." *Merton Annual* 9 (1996): 100.

[663] Merton's poetry covers a wide range of topics and has been researched extensively by George Woodcock. See: George Woodcock, *Thomas Merton: Monk and Poet A Critical Study* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978).

silence of the forest is my bride and the sweet dark warmth of the whole world is my love."[664] The value of Merton's nature poetry has been highlighted by eco-theologian Thomas Berry, who describes Merton's poetry as a gift that offers a "sense of the sacred throughout the entire range of the natural world."[665] Kathleen Deignan has also noted the role of nature in Merton's life, particularly his interest in nature as a child and his own interest in Franciscan spirituality.[666] Deignan emphasizes that the theme of nature is most prominent in Merton's writing and poetry during his hermitage years. She describes Merton's hermitage years as a period when his mystical theology and his relationship with nature grew immensely.

> He [Merton] chose to live alone in the forest as refuge for his own existential pain, but also to make reparation for the violation of earth and earth peoples. Here he became a poet, a protestor, a prophet, a political prisoner, and an escaped prisoner. Ever in search of his "true self" beneath his distress and artifice, he came in time to realize it was none other than his "green self"—his original nature healed of inner agitation, congestion, drivenness, turmoil, and suffering by entertainment to the merciful rhythms of the elements, the seasons, the creatures, in the particular bioregion of Kentucky that he called home.[667]

Merton's nature poetry written at the hermitage contains direct reflections on animals, weather, the stillness of creation, and humanity's destructive presence. Influential scholars who have collected and studied Merton's nature poetry, such as Deignan, Monica Weis, and George Kilcourse, will be most helpful in navigating Merton's work as they identify where "we hear the voice of a creation mystic inviting us to become part of the present festival, to join the general dance and embrace nature as the bride."[668]

George Kilcourse goes into great detail dissecting and explaining some of the major themes of Merton's poetry, specifically Merton's poetic reflections on the theology of the true self, Christology, and nature. Kilcourse explains that "the poet [Merton] seeks to recreate his readers by exposing the illusory false self and summoning the true or inner self, grounded, for Merton, in the experience of Christ, who has restored our lost likeness to God and transfigured human

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[664] Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage*, vol. 5 of *The Journals of Thomas Merton*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 240.

[665] Thomas Berry, "Foreword" in *Writings on Nature: Thomas Merton When the Trees Say Nothing*, ed. Kathleen Deignan (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin, 2003) 19.

[666] Deignan, *Writings on Nature: Thomas Merton When the Trees Say Nothing*, 24-25.

[667] Ibid., 33-34.

[668] Ibid., 41.

nature."[669] In order to identify these themes in Merton's poetry, Kilcourse separates Merton's poetry into two categories. The first category is Merton's poetry of paradise consciousness, which includes his poetry that contains a "spirituality of the true self in poems which always imply and sometimes explicitly refer to the self in Christ."[670] The second category is Merton's poetry of the forest, which includes Merton's more recent poems where he "recreates the experience of the true self as sublimely free and resilient, capable of finding authentic new life in the wake of personal and social disruptions."[671]

Kilcourse provides many examples of Merton's paradise consciousness and forest poetry where nature is an essential component of the poem and a source for some of his theological reflection. The poem "Song for Nobody" (1963) is a good example of a poem that expresses Merton's theology of the true self, and Christology, through the growth of a yellow flower.

> A yellow flower
> (Light and spirit)
> Sings by itself
> For nobody.
>
> A golden spirit
> (Light and emptiness)
> Sings without a word
> By itself.
>
> Let no one touch this gentle sun
> In whose dark eye
> Someone is awake.
>
> (No light, no gold, no name, no color
> And no thought:
> O, wide awake!)
>
> A golden heaven

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[669] Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms,* 42.

[670] Ibid., 44. Kilcourse's categorizations of Merton's poetry builds from George Woodcock's categorization of Merton's poetry into poetry of the choir (Merton's early work) and poetry of the desert (Merton's later work). Kilcourse does not reject Woodcock's categorization; rather, he seeks to add two more categories in order to better understand Merton's poetry. Ibid. The theme of paradise in Merton's poetry has also been researched by Kathleen Deignan. See: Kathleen Deignan, "'Love for the Paradise Mystery'—Thomas Merton: Contemplative Ecologist," 551-555.

[671] Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms,* 44.

Sings by itself
A song to nobody.[672]

Here Kilcourse explains how Merton makes use of nature metaphors and nature imagery in order to express how the inner self (the yellow flower) is becoming the true self, in Christ (the light).[673] Again, in his poem "O Sweet Irrational Worship" (1963), Merton continues to weave together his theology and nature metaphors but this time describing himself joining with creation to worship the Creator.

Wind and bobwhite
And the afternoon sun.

By ceasing to question the sun
I have become light,

Bird and wind.

My leaves sing.

I am earth, earth

All these lighted things
Grow from my heart.

A tall, spare pine
Stands like the initial of my first
Name when I had one.

When I had a spirit,
When I was on fire
When this valley was
Made out of fresh air
You spoke my name
In naming Your silence:
O sweet, irrational worship!

I am earth, earth

My heart's love
Bursts with hay and flowers.
I am a lake of blue air

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[672] Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York, NY: New Directions, 1977), 337-338.

[673] Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms,* 65.

In which my own appointed place
Field and valley
Stand reflected.

I am earth, earth

Out of my grass heart
Rises the bobwhite.

Out of my nameless weeds
His foolish worship.[674]

Merton's poem, "Night-Flowering Cactus," makes powerful use an undesirable plant (cactus) struggling to transform into a flower, paralleling one's spiritual and personal growth. Kilcourse notes that this poem is perhaps a poetic autobiography of Merton's own transformation into Christ.[675] Kilcourse also argues that this particular poem is an excellent example of Merton's transformative Christological true-self theology, where "his poetry celebrates this Christological pattern of transformation."[676]

I know my time, which is obscure, silence and brief
For I am present without warning one night only.

When sun rises on the brass valleys I become serpent.

Though I show my true self only in the dark and to
no man
(For I appear by day as serpent)
I belong neither to night nor day.

Sun and city never see my deep white bell
Or know my timeless moment of void:
There is no reply to my munificence.

When I come I lift my sudden Eucharist
Out of the earth's unfathomable joy
Clean and total I obey the world's body
I am intricate and whole, not art but wrought passion
Excellent deep pleasure of essential waters
Holiness of forms and mineral mirth:

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[674] Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, 344-345.

[675] Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms*, 74.

[676] Ibid., 77.

I am extreme purity of virginal thirst.

I neither show my truth nor conceal it
My innocence is descried dimly
Only by divine gift
As a white cavern without explanation.

He who seeks my purity
Dares not speak of it.
When I open once for all my impeccable bell
No one questions my silence:
The all-knowing bird of night flies out of my mouth.

Have you seen it? Then though my mirth has
quickly ended
You live forever in its echo:
You will never be the same again.[677]

In these nature poems, the theme of transformation both within nature and within one's self is emphasized, although nature is not simply a vehicle Merton uses to express his theological ideas. Instead, nature provides a raw and vulnerable parallel to the spiritual life where the growth of the true self fosters a deeper identification between one's true self and nature. Many times Merton will describe the true self as hidden, specifically hidden within God; therefore, in order to discover one's true self, one must discover God.[678] During Merton's hermitage years, the hidden presence of God in creation becomes a reoccurring theme in his writing, and his interactions with animals in the forest, particularly the shy deer, not only represent this hidden true self, but also the hidden presence of God.[679]

While Merton's poetry of the forest contains many of the same themes present in the paradise consciousness poetry, Kilcourse explains that one unique element of his poetry of the forest is that it contains more direct references to animals. It is in this poetry where Merton's meditative reflection on animals in the forest, particularly the deer, produces within him some of his deepest nature reflections, noting that "the deer reveals to me something essential in myself."[680] Many of

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[677] Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, 351-352.

[678] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 36.

[679] Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms*, 77-78.

[680] Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage*, 291. This quote has been referenced and discussed by both Kathleen Deignan (*Writings on Nature: Thomas Merton When the Trees Say Nothing*, 125-126) and George Kilcourse (*Ace of Freedoms*, 86).

Merton's journal reflections also involve poetic reflections on his observations of deer near his hermitage.[681] While these moments provide for Merton insights into the beauty of creation and the glory of God within creation, some of this poetry of the forest contains reflections on the suffering of nature. His poem, "Merlin and the Deer," captures one such moment with great beauty.

> After thrashing in the water of the reservoir
> The deer swims beautifully
> And so escapes
> Limping across the country road into the little cedars.
>
> Followed by Merlin's eye
> Bewitched, a simple spirit
> Merlin awakes
> He becomes a gentle savage
> Dressed in leaves
> He hums alone in the glade
> Says only a few phrases to himself
> Or a psalm to his companion
> Light in the wood
>
> Yes they can kill
> The lovely doe and deer
> In and out of season
>
> And messengers also
> Come to bring him back
> To hours and offices of men
>
> But he sees again
> The curved and graceful deer
> Fighting in the water
> And then leaving
>
> So he pulls out
> Of all that icy water himself
> And leaves the people
>
> "Il revient a ses forets

[681] Monica Weis has researched in detail the importance of deer for Merton, particularly between the years of 1963-1968. See: "Afterword: Woodland Deer: An Ecological Journey in Miniature," in *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton* (Lexington, KY: Kentucky University Press, 2011), 157-165. Kathleen Deignan has also highlighted and reprinted Merton's deer references from his journals. See: *Writings on Nature: Thomas Merton When the Trees Say Nothing*, 124-130.

Et cette fois pour toujours."

Now caught in many spells
Willing prisoner of trees and rain
And magic blossoms
The invisible people

Visit his jail
With forest stories
Tales without sound
And without conclusion
Clear fires without smoke
Fumbled prophecies
And Celtic fortunes.[682]

Merton's poetry of the forest, and his more general writing on nature, has also been described by Monica Weis to be not simply evidence of his admiration of nature but, rather as his way of expressing his kinship with other creatures.[683] Weis argues that Merton's poetry is about seeing differently, it calls one to see the wholeness of the cosmos. Even within what appear to be random references to nature scattered throughout his books and journals, Weis argues that "what is common to these notations is that Merton sees not only the object in itself but also its relationship to its local surroundings and, indeed, to the cosmos."[684] Since nature is not simply a muse for Merton's theology and poetry, his nature poetry should be understood as an essential component of his nature mysticism. As Ross Labrie rightly describes, nature provided for Merton a kind of aesthetic pleasure where he reflected on the freedom of nature, and enjoyed the ability of nature to "freshen his perspectives"; but, ultimately Merton's relationship with nature was reciprocal since "even when absolutely mute and still, nature could communicate, and did so in a number of Merton's poems."[685]

Thomas Merton's Nature Mysticism

Nature mysticism is a type of mysticism that emphasizes the consciousness of the presence of God within the cosmos that elicits not only a deep awareness of the sacredness and

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[682] Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, 736-737.

[683] Weis, *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, 134.

[684] Ibid., 75.

[685] Ross Labrie, *Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 84-85, 91.

interconnectedness of all creation but also contains an ethical imperative that strives to build an ethic of creation. Merton's theology of the self, his emphasis on contemplation, his cosmic Christology, his nature poetry, and his writing on social issues in the 1960s all contribute to his nature mysticism. As Weis concisely observers, "Merton regards religion and nature as integrally related; immersion in one leads to immersion in the other. In other words, commitment to contemplation and solitude leads to solidarity with and compassion for nature."[686] His nature mysticism is further evident in his own intimate relationship with creation and his mystical experience in Louisville, where he is overwhelmed by the presence of God in all that surrounds him. This experience made Merton rejoice in his humanity and established within him a deep love for the other.[687] His love of the other is therefore not only evident in his concern with civil rights issues, but also in his environmental concerns he shared with Rachel Carson. In addition to this, according to Kilcourse, Merton's own mystical experience in Louisville in 1958 had a lasting impact on his Christology which in turn contributed to Merton's nature mysticism.[688] Kilcourse describes the impact this event had on Merton's Christological development:

> Merton's turn to human experience, linked with his reclaiming an optimistic confidence in the goodness of creation and nature…mirrors the transition from an exclusively metaphysical Christology to the incorporation of a salvation-history Christology. …[T]he enlarged context of the dynamics of history as the arena for the experience of salvation in Christ comes up repeatedly in Merton's last decade.[689]

This transition to a salvation-history Christology is evident in Merton's reworking of *New Seeds of Contemplation*, which Kilcourse describes as a book of "meditations on the Christ."[690] Also, regarding *Conjectures of A Guilty Bystander*, Kilcourse explains that the Christology of Eastern Orthodoxy shines throughout the book in such a way that "the monk [Merton] was glimpsing the christological mystery that ineluctably led him back to the world with compassion and confidence in the capacity for human transfiguration."[691] Lastly, regarding Merton's *Seeds of Destruction*, Kilcourse describes how Merton's Christological development is strongest in his

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[686] Monica Weis, "Thomas Merton Advance Man for New Age Thinking About the Environment" *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 5, no. 2 (1998):1.

[687] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 156-157.

[688] Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms*, 92.

[689] Ibid.

[690] Ibid., 97.

[691] Ibid., 115.

embrace of the Incarnation, which he employs as the "center [of] his voice of dissent." Moreover, this book showcases Merton's ability as a bold social and moral critic whose critique of society is rooted in "the suffering Christ of emptiness and poverty [who can] manifest a way of transfigured hope for those who would do justice and walk humbly with the hidden God of compassion."[692] Ultimately, Kilcourse argues that Merton's salvation-history Christology has pushed him into the world with all its troubles. Furthermore, Merton's Christology has also enabled him to embrace the world (all creation) and it has ignited within him a responsibility of caring for all creation.

Merton's mystical experience in Louisville, along with his Christology, drew him into the presence of God and revealed to him the "profound spiritual crisis of the whole world."[693] This profound crisis refers to humanity's destructive and violent actions towards one another, society, human advancement, and nature. This is why Merton spoke so boldly of the need for peace in the midst of the civil rights movements, and why he challenged corrupt leaders, governments, and corporations who appeared to serve their own interests rather than the needs of the common good. His later work continually reminds the reader that Christianity is not separate from social issues since "Christianity is concerned with human crisis."[694] Responding to the profound spiritual crisis of the world is a part of the Christian responsibility to build peace, which means fostering and creating that which is good, not simply avoiding that which is bad. Even though *Seeds of Destruction* is focused on the Christian responsibility in regards to the civil rights movement, much of what Merton advised Christians to do in that situation can be applied to the current ecological crisis. This current crisis also requires a Christian response that holds governments and corporations responsible for not acting in a way that seriously deals with the current crisis. Merton's declaration still stands: "statesmen and governments which put their own interests before everything else, including justice and natural law, are no better than bandits."[695]

Merton's simple reflections on nature, and his more detailed nature poetry, are also examples of his nature mysticism. It is in these passages and poetry where nature reveals to Merton the genius

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[692] Ibid., 118, 120.

[693] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 67.

[694] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 18.

[695] Ibid., 119.

of God's creation, but also the call for humanity to live differently. More specifically, his nature poetry expresses his theology surrounding the unique intended relationship between nature and humanity. As noted by Deborah Kehoe, Merton's best poetry "demonstrates Merton's faith in the capacity of poetry to evoke experiences which prose can only relate."[696] Kehoe observes how Merton's poetry also contains themes surrounding nature's vulnerability and interconnectedness. She explains that his journals and poetry include an "ongoing record of reverence for the creatures with which he shared his home," but also a "growing awareness of the intricate web of life and the incalculable importance of every strand."[697] Moreover, poetry served for Merton as a way to deal with humanity's struggle to live and act responsibility with one another and creation. Kehoe explains that for Merton, poetry was an outlet where he could express his frustration and "convey hope for reconciliation between civilized culture and nature."[698]

Kathleen Deignan describes Merton's relationship with nature as "love for the paradise mystery," which is an expression Merton himself uses in his own writing on nature.[699] Deignan explains how for Merton, creation was paradise. His use of the term paradise is based on the biblical understanding of this term, but also contains his contemplative focus. Deignan explains, "In Merton's mind, 'paradise' is an ontological truth which has an epistemological challenge; it is our vocation, our existential labor, to awaken to 'paradise all around us.'"[700] While Merton first explained how contemplation brings us to our true self in God, Deignan argues that as Merton began to experience his own awakening to paradise, he saw how contemplation is also "the sacred therapeutic practice which evokes and nurtures paradise mind."[701] According to Deignan, it was during Merton's hermitage years that some of his best nature writing and reflections occurred because it was during this time he truly became a "paradise mystic." She explains how "the hermitage became his re-birth chamber" where he reflected not only on his love of nature,

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[696] Deborah Kehoe, "Thomas Merton's Ecopoetry: Bearing Witness to the Unity of Creation" *The Merton Annual* 22 (2009): 172.

[697] Ibid., 179-180.

[698] Ibid., 182.

[699] Merton, "'Baptism in the Forest': Wisdom and Initiation in William Faulkner," in *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York, NY: New Directions, 1981), 108. See also, Kathleen Deignan, "'Love for the Paradise Mystery'—Thomas Merton: Contemplative Ecologist," 545.

[700] Deignan, "'Love for the Paradise Mystery'—Thomas Merton: Contemplative Ecologist," 546.

[701] Ibid., 547.

but also the destructive actions of humans within nature.[702] For Deignan, the result of his writing about this paradise mystery offers both an inspiring collection of poetry, but more seriously, a "disturbing challenge to humankind's unconscionable irresponsibility regarding our stewardship of even the most humble elements of Earth."[703]

Other examples where Merton's nature mysticism addresses humanity's struggle to responsibly care for creation can be found in some of his later letters, particularly his letter to Rachel Carson. Here, the ethical dimension of his nature mysticism is most evident. In the fall of 1962, Rachel Carson, a marine biologist, published her book *Silent Spring*.[704] The book lamented the shocking effect of pesticides within the environment (particularly on insects) and issued a call for humanity to choose a different, less destructive path. One of her readers, Thomas Merton, took her message to heart, and in a letter responding to her book, he lamented his own participation in destroying the nature surrounding the monastery. Some Merton scholars have argued that in this letter, Merton demonstrates a growing ethical concern for ecological issues.[705] In this letter, Merton agrees with Carson's discoveries, arguing that she has identified a deep problem, that she provides "the diagnosis of the ills of our civilization."[706] What he finds particularly painful about her diagnosis, however, is how humanity struggles to see this larger problem; that when ecological issues emerge, humanity often creates further issues in its attempt to address them so that "the remedies are expressions of the sickness itself."[707] He continues to explain that this sickness "is perhaps a very real and dreadful hatred of life," which he relates to original sin, and that it has resulted in a situation where "man has built into himself a tendency to destroy and negate himself."[708] This is truly tragic since, according to Merton, the responsibility of humanity is to care for creation, not destroy it.[709] Our inability to care for creation, to see the problem, and

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[702] Ibid., 551-552.

[703] Ibid., 554-555.

[704] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962).

[705] Dennis O'Hara and Monica Weis have both explained the importance of Merton's response to Carson. See: Dennis Patrick O'Hara, "'The Whole World … Has Appeared as a Transparent Manifestation of the Love of God': Portents of Merton as Eco-Theologian." *Merton Annual* 9 (1996): 90-117, and Monica Weis, *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*.

[706] Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 70.

[707] Ibid.

[708] Ibid., 71.

[709] Ibid.

to adequately address the problem is once again reflective of the struggle between the true self and false self. We do not live up to our full potential, which according to Merton means that "man's vocation was to be in this cosmic creation, so to speak, as the eye in the body" since "man is at once a part of nature and he transcends it."[710] Merton's letter to Carson demonstrates not only his theological reflection on an environmental issue but it is also an excellent example of the ethical dimension of Merton's nature mysticism. While Weis argues that Merton's letter to Carson demonstrates his "evolving ecological consciousness," she clarifies that Merton's concern for creation was emerging even before this letter, and before environmentalism became a popular movement.[711]

Merton's social justice concerns reflect a nature mysticism with a strong nature activism or Earth ethic that emphasizes our relationship with and responsibility towards all creation. This nature activism is twofold. First, Merton emphasizes both not denying the world and how monastic communities can be particularly susceptible to this misunderstanding that the world is evil. In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, he explains how those who believe the world is to blame for evil are spiritually immature. A mature spirituality, however, means we have finally come to see that it is not the material world, rather "the obstacle is in our 'self.'"[712] Therefore, before we can first deal with social justice issues, such as the environmental crisis, Merton is calling us to see the source of the problem as rooted in our false self, not the world. The monk can only be of most help "depend[ing] on his ability to see his own place in relation to the world correctly."[713]

Building on this, the second part of Merton's nature activism explores how our view of our self has a significant impact on how we treat other people and nature. This is something Merton highlighted in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, that "our attitude towards nature is simply an extension of our attitude toward ourselves, and toward one another. We are free to be at peace with ourselves and others, and also with nature."[714] Our wasteful use of natural resources, and the unchecked advancements of science and technology has created a suicidal age, where Merton

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[710] Ibid.

[711] Weis, *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, 132, 136.

[712] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*. 22.

[713] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 144.

[714] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 139.

laments that people live unhappy lives burdened by servile work that generates useless products that society claims are necessary for a purposeful life.[715] Merton captures with such accuracy how this story, this suicidal age, has further disconnected humanity from one another and from nature. His own experience as a monk, specifically his time at the hermitage, highlighted for him just how in need humanity is of finding true peace in God in order to live in peace with the world. Merton reflected in his journals about how this peace and solitude was something his monastic vocation provided for him, specifically through his time in nature on the monastery grounds.

> Out here in the woods I can think of nothing except God and it is not so much that I think of Him either. I am aware of Him as of the sun and the clouds and the blue sky and the thin cedar trees. When I first came out here, I was asleep…but I read a few lines from the Desert Fathers and then, after that, my whole being was full of serenity and vigilance.[716]

This nature activism, rooted in building a positive relationship with the world and finding our true self, has the potential to contribute to the further development of ecological ethics.

Separate from this nature activism, but very much a part of Merton's nature mysticism, is his personal love and desire to be in relationship with nature. He extends an invitation to each person to also enter into a loving relationship with nature. His love of being in nature and reflecting on nature, as evident in his nature poetry and his hermitage years, established his strong relationship with each part of creation. His contemplative nature reflections are also not simply about the beauty of creation, but also the suffering of creatures and their struggle to survive. His nature poetry draws one into nature, to not simply appreciate it but to see what one so often misses. Christopher Pramuk eloquently describes Merton as "a poet of the liminal spaces of our lives, where sacred mystery breaks in, casting everything in a different sort of light."[717] Nature was for Merton a great source and space for contemplation where he continued to discover his hidden true self within the presence of God. What Merton learned during his years at Gethsemani was how necessary his relationship with the world, and with nature, was for his own spiritual

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[715] Ibid., 308-309.

[716] Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's True Life*, vol. 3 of *The Journals of Thomas Merton*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 16.

[717] Christopher Pramuk, "Contemplation and the Suffering Earth: Thomas Merton, Pope Francis, and the Next Generation" *De Gruyter Open Theology* 4, no.1 (2018): 216.

formation. Rather than the monastery becoming a place to escape people and nature, "it was nature that called him into deeper levels of prayer."[718] In essence, Merton's nature mysticism contains theological reflection and nature activism, as well as an invitation to enter into a deeper relationship with Christ through creation.

[718] Monica Weis, "Finding Oneself in the Cosmic Dance: Nature's Grace for Thomas Merton" *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* vol. 50, no. 1 (2015): 67.

Chapter 4
Nature Mysticism as a Building Block for Ecological Theology and Ethics

The previous three chapters have been building towards this chapter which will focus directly on nature mysticism, examining in more detail what nature mysticism is and how Teilhard and Merton demonstrate their own type of nature mysticism. Based on the previous chapters' reviews, I argue that nature mysticism is a type of mysticism that emphasizes a consciousness of the presence of God within the cosmos, which elicits not only a deep awareness of the sacredness and interconnectedness of all creation, but also contains an ethical imperative that strives to build an ethic of creation. In this chapter, certain themes and characteristics of nature mysticism discussed in chapters one to three will be highlighted and further developed, such as cosmic Christology, ecotheological anthropology, the transcendent yet immanent presence of God within creation, and an ecologically sensitive ethical imperative. The ethical dimension of nature mysticism will also be explored here in detail, as the potentiality for mystical experiences to elicit social transformation and inform ethics is an important characteristic of this nature mysticism. Particular attention will also be given to discussing the implications of this ethical dimension of nature mysticism for ecological theology.

Common Themes and Characteristics of Nature Mysticism

As stated in my thesis statement, I argue that nature mysticism can provide a foundation for ecological ethics. The mystical theology of nature mystics can enrich ecological spirituality and ethics. Nature mysticism contains what Thomas Berry called for in his essay, "An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality"—i.e., "a return to a mystique of the Earth." [719] He stressed in this same essay that

> to lessen the grandeur of the outer world is to limit the fulfillment available to our inner world. …For it is from the stars, the planets, and the moon in the heavens as well as from the flowers and birds and forests and woodland creatures of earth that some of the more profound inner experiences take place…. To devastate any aspect of the natural world is

[719] Berry, "An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality," 2.

> to distort the more sublime experiences that provide ultimate fulfillment to the human mode of being.[720]

In essence, Berry calls for an eco-spirituality that emphasizes "a spirituality of intimacy with creation…a spirituality of the divine revealed in the visible world around us…[and] a spirituality of justice to the devastated Earth community."[721] I argue that each of these three elements can also be found within the main characteristics of nature mysticism, and that each of these characteristics demonstrates how nature mysticism can contribute to ecological ethics. Firstly, nature mysticism contains an emphasis on becoming aware of the intimate relationship between humans and all creation by building a relationship *with* creation not *over* creation, and by not viewing creation as empty matter. This intimate relationship with creation is often understood via a cosmology of cosmogenesis, which Berry has outlined in his writing, although nature mysticism does not require a cosmology of cosmogenesis since it could also be based on a more heliocentric understanding of creation and the attendant values and insights that are derived or associated with the same.[722] Secondly, nature mysticism relies heavily on the mystic's experience of the divine in the phenomenal world, which can include personal, emotional, and mystical encounters with God through and in other people or nature.[723] More specifically, the nature mysticism of Teilhard and Merton demonstrates that the created world not only shows God's ability to create, but how within the phenomenal world one can encounter the cosmic Christ transforming all of creation. Lastly, nature mysticism demands an Earth ethic of care and justice, which is often evident in the actions of the nature mystic. Moreover, this demand for an Earth ethic can be a great source for building an ecological ethic.

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[720] Ibid. Berry's work here has similarities to the most recent encyclical by Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, where he writes, "…as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. …'God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement'." LS 89, quoting *Evangelii Gaudium*, 215.

[721] Berry, "An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality," 2.

[722] An example of a nature mystic who did not operate from a cosmology of cosmogenesis but who nevertheless experienced an intimate relationship with nature is St. Hildegard von Bingen. See: *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works with Letter and Songs (De operatione Dei)* ed. Matthew Fox (Santa Fe, CA: Bear & Company, 1987).

[723] By nature, here, I mean the created world and cosmos that does not include humanity but does include other-than-human creatures. By this I do not mean that humans are not part of nature; we are. But this usage, here, is to clarify that a nature mystic may encounter the divine in the world in a general sense, or in a very specific sense (in humanity, in a particular creature, or in nature). See Chapter 1 for important definitions.

While Berry did not explicitly outline any characteristics of nature mysticism *per se*, his call that an eco-spirituality would contain similar characteristics to those found in the former, warrants the inclusion of his suggestions. As noted by many Berry scholars, Berry constantly worked toward fostering a community that addressed the realities of climate change from a religious perspective. As described by Dennis P. O'Hara, "Berry has worked to overcome the dualism that separates spirit and matter, and to correct the omission of the psychic-spiritual from our telling of the universe story."[724] Berry's contributions to eco-theology, particularly on the topic of ecological spirituality, contain many of the same themes found in nature mysticism, and therefore his work provides a way that nature mysticism can be incorporated into the task of ecological theology and ecological ethics. Moreover, I believe that these three characteristics, which build from Berry's work and are also found in the works of Teilhard and Merton, are most relevant for nature mysticism because of how each characteristic describes not only what the nature mystic experiences, but how each characteristic enables the application of nature mysticism to ecological theology and ecological ethics. As stated in my thesis statement, my goal is to incorporate a nature mysticism that emphasizes the presence of God within the cosmos and the sacredness of all creation. The call to become aware of the intimate relationship between humans and all creation by building a relationship *with* creation not *over* creation, which is based on the mystic's experience of the divine in the phenomenal world, and then results in an Earth ethic of care and justice, allows for a deeper analysis and application of the nature mysticism of both Teilhard and Merton. Furthermore, since Teilhard and Merton are not the only nature mystics, these characteristics of nature mysticism are broad enough to include the nature mysticism of many other theologians and spiritual writers in the Christian tradition.

Employing Tucker and Grim's retrieval, re-evaluation and reconstruction method, I have already provided a detailed retrieval of important theology from both Teilhard and Merton, as well as some re-evaluation of their theology in terms of applying it to this dissertation, in chapters two and three. From this earlier retrieving and re-evaluating, I conclude that these three characteristics of nature mysticism take shape through specific themes and pervading topics of interest in the mystical theology of both Teilhard and Merton. For Teilhard, evolution, divinization, and the "phenomenon of man" are some of central thematic topics that are essential

[724] O'Hara, "Thomas Berry's Understanding of the Psychic-Spiritual Dimension of Creation, Some Sources," 83.

to his nature mysticism. For Merton, contemplation, issues of peace, and nature poetry are often areas where his nature mysticism is indirectly formulated and expressed. These thematic topics are not simply areas of personal interest; rather, they become topics that involve some level of personal experience, and/or they are topics that inspire great theological reflection for the particular mystic. These themes become intertwined with their nature mysticism and are important as the mystics express their nature mysticism. In this chapter, I will examine how the nature mysticism of Teilhard and Merton can be brought together in an effort to address ecological issues. I will begin by reflecting on some of the many similarities in their lives in order to highlight pivotal life experiences that shaped their theology and their nature mysticism. I will then provide a more detailed re-evaluation and reconstruction regarding the nature mysticism of both Teilhard and Merton. This re-evaluation and reconstruction will also employ McIntosh's transcendental interpretive method.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and Thomas Merton (1915-1968) were both important Catholic scholars and writers who shared a mutual interest in mystical theology, Christology, and Christianity's engagement with the modern world. Both were originally from France, travelled extensively, and lived for many years in America. Both were Catholic priests; Teilhard was a member of the Jesuit community and Merton was a Trappist monk and priest. Each experienced WWII, and outlived their immediate families, experiencing the pain of losing not only their parents but also their siblings. The intrigue of Asia and Eastern religions also interested both of these men, which is evident in their writing.[725] Both also wrote in a very autobiographical fashion (Merton more so) referencing their own spiritual development and personal challenges in their theological writings. In terms of the Church's response to their work, both Teilhard and Merton experienced pressure and silencing. Teilhard was not permitted to publish any of his work that addressed theology and evolution (however anything strictly on science he could publish).[726] Unlike Teilhard, however, Merton could publish his work during his lifetime but he

[725] See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Spiritual Contribution of the Far East" in *Toward the Future*, trans. René Hague (New York, NY: Harcourt, 1975), 134-147. Ursula King has also documented Teilhard's interest in Eastern spirituality in her book, *Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions: Spirituality and Mysticism in an Evolutionary World* (New York, NY: Paulist, 2011). For Thomas Merton's interest in Eastern spirituality, see his books: *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (London, UK: Unwin Books, 1965), and *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York, NY: Dell, 1967).

[726] Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Visions of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, Revised Edition (2015), 66. King writes in detail about the many challenges Teilhard faced when trying to get his work published. It was only after his death that any of his theological writing was publicly available. Teilhard would often try to get new

did experience periods of censorship.[727] In addition to this, many women played pivotal roles in each of their lives and further shaped their work. Teilhard's mother and sisters, cousin Marguerite, and his friend and confidant Lucile Swan all shared many letters with Teilhard, influenced his work, and reviewed much of his work during his lifetime.[728] Teilhard gave Mademoiselle Mortier the rights of his theological writings and it was she who arranged for the publication of his work after his death. For Merton, Catherine Doherty and 'Ms. M.' were both influential in his life with Doherty encouraging Merton to more seriously commit himself to the monastic life, and with 'Ms. M.' testing his commitment to his religious vows later in life.[729] Furthermore, Rachel Carson and her book, *Silent Spring*, elicited in Merton a real awakening, or what Monica Weis refers to as the beginning of his ecological consciousness.[730] Both contain a nature mysticism that is intertwined with their spirituality and their mystical theology, which together I argue can contribute to building an ecological theological ethic.

First Characteristic of Nature Mysticism: Intimacy with Creation

Just as pivotal moments in their respective lives overlap, so too does their nature mysticism. The first characteristic of nature mysticism—viz., building an intimate relationship between humans and all creation that emphasizes a relationship *with* creation not *over* creation, often through employing a cosmology of cosmogenesis—is strongest in the work of Teilhard and his evolutionary theology. Mary Evelyn Tucker has argued that Teilhard had a cosmic perspective, and that his "greatest contributions to modern religious thought is his conception of reality as

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work published but would not be permitted by his provincial or other members of the Church hierarchy. Ibid. Robert Faircy further explains that Teilhard's work was censored by the Church because the official Jesuit censors interpreted Teilhard's theology to be pantheistic. In response to this critique, Faircy argues the censors were not correctly interpreting Teilhard's theology. See: Robert Faircy, "The Exploitation of Nature and Teilhard's Ecotheology of Love," *Ecotheology* 10, no. 2 (2005): 190.

[727] Merton biographer Michael Mott explains in detail how Merton was told in 1945 that while his poetry could be published it was not to have his religious name attached or have any updated photo of him. Permission was also necessary for publishing books, and this was not always easily granted. Merton's work often went through a great deal of editing in order to be approved. Writing on the topics of the cold war, communism, inter-religious dialogue, and civil rights issues in America were also heavily censored, but usually received publication permission after much discussion and editing. One of Merton's abbots, Dom Gabriel, often questioned the publication of certain texts by Merton when he perceived "slights and disloyalties to the Order." See: Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 225, 309-310, 323-324, 346-347.

[728] Ursula King, "Faces of the Feminine" and "Lucile Swan," in *Spirit of Fire*.

[729] See Merton, *The Seven Story Mountain*, 400-401, and Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, 438-444.

[730] Weis, *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, 132.

composed of both spirit and matter. This is what he called the psychic and the physical components of reality, the within and the without of things."[731] Through his engagement with evolutionary theory, Teilhard begins to employ a cosmology of cosmogenesis as he explains that there is a within of creation, the psychic dimension. This is one of the most essential points for understanding Teilhard, and is a key element in Berry's own work on cosmogenesis.[732] This view challenges the idea that the world is a great machine, presenting instead the idea that all creation is dynamically evolving rather than static matter, and is intimately interrelated. As Tucker and John Grim note, Teilhard is "unwilling to separate matter and spirit."[733] Therefore, he argues instead that humanity must become aware of all the intimate relationships shared by all creation, and that such an awareness leads to greater human consciousness. In Teilhard's perspective, science furthered human consciousness and awareness through the discovery of our world and our self. Evolution, understood by Teilhard as "an ascent towards consciousness," is one of the ways he explores this within and without of the cosmos.[734]

When reflecting on evolution and the human phenomenon in *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard explains how the within of the cosmos contains consciousness, that this within is essential to evolution, making evolution more than the process of material transformation.[735] Through Teilhard's eyes, evolution is a cosmic reality where the universe becomes conscious of itself through humanity; "man discovers that *he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself*, to borrow Julian Huxley's striking expression."[736] Tucker and Grim interpret Teilhard's expression 'the phenomenon of man' to refer to how "humans become heirs of the evolutionary process capable of determining its further progression or retrogression. This is an awesome responsibility and much of Teilhard's later work explicates how humans can most effectively

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[731] Tucker, "The Ecological Spirituality of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin," 8.

[732] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim have provided a summary highlighting how Teilhard's work influenced Berry's own understanding of cosmogenesis, and some ways that they differ. See: Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, "The Evolutionary and Ecological Perspectives of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion & Ecology*, ed. John Hart (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 404-405. Thomas Berry himself references the work of Teilhard is much of his own writing (such as *The Great Work* and *The Dream of the Earth*).

[733] Tucker and Grim, "The Evolutionary and Ecological Perspectives of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry," 395.

[734] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 258-259.

[735] Ibid., 54.

[736] Ibid., 221. Italics original to text.

participate in the creativity of evolutionary processes."[737] Teilhard's description of consciousness captures how humanity becomes aware and transformed in its relationship with creation. Just as James, Underhill and McGinn explain that mysticism and mystical experiences involve some change in consciousness, I argue that here, Teilhard's explanation of evolution and human consciousness describes a change in the relationship between humanity and Earth that requires a change in consciousness. This will enable humanity to realize and act according to the ultimate goal of evolution. This ultimate goal is a greater point of consciousness—what he calls the Omega—that is also the source of all consciousness as well as the goal toward which the cosmos is directed.[738] Moreover, Teilhard's understanding of consciousness and evolution encourages an ecological anthropology that not only suggests humanity should respect creation, but urges humanity to understand that part of being human means entering into a much more intimate relationship with creation.

While Teilhard employs this cosmology of cosmogenesis more explicitly than Merton, there are some elements of Merton's later work, such as his letter to Carson where he voices concerns about viewing creation only as a piece of matter, that I argue can be framed within Berry's cosmology of cosmogenesis. O'Hara has noted many of these parallels between Berry and Merton, in particular the similarity between both Berry and Merton's cosmic Christology. Essentially, while Merton may not have fully discussed this cosmology of cosmogenesis, his critique of modern Western culture and his concerns regarding Christian spirituality parallel the concerns raised by this cosmology as interpreted by Berry. O'Hara concludes that Merton's call that "recognizing our authentic self" can enable us to "adopt a spirituality that better prepares us to address the ecological crisis challenging us" is very much also Berry's call for humanity to understand that we too are part of creation and our spirituality must be formed and lived according to this awareness.[739] Merton, like Teilhard, also discusses the role of consciousness in

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[737] Tucker and Grim, "The Evolutionary and Ecological Perspectives of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry," 397.

[738] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 258-259, 294. Teilhard explains how the Omega is also not an abstract idea; rather, it is the personal Christian God, and that understanding evolution can enable Christians to better understand Christ, the Omega. Ibid.

[739] Dennis Patrick O'Hara, "Thomas Merton and Thomas Berry: Reflections from a Parallel Universe," *The Merton Annual* 13 (2000): 234.

his nature mysticism, but I will discuss the importance of this in relation to the third characteristic of nature mysticism.

Second Characteristic of Nature Mysticism: Divine Immanence

The second characteristic—viz., an emphasis on the divine presence in the phenomenal world that is often accompanied by a personal mystical experience involving people and/or nature—is strongly evident in both Teilhard's and Merton's nature mysticism. As explained by James, mystical experiences involve the mystic suddenly becoming aware of the "immediate presence of God."[740] As well, Underhill explains that such an experience leads to a transformation within the mystic because since the mystic "has seen the Perfect; he wants to be perfect too."[741] For Teilhard, I argue that this is evident in his own personal mystical experiences and reflections, and in his cosmic Christology. Ursula King argues that Teilhard should be recognized as one of the most important Christian mystics of the twentieth century and that his "experience-rooted" mystical theology has had significant influence on Catholic mystical theology.[742] Tucker and Grim also note that Teilhard understood mysticism as a journey intimately bound with creation. They argue that "traditional mysticism in the world's religions is often understood as an interior experience that demands a de-materialization and a transcendent leap into the Divine. Teilhard, however, realized a radical re-conceptualization of the mystical journey as an entry into evolution, discovering there an immanental sense of the Divine."[743]

His own personal mystical experiences, particularly in *Writings in a Time of War* but also his essays in *Hymn of the Universe*, demonstrate "Teilhard's mystical union and communion with the cosmic Christ and his vivid realization of the presence of God in all things."[744] In fact, King argues that in these particular essays we can see how "the origin and context of his [Teilhard's] mysticism are always experiential and personal."[745] Teilhard's experience of God was through

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[740] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 393-394.

[741] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 90.

[742] Ursula King, "'Consumed by Fire From Within': Teilhard de Chardin's Pan-Christic Mysticism in Relation to the Catholic Tradition," *Heythrop Journal* 40, no. 4 (1999): 456.

[743] Tucker and Grim, "The Evolutionary and Ecological Perspectives of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry," 399.

[744] Ursula King, "'Consumed by Fire From Within': Teilhard de Chardin's Pan-Christic Mysticism in Relation to the Catholic Tradition," 457.

[745] Ibid., 458.

the cosmos, and his own experience of the presence of God, the cosmic Christ, in the phenomenal world shapes his nature mysticism. This is why Teilhard describes matter with such beauty and purpose because "the heart of matter, the heart of reality is infused with divine power and presence, it is 'the hand of God, the flesh of Christ.'"[746]

Even though much of Teilhard's own personal mystical experiences are described by himself to be the experiences of other people, I agree with Ursula King who argues these are actually his own mystical experiences.[747] In his essays, "The Mass on the World," "Christ in the World of Matter," and "The Spiritual Power of Matter," Teilhard's own personal mystical experiences are pivotal events that fundamentally shape his life and his theology. I argue that each of these experiences are also very tied to creation. In "The Mass on the World," Teilhard performs the Mass in the wilderness, without his Mass kit. Making due with nature, Earth is his altar where he offers to God the sufferings of the world.[748] In this spiritual Mass he describes God as fire, therefore further cementing the intimate connection between God and creation; God is "the flame [that] has lit up the whole world from within."[749] As the Mass concludes with a prayer, Teilhard emphasizes that Christ is the heart of matter.[750] The mystical experiences described in "Christ in the World of Matter" continue to explore how Christ is the heart of matter. As Teilhard reflects on what he describes as "experiences through which the light of…awareness gradually entered into my soul as though at the gradual, jerky raising of a curtain," he shares his personal mystical experiences involving the Body of Christ and an image of Christ.[751] In these unique visions, the common theme is how all that Christ comes into contact with is transformed.[752] In each of these encounters, Teilhard is continually overwhelmed by the presence of Christ, either through the

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[746] Ibid., 461.

[747] Ibid., 457. Ursula King notes that Teilhard's own personal mystical experience is debated since his writings on specific mystical experiences are attributed to unnamed friends. Regardless of this, she still contends that some of his most personal mystical experiences are contained in *Writings in a Time of War*. Ibid., 457. Gerald Vann, who translated Teilhard's book *Hymn of the Universe*, also notes that the mystical experiences recounted in his essay "Christ in the World of Matter," which Teilhard attributes to a now dead 'friend,' should be interpreted to be Teilhard's mystical experiences. See: Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 35.

[748] "I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world." Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 11.

[749] Ibid., 16.

[750] Ibid., 28.

[751] Ibid., 35-36.

[752] Ibid., 43.

Eucharist or through an image of Christ which revealed how the depths of the universe are contained in Christ.[753]

In addition to Teilhard's cosmic Christology, his emphasis on the divine immanence of God in creation is evident in his mystical essay, "The Spiritual Power of Matter." This essay, based on the Biblical account of Elijah being taken into heaven, is Teilhard's mystical reflection of the encounter between Elijah and the great fiery whirlwind (God) who urges Teilhard, here called "Son of earth," to not condemn creation but to "steep yourself in the sea of matter, bathe in its fiery waters, for it is the source of your life."[754] The voice of the whirlwind explains that creation is not dead, or evil; rather than see creation this way, humanity is instead urged to become more deeply aware of its relationship with creation, and the goodness of creation.[755] "The Hymn to Matter" concludes this mystical essay with a list of blessings to matter, and the reiteration that humanity is urged to encounter the divine milieu of the cosmos.[756] Robert Faircy succinctly states that Teilhard's mystical experiences and reflections expressed in the essays "The Mass on the World," "Christ in the World of Matter," and "The Spiritual Power of Matter" "showed him [Teilhard] the mystery of God's presence through Jesus Christ in the world, and they changed Teilhard forever."[757] Ultimately, I argue that Teilhard's mystical experiences had a transformative effect on him and his theology, which contributed immensely to his theological interpretation of evolution and the human person.

Like Teilhard, Merton too has his own mystical experience, recounted in *Conjectures of A Guilty Bystander*, that shapes his nature mysticism in many immeasurable ways. Just as McGinn explains how mystics go through their own personal transformations that then radiate out from the mystics into the world through their actions, I argue that this very clearly happens with Merton and his mystical experiences.[758] One of Merton's mystical experiences involves himself

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[753] Ibid., 37-38.

[754] Ibid., 60-61.

[755] Ibid., 61.

[756] Ibid., 66-67.

[757] Faircy, "The Exploitation of Nature and Teilhard's Ecotheology of Love," 189. Faircy also argues that the mystical experiences recounted by Teilhard in "Christ in the World of Matter" are also Teilhard's own experiences. Ibid.

[758] McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, xvii.

and many other people while he is in Louisville on March 18, 1958. At the intersection of Fourth and Walnut Streets, Merton recounts feeling overwhelmed with love for all the strangers that surrounded him. He describes realizing that he was somehow connected to each person, even though each person was a stranger to him.[759] This experience made a lasting impression on him, and his work. Susan Rakoczy accurately describes this as an experience that resulted in a significant change; "he could not despise the world and its people but as a monk–writer–hermit–social critic, he learned to embrace it and also speak words of prophetic critique."[760] I would add to Rakoczy's statement that this mystical experience reoriented Merton's perspective and allowed him to not only see his vocation in a new way, but to also see the world differently. Andrew Lenoir describes Merton's Louisville experience to be an "experience of transcendent love" which provided for Merton a new understanding of *contemptus mundi* that "was not about abandoning others or the physical realities of life. Instead, it was turning one's back upon inherited ideas, definitions and preconceptions. …[I]t made him reassess how we relate to others as members of our faith and our species, and what we owe to one another."[761] I argue that this mystical experience brings about in Merton a real transformation where he begins to express a real concern for human behaviour towards Earth.

I also believe that connected with Merton's mystical experience is his cosmic Christology, which also goes through a radical re-evaluation, and that this is related to Merton's ethical concern for creation. Weeks before Merton's March 18th Louisville experience, Merton wrote his poem "Hagia Sophia," which is based on a dream he had February 28, 1958. In this dream, Merton describes being awakened by Wisdom (referred to as Proverb and Hagia Sophia), an awakening he describes to be "like the One Christ awakening in all the separate selves that ever were separate and isolated and alone in all the lands of the earth. …It is like coming forth from primordial nothingness and standing in clarity, in Paradise."[762] George Kilcourse explains that this dream is "a dramatic re-enactment of the mystery of Christ," which he interprets to be very

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[759] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 156-157.

[760] Rakoczy, "Thomas Merton: The True Self and Quest for Justice," 4.

[761] Andrew Lenoir, "Lessons from a Hopeful Bystander: Thomas Merton Wrote in a Time of Crisis. What Would he Make of the Crises of our day?" *America* 217, no. 7 (Oct. 2017): 28.

[762] Merton, "Hagia Sophia," in *The Collected Poem of Thomas Merton*, 363-364.

much connected with Merton's Louisville mystical experience.[763] Before Merton's mystical experience, Kilcourse explains that Merton had a metaphysical Christology, a Christology emphasizing "the descent of God's Word into the world"; however, after this dream and his mystical experience, Merton demonstrates a "salvation-historical christology" which focuses on Jesus' "movement ascending toward the God in whom he [Jesus] trusted absolutely."[764] I argue that Merton's ascending cosmic Christology very much contributes to his nature mysticism by reinforcing the goodness of creation that is full of the transformative presence of Christ. Furthermore, this leads to Merton's re-working of *Seeds of Contemplation*, to produce *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1960). Kilcourse argues that this particular book brings out Merton's kenotic Christology that now emphasizes the love of Christ, who is described as "the power and wisdom of God, Light, echoing the poem, 'Hagia Sophia.'"[765] Finding our true self in God is to enter into "paradise consciousness," which Kilcourse summarizes as being "called to surrender our false self-consciousness and join Christ in the cosmic dance in the emptiness of the garden of creation."[766] While Kilcourse is correct in his assessment, I would add further that this Christological change has an immense impact on Merton's understanding of the cosmos and the human responsibility towards creation.

Even Merton's interest and writing on contemplation, explained best in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, demonstrate how Merton's mystical experience had a transformative effect on him and his theology. He explains that contemplation is "the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive."[767] Moreover, contemplation opens one to "the deep, inexpressible certitude of the

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[763] Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ*, 90.

[764] Ibid., 91. These two types of Christology are presented by Karl Rahner. See: Karl Rahner, "The Two Basic Types of Christology," in *Theology, Anthropology, Christology*, vol. 13 of *Theological Investigations* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1975) 213-222. Patrick F. O'Connell argues that John Duns Scotus also had a particular influence on Merton's Christology, which is also evident in Merton's nature mysticism. O'Connell argues that, "the key Christological idea of Scotus that the Incarnation of the Word was not simply a consequence of the fall but the culminating point of creation is evident throughout Merton's work." Patrick F. O'Connell, "The Traditional Sources of Thomas Merton's Environmental Spirituality," 159.

[765] Kilcourse, *Ace of Freedoms: Thomas Merton's Christ*, 106.

[766] Ibid., 108. Kilcourse continues to explain Merton's evolving salvation-historical Christology and argues that Merton's books where this is most evident are: *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, *Seeds of Destruction*, *A Vow of Conversation*, his essay "The Humanity of Christ in Monastic Prayer," and the posthumously published book *Honourable Reader*. Ibid.

[767] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, ix.

contemplative experience [and] awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depths of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding."[768]Therefore, contemplation of the natural world, that is not "distorted…by despising the material world" enables any contemplative to encounter the transformative divine presence of God, and that such an encounter calls us to action, to fulfill our ethical responsibility towards all creation.[769] Contemplation for Merton is a practice not purely for the development of an interior life, but a practice that has a critical influence on how we see and respond to the world.

In addition to his pivotal mystical experience and cosmic Christology, I have argued that Merton's contemplative encounters with nature, some of which are contained in his nature poetry, are similar to mystical experiences, and that in these nature passages Merton encounters the transformative presence of God. Merton does not simply develop a love for the beauty of nature, but also an understanding that contained within nature is the divine presence of God. In one of Merton's journals, he reflects, "as soon as I get away from people, the Presence of God invades me."[770] Deborah Kehoe argues that it is in Merton's poetry that the reader can witness the journey of a "mystical pilgrim."[771] His nature poetry, which she refers to as ecopoetry, includes "poems [that] express the poet's awe in the presence of a Christ-infused wilderness and his awareness of his own inexplicably unique part in the continuum."[772] Throughout many of his nature poems, Merton reflects on the Incarnation, the transformative grace of God, and how nature offers up thanksgiving "by not striving to be anything more than what it was created to be."[773] Kehoe describes Merton's nature poetry as demonstrating an ecocentrism, "a view of the natural world that refuses to privilege any single organism over another."[774] She explains that

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[768] Ibid., 12-13.

[769] O'Connell, "The Traditional Sources of Thomas Merton's Environmental Spirituality," 161. O'Connell also notes that the influence of John Duns Scotus, Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Greek patristics, and Franciscan spirituality on Merton's theology. Ibid.

[770] Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk & Writer*, vol. 2 of *The Journals of Thomas Merton*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1997), 328. This quote is from a time before Merton's mystical experience in Louisville, March 18, 1958.

[771] Kehoe, "Thomas Merton's Ecopoetry: Bearing Witness to the Unity of Creation," 170.

[772] Ibid., 171. Kehoe uses J. Scott Bryson's definition of ecopoetry when examining Merton's nature poetry. According to Bryson, ecopoetry involves appreciating nature and a sense of ecocentrism. See: J. Scott Bryson, ed., *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah, 2002), 7.

[773] Kehoe, "Thomas Merton's Ecopoetry: Bearing Witness to the Unity of Creation," 176.

[774] Ibid., 179.

Merton's journals also contain a clear reverence for creation, particularly when he reflects on the many animals and insects that he shares the countryside with, but these journals also share Merton's clear concern of worldly distractions and technology which he considered damaging to the soul and the environment.[775] While Kehoe has made some excellent observations about Merton's nature poetry, I believe it would be incorrect to limit our understanding of Merton's deep relationship with creation by only considering Merton's nature poetry or journals, since references to and reflections on the presence of God in nature or the beauty of nature are contained not only in these materials, but are also scattered throughout his later letters and writing, such as *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Moreover, Weis explains how Merton's desire to wander throughout the wilderness while at Gethsemani is integral to understanding his relationship with creation. She explains, "one could say that Merton's *longing* for a place to call home, his longing for a deeper relationship with the Divine is transformed into a sense of *belonging*. Wandering the fields and knobs of the monastery helped Merton discover and experience the relationship between Sacred Earth and Sacred Self."[776]

I argue that Merton's sense of belonging to Earth generates a strong sense of ethics. Like Merton, Teilhard's nature mysticism also engenders some ethical conclusions, which is why nature mysticism contains a final characteristic of demanding an Earth ethic of care and justice. As stated in my thesis statement, it is this ethical characteristic of nature mysticism that I argue is an essential component of nature mysticism and that this characteristic also demonstrates how nature mysticism can contribute to building an ecological ethic.

Third Characteristic of Nature Mysticism: Earth Ethic of Care and Justice

The last characteristic of nature mysticism—viz., an Earth ethic of care and justice that may also be evident in the mystic's own actions—is contained within the nature mysticism of both Teilhard and Merton.[777] James F. O'Brien explains that "Teilhard's ethical view is deeply rooted not only in his view of man's reflective powers, but also in [his] specific views of nature. To him

[775] Ibid., 179-182.

[776] Weis, "Finding Oneself in the Cosmic Dance: Nature's Grace for Thomas Merton," 68.

[777] An Earth ethic of care and justice, often evident in the actions of the nature mystic, can be a great source for building an ecological ethic. This characteristic builds from Berry's suggestion that we need "a spirituality of justice to the devastated Earth community." See: Berry, "An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality," 2.

an ethic divorced from a view of the physical world is incomplete."[778] Moreover, Ursula King argues that Teilhard's mystical theology reflects his call for the "*practice of the mystical life,* one that is both life-enhancing and world-transforming…'a mysticism of evolution' and a 'mysticism of action.'"[779] While Teilhard does not outline a detailed, systematic ethic, I argue that his reflections on the phenomenon of man as the consciousness of the Earth, on the divine milieu, and on the divinization of human behaviour can contribute to the foundation of environmental ethics. Teilhard's consciousness of the Earth requires a transformation of understanding and action, where humanity gains a greater understanding of the human purpose in creation and therefore, acts differently, specifically more responsibly, towards the rest of creation.

In *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard explains why he considers humanity to be a phenomenon. By this he means that the phenomenon of man calls humanity to embrace our unique role and identity as the spirit of Earth.[780] As the spirit of Earth, humanity is focused on the Omega Point, the greatest point of consciousness, which we move toward as we encounter the divine milieu within the cosmos.[781] The divine milieu (Christ), our spiritual atmosphere that sustains reality and transforms humanity, is related to human behaviour, specifically with the divinization of human actions.[782] Moreover, in *The Divine Milieu*, Teilhard explains how human behaviours, things we actively do or passively experience, all have the potential to be made holy, to be aligned into Christ.[783] Since for Teilhard, all actions (religious and non-religious) are bound with God and have the potential to bring about God's kingdom, he explains in detail different types of actions and the divinization of human behaviour.[784] Therefore, I believe that this can be applied to environmental ethics because, as Teilhard explains, we can choose to participate in actions of growth (organized actions with intention and reflection) that build up Earth and complete the

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[778] James F. O'Brien, "Teilhard's View of Nature and Some Implications for Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 10, no. 4 (1988): 336.

[779] Ursula King, "'Consumed by Fire From Within': Teilhard de Chardin's Pan-Christic Mysticism in Relation to the Catholic Tradition," 471, 473. Italics original to text.

[780] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 182.

[781] Ibid., 258.

[782] Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin 'The Divine Milieu' Explained*, 18-19, and Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 50.

[783] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 61.

[784] Ibid., 49-63, 74-94.

work of Christ. According to Teilhard, actions of growth demonstrate how humanity can be an instrument of and a "living extension [of the]…creative power of God."[785] In order to apply this to ecological ethics, I suggest that an action of growth in ecological ethics would be encouraging behaviour that acknowledges and protects the sacredness of creation and the presence of God within creation. For instance, it would be rejecting the practice of factory farming and instead participating in free-range farming techniques.[786] I also argue that Teilhard's passivity of growth (experiencing inward development in God that may be influenced by outward forces) can also be applied to ecological ethics. I suggest that passively reflecting on the intimate relationship between humanity and the rest of creation does not require specific human actions; rather, it is a passivity of growth that encourages humanity to think differently about creation and the presence of the God in creation. As Teilhard discussed the need for a change in consciousness, a passivity of growth builds on this change in consciousness by promoting more serious reflection on the intimate relationship between humanity and creation. Moreover, this passivity of growth does not require a specific action but involves a change in human understanding of human behaviour.

In addition to applying Teilhard's action and passivity of growth to ecological ethics, Teilhard's passivity of diminishments (explained by Teilhard as negative life experiences which can be experienced both within us, such as through illness, or outside of us, such as through tragedies or natural disasters) can likewise be applied.[787] Teilhard emphasizes that these passivities of diminishment can be very burdensome trials and challenges, but that even the worst passivity of diminishment (death) has been conquered by Christ. In relation to my research here, I argue that an environmental passivity of diminishment that needs to be acknowledged is the suffering of creation, more specifically the collective destructive long lasting negative actions of humanity on Earth (such as the use of harmful and toxic chemicals that support economic success while promulgating ecological harm). The suffering of creation is a real passivity of diminishment, and while some of this suffering is the result of destructive human actions, Teilhard argues that even our passivities of diminishment can be divinized. He explains, "God, as we have seen, has

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[785] Ibid., 62.

[786] Free-range farming techniques refer to the process of how animals are housed, fed, and cared for in order to support a safe and healthy environment for the animals. Studies on free-range farming argue that this farming technique offers many health benefits for farm animals and humans. See: Monique Bestman et al., "Factors Related to Free-Range Use in Commercial Laying Hens," *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 214 (2019): 57-63.

[787] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 81.

already transfigured our sufferings by making them serve our conscious fulfilment. In his hands the forces of diminishment have perceptibly become the tool that cuts, carves and polishes within us the stone which is destined to occupy a definite place in the heavenly Jerusalem."[788] Furthermore, an awareness of this environmental passivity of diminishment could encourage a more moderate and sustainable lifestyle. While these examples of environmentally orientated actions of growth and passivity are my own, they build from Teilhard's own understanding of human behaviour and the divinization of human behaviour outlined by Teilhard in *The Divine Milieu*. This ethical dimension of Teilhard is particularly relevant for ecological theology and ethics because it contributes to building an ecological consciousness that calls for an Earth ethic of care and justice.

This third characteristic of nature mysticism, however, is arguably strongest in the nature mysticism of Merton, whose nature mysticism contains direct reflection on the behaviour of all humanity toward one another and toward the environment. In *Seeds of Destruction*, Merton poignantly expresses a serious concern regarding society's focus on encouraging the wealth and power of the corporation over and above "human liberty and in the human person."[789] He highlights in particular the "well-meaning liberal," the one who is confused in the pursuit of the good; this is the one who must also accept personal responsibility to treat the 'other' with dignity and respect.[790] While he wrote the essays in *Seeds of Destruction* as a response to the civil rights movement, he does conclude that this issue is about American society more generally, as it is a movement in which African Americans are calling all Americans to be awakened and readied "to initiate the reform and renewal which may still be capable of saving our society. …[America needs] a complete reform of the social system which permits and breeds such injustices"[791] This is why Merton argues that the Christian responsibility is to be a peacemaker, not a pacifist nor one who declares defeat, but rather one called to contribute to the common good by building peaceful relationships with others.[792] This is an important point for this dissertation, since

[788] Ibid., 87-88.

[789] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 26.

[790] Ibid., 33-35.

[791] Ibid., 40, 54.

[792] Ibid., 90-91.

Merton's call for each person to be a peacemaker has serious consequences not just for how the other as human is treated, but also with regards to how the other as Earth is treated.

This theme of being a peacemaker is one that Merton returns to when he explains the need for an ecological consciousness, which is contained in his letter to Rachel Carson (the author of *Silent Spring*) and in his letters to Barbara Hubbard. These letters contain some of Merton's strongest ethical language regarding humanity's responsibility toward the environment, and it is this material that I argue is most essential for understanding how Merton demonstrates this third characteristic of nature mysticism. His letter to Carson connects human actions in creation with how we understand the self. When we do not cultivate our truly authentic self in Christ, we invariably act irresponsibly in nature. Correct and responsible human behaviour in creation requires humanity to be "the eye of the body" realizing that "man is at once a part of nature and he transcends it."[793] With such a role in creation comes great responsibility, namely to "make use of nature wisely" and to fulfill the role in "relating both himself and visible nature to the invisible…to the Creator…the source and exemplar of all being and all life."[794] It is in this letter that I believe Merton's ethical understanding of human behaviour has come full circle, meaning that his earlier theology of the self (*New Seeds of Contemplation*), his work on the Christian responsibility to the other (*Seeds of Destruction*), and his mystical experience in Louisville, have resulted in a transformation in Merton where he is now forced out from his monastery and into the troubles of the world.

The parallels between Merton's critique of humanity's irresponsible environmental ethic and his critique of nuclear war has been noted by Monica Weis. As Weis points out, "in Merton's mind, our propensity for nuclear war and our desire to eradicate garden pests spring from the same hubris."[795] Even at the end of Merton's letter to Carson, he compares the obsession to exterminate the Japanese beetle to our obsession with demonizing and targeting the 'other' whom we deem to be dangerous stating that "it is exactly the same kind of 'logic.'"[796] Weis also argues that it is in this letter that Merton clearly rejects a mechanistic view of creation as "he

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[793] Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letter of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 71.

[794] Ibid.

[795] Monica Weis, "Kindred Spirits in Revelation and Revolution: Rachel Carson and Thomas Merton," *The Merton Annual* 19 (2006): 131.

[796] Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letter of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 72.

reiterates the importance of maintaining a cosmic perspective," which is most evident in his description of the vocation of humanity to be "the eye of the body" within "this cosmic creation."[797] Weis concludes that it is in this letter to Carson that Merton demonstrates a "significant enlargement of vision."[798] She explains,

> having focused his social justice writing on right relationships among people—topics of racism, rights of indigenous people, the dangers of atomic energy and technology, as well as the moral imperative for making peace through non-violent means—Merton is now articulating a new insight: responsibility for the earth. Indeed, I want to emphasize that reading *Silent Spring* is a graced moment in Merton's life—a moment of both revelation and revolution—because it appears to have allowed him to see how human justice is related to eco-justice.[799]

While I agree with Weis and her conclusion that Merton's letter to Carson demonstrates a "significant enlargement of vision," I would argue, however, that this enlargement of vision follows from Merton's mystical experience in Louisville, where his entire outlook on life and reality was transformed. If reading *Silent Spring* is a "graced moment," then I argue that moment is only possible because Merton has previously undergone a mystical experience that radically transformed himself and his theology. Moreover, Weis argues that while this may have been Merton's first clear explanation of environmental ethics, after reading Carson's book and writing her this letter in 1963, a continued ethical concern for creation is present in Merton's journals and other pieces of writing. Weis's examples include Merton's reflections on Kenneth Jackson's book *Early Celtic Nature Poetry*, his later nature poetry, some personal letters, and his later personal journals.[800]

I also argue that an Earth ethic of care and justice in Merton's nature mysticism is also evident in his explanation of the need for an ecological consciousness which he outlined in a letter to Barbara Hubbard (February 1967). In this letter, Merton discusses two types of consciousness

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[797] Weis, "Kindred Spirits in Revelation and Revolution: Rachel Carson and Thomas Merton," 132, and Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letter of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 71.

[798] Weis, "Kindred Spirits in Revelation and Revolution: Rachel Carson and Thomas Merton," 132.

[799] Ibid., 132-133.

[800] Ibid., 134-136. The personal letter noted by Weis is Merton's letter to Barbara Hubbard (1967). One of his last personal journals is: *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage*, vol. 5: 1963-1965 of *The Journals of Thomas Merton*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1997).

developing in the world: a millennial consciousness and an ecological consciousness.[801] He explains that an ecological consciousness is calling humanity's attention to all creation. Even if humanity is moving into this new era, this consciousness declares that "we are not alone in this thing. We belong to a community of living beings and we owe our fellow members in this community the respect and honor due to them. It we are to enter into a new era, well and good, but let's bring the rest of the living along with us."[802] An ecological consciousness seeks to remind humanity of our responsibility to Earth. Merton argues against exploiting creation for short term gains that cause an "irreparable loss in living species and natural resources."[803] I believe his description of the different types of consciousness parallels his descriptions of the false self and the true self, where the false self represents an individual's self-centered behaviour rooted in false ideas and illusions that enable us to sin, such as a millennial consciousness that is focused on immediate but reckless desires.[804] The true authentic self, which is rooted in Christ and pulls us away from sin and towards the goodness of God, parallels the ecological consciousness Merton describes, where we embrace our responsibility for Earth.[805] Merton's

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[801] Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letters of Thomas Merton in times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 74. Thomas Berry also discussed the millennial consciousness in *The Great Work*, where he writes, "even when the religious dimension of the millennial search gave way to a humanistic life attitude, the sense of living in a radically unsatisfactory world remained a central fact in our Western consciousness. We have rarely felt at ease amid the spontaneities of the natural world. We feel we deserve a better world. We must find our fulfillment in some transformed earthly condition. We find increasing difficulties in accepting life within the conditions that life has granted us." See: Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 103. Since here I wish to focus on Merton's ecological consciousness, I will not go into detail regarding his description of millennial consciousness. In summation, when he refers to millennial consciousness, he is referring to human advancement, such as technology, to have been progressing towards this current moment (even if some of that progress has been a failure). This consciousness argues that "the real thing is about to happen: the new creation, the millennium, the coming of the Kingdom, the withering away of the State." Merton considers this view to be common among Marxists, cult like communities, some revolutionary movements (such as those in the third world and the civil rights movement), and even among some Church communities. See: Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letter of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 74.

[802] Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letter of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 74. Merton's description of an ecological consciousness is similar to Berry's call that humanity must work with Earth and realize our role in creation in order to ensure the survival of ourselves and Earth. Berry explains, "the human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish in the desert.…We have been trying to go into the future as a human community in an exploitative relationship with the natural community without any sense of being integral with this natural world as a sacred community." Thomas Berry, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth*, ed. Stephen Dunn and Anne Lonergan (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third, 1991), 43.

[803] Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letter of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 74. Merton also cautions against a purely millennial consciousness since this perspective "may lead to ecological irresponsibility." Ibid., 75.

[804] Merton, *News Seeds of Contemplation*, 34-35.

[805] Ibid., 7-8.

description of consciousness here is an important point for this dissertation not only because it contains his Earth ethic, but because it also demonstrates the role of consciousness in mysticism that McGinn explained. According to McGinn, consciousness is an important component of mysticism because "consciousness emphasizes the *entire process* of human intentionality and self-presence, rather than just an originating pure feeling, sensation, or experience easily separated from subsequent acts of thinking, loving, and deciding."[806] According to McGinn, mystical consciousness refers to one becoming aware of the "consciousness of the presence of God." Mystical consciousness is different from being conscious of objects or of one's self; it is a type of consciousness that he calls "consciousness *beyond*, or 'meta-consciousness.'"[807] Therefore, I argue that Merton's ecological consciousness develops after his mystical experience in Louisville and demonstrates how his mystical experience has transformed him, meaning he has been radically changed by this experience and that this change contains an ethical dimension.

Merton's most developed and detailed explanation of an ecological conscience is in a book review of Roderick Nash's book *Wilderness and the American Mind*, titled "The Wild Places," which Patrick F. O'Connell considers to be "the most extensive presentation of Merton's developing ecological awareness in the final years of his life."[808] Merton explains,

> the ecological conscience is centered in an awareness of *man's true place as a dependent member of the biotic community*. Man must become fully aware of his *dependence* on a balance which he is not only free to destroy but which he has already begun to destroy. He must recognize his obligations toward the other members of that vital community. And incidentally, since he tends to destroy nature in his frantic efforts to exterminate other members of his own species, it would not hurt if he has a little more respect for human life too. The respect for life, the affirmation of *all* life, is basic to the ecological conscience. In the words of Albert Schweitzer: "*A man is ethical only when life as such is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as well as that of his fellow man*."[809]

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[806] McGinn, "Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal," 46. Italics original to text.

[807] Ibid., 47. Italics original to text.

[808] O'Connell, ed., "The Wild Places" in *Thomas Merton: Selected Essays*. 442. While Merton's book review was first published in *The Catholic Worker* (1968), and then later printed in *Center Magazine*, O'Connell explains that the version of the review in these sources was either significantly shortened, or edited. In *Thomas Merton: Selected Essays*, O'Connell has provided the most complete version of Merton's review. Ibid.

[809] O'Connell, ed., "The Wild Places," 450. Italics original to text. Merton makes us of both the terms ecological conscience and ecological consciousness. Both function together in similar ways to inform his own development of an Earth ethic.

For Merton, there is a clear parallel between the destruction of the environment, and the destructive reality of war (such as the war in Vietnam or nuclear war). This is why he concludes that "the ecological conscience is also essentially a peace-making conscience."[810] Therefore, returning to a message similar to that of *Seeds of Destruction*, Merton suggests that if America truly wants to develop an environmental ethic, this will be bound with peacemaking efforts, not the organization of war and conflict. His final concluding recommendation, which is similar to the goal of this dissertation, is for Catholic theology to also "take note of the ecological conscience and do it fast."[811] Merton's letter to Hubbard and his review of Nash's book contain his most developed explanation of an ecological conscience and ecological consciousness, which draws heavily on his interest in the topic of peace and social issues. I argue that this ecological conscience/consciousness is an essential part of his nature mysticism, which is explicitly described here in these letters, but is implicitly evident in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, *Seeds of Destruction*, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, and his nature poetry. O'Connell argues that Merton's own ecological conscience "is an integral dimension of the Christian life [and] was rooted in his deep appreciation of the sacramentality of the natural world."[812] I believe Merton's nature mysticism emphasizes how each person has a great responsibility to care for not only one another, but all creation, and that this responsibility is an essential part of our true self. Since Merton's ecological letters to Carson and Hubbard, as well as his review of Nash's book, were written at the end of his life, they are also an excellent representation of his evolving nature mysticism, which continued to grow throughout his life and work, and demonstrates the transformative effect of his own mystical experience in Louisville, in 1958.

Nature Mysticism and Ethics

In the vast majority of secondary research about Teilhard and Merton that has been examined in this dissertation, the secondary authors typically focus on particular books Teilhard or Merton wrote, their unique theological ideas, or controversial beliefs they each held. While these can be helpful examinations of Teilhard and Merton's work, I would suggest that this research often

[810] Ibid., 451.This definition of the ecological conscience builds from the work of Aldo Leopold, who Merton credits for introducing this idea. Ibid.

[811] Ibid.

[812] O'Connell, "The Traditional Sources of Thomas Merton's Environmental Spirituality," 155.

does not sufficiently engage with the mystical experience of Teilhard or Merton.[813] Instead of embracing Teilhard and Merton as mystics, referring to them as mystics is avoided with a preference to instead considering them as great theological writers or thinkers. My argument has been to consider the theology of both Teilhard and Merton as informed by their individual mystical experiences, which for each mystic was a pivotal, transformative event resulting in the development of a mystical theology that engaged with the other and the world. This is one of the main reasons their nature mysticism can contribute to ecological theology and ethics. As stated in my thesis statement and discussed in the Introduction, the integration of Christian mysticism, and especially the nature mysticism as found in the work of Teilhard and Merton who both employ a cosmology of cosmogenesis, will enrich ecological theology with a mystical theology that will provide a foundation for ecological ethics. Both Teilhard and Merton were forever changed by their mystical experiences and the value of these experiences in their respective theologies must be included when assessing and analysing their mystical theology. This is how my dissertation takes the mystical theology of Teilhard and Merton further, by first embracing their role as Christian mystics, considering their work in light of their respective mystical experiences, and then applying their nature mysticism to the foundation of ecological theology and ethics.

According to Mark A. McIntosh, the spirituality of saints and mystics is valuable and important for theological development. He argues that "if the contemplative's encounters are dismissed as so much 'devotion' which can have no place in academic theology, then a significant public forum for mystical insight is closed."[814] McIntosh defines mysticism by building from the work of Bernard McGinn who focuses on mystical consciousness.[815] According to McIntosh, "mystical consciousness is the impression in human existence of infinite coherence, expressivity and meaning, namely the trinitarian life of God. Mysticism bears this speech of God, God-talk, theo-logy, within it and is therefore inherently theologically fruitful."[816] Since mysticism is theologically fruitful, he goes on to argue that the theologian can use the mysticism of Christian mystics, saints, and theologians to add to our tradition of revelation which will allow for a

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[813] Some examples here include Teilhardian scholars Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim. Examples of Merton scholars include Lawrence Cunningham and Donald St. John.

[814] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, 12.

[815] See Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1991).

[816] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, 32.

deepening of Christian faith. Considering then the mystical theology of both Teilhard and Merton, their nature mysticism in particular can contribute to the theological development of ecological ethics.

The methodology of McIntosh is critical for this dissertation because he provides a lens for more seriously incorporating the voice of the mystic that does not sanitize the mystic of their mystical experience or mystical tendencies. To do this, McIntosh cautions against focusing only on the mystic's experience, or attempting to find the authentic and real purpose behind the text.[817] Instead, McIntosh proposes "an interpretive approach to mystical texts that gives maximal value to the texts themselves, with all their particularities of imagery, structure and language."[818] In doing so, we can begin to access the meaning of the mystical texts that awaken a call in the reader since "to enter into the meaning of a mystical text is to allow one's own categories for understanding and experiencing reality to be given over—perhaps broken—certainly to be transformed, by the reality of the other who is always beyond oneself."[819] Mystical theology is therefore not to be left in isolation; the interpretation of mystical theology, of mystical texts and mystical experiences can contribute to the Christian community and Christian theology more generally.

In order to assess the meaning of a mystical text, McIntosh provides some guidelines. First, "since theology is all about the meaningfulness of *truth*," McIntosh suggests that the theological reflection of the text remain critical.[820] However, a serious challenge lies in the role of mystical texts which embody the mystic's testimony, "namely by *testimony* to a new way of being in the world" which, according to McIntosh, can be best assessed through "evoking a response in the observer who finally can only appropriate this truth by, in some sense, participating in it,

[817] Here, McIntosh refers to trying to 'demythologize' the mystical text (as Rudolf Bultmann does with Scripture), or attempting to better understand the meaning of the mystical experience assuming that we could come to understand the experience better than the mystic who experienced it. McIntosh also agrees with Grace Jantzen against limiting mystical experience by viewing mystical texts only as personal, individual experiences. He writes, the "interpretation of mysticism as primarily inner experience works covertly to disenfranchise religious communities in favour of academic arbiters of religion." McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, 121-122, 137.

[818] Ibid., 122.

[819] Ibid., 135.

[820] Ibid., 143. Italics original to text.

adopting it as a reference for living."[821] Essentially, McIntosh includes in his evaluation of the mystical text the impact the text has on the reader, and the community more generally. The mystical and spiritual text should also be assessed on the ability of the testimony to transform a person or a group of people "since spiritual texts are, as we have seen, not ultimately descriptions of objects but invitations to particular ways of life, it seems appropriate to assess their truthfulness in this fashion."[822] In particular McIntosh highlights that a "spirituality that builds *justice* has a powerfully valid claim on the attention of the theologian."[823]

Turning then to the nature mysticism of both Teilhard and Merton, with McIntosh's approach in mind, we can assess how both contain a call and a testimony that evokes within the observer a new way of understanding and engaging with all creation. Considering first McIntosh's assessment that the mystic's testimony evokes a response in the reader, I argue that both Teilhard and Merton share their mystical experiences in such a way that it is evident how the mystical experience experienced by both had a transformative effect on each. Teilhard's mystical experiences occurred during his military service during WWI. It was a time when he felt his life could end at any moment. While on the edge of mortality, he began to record his testament in "Cosmic Life," as well as his mystical experiences in the *Hymn of the Universe*. These were transformative events in Teilhard's own life that impacted not only his own theology but also the Christian community because they called for a further transformation of humanity. Moreover, after recording his mystical experiences in *Hymn of the Universe*, the text closed with a nature poem titled "Hymn to Matter."[824] This hymn was inspired by a transformation within Teilhard that resulted from his mystical experiences. He stated,

> if we are ever to reach you, matter, we must, having first established contact with the totality of all that lives and moves here below, come little by little to feel that the

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[821] Ibid., 143-144.

[822] Ibid., 145. McIntosh rightly discussed the issue of "by *whose* standards of rationality [is the validity of the testimony]…being held as the plumbline, and with *whose* gender and political location these standards are coherent." No further elaboration is provided; rather, McIntosh ends this section with the caution that "the coherence of mystical speech and its attendant capacity to frame the work of theological construction will need to be judged to a large extent in terms of practical effects." Ibid. Italics original to the text.

[823] Ibid. Italics original to the text.

[824] This "Hymn to Matter" comes at the end of the mystical experience recounted in "The Spiritual Power of Matter," where Teilhard writes a mystical commentary on Elijah being taken up into Heaven while Elisha is left behind. Here Teilhard describes Elisha's experience encountering and speaking with a fiery whirlwind. In this conversation, Teilhard records gaining an understanding of creation and how humanity has evolved. See Teilhard de Chardin, "The Spiritual Power of Matter" in *Hymn of the Universe*, 53-69.

> individual shapes of all we have laid hold on are melting away in our hands, until finally we are at grips with the *single essence* of all subsistencies and all unions. …Raise me up then, matter, to those heights, through struggle and separation and death; raise me up until at long last, it becomes possible for me in perfect chastity to embrace the universe.[825]

The transformative effect of his experiences led to his future works (*The Phenomenon of Man* and *The Divine Milieu*), but they also have an impact on ecological ethics today. His writing calls for a complete reorientation of the role of the person in relationship with all creation, while also pushing humanity to see its cosmic place in evolution. The ethical ramifications of his mystical theology push humanity toward developing an Earth ethic where our place in the cosmos radically influences our actions within nature. The very essence of his nature mysticism is a call to readers to also undergo a transformation that will radically reorient their understanding of their place in the cosmos, and therefore their relationship with the rest of creation.

Similarly, I argue that Merton's mystical experiences are likewise transformative events for Merton that generate in readers a further social transformation. His experience on March 18, 1958, in Louisville, radically changed how Merton responded to the other. The world and other people were no longer distractions to be ignored; rather, in the moment of his mystical experience Merton saw the beauty of each person's soul and he loved each person at that intersection.[826] The illusion that he was separate from the world was completely shattered with Merton becoming further awakened into his true self, hidden in God. When Merton described how humanity is intimately bound with creation, he explained: "how absolutely central is the truth that we are first of all *part of nature*, though we are a very special part, that which is conscious of God."[827] Returning again to his own journey into Christianity, Merton reflected that "my conversion to Catholicism began with the realization of the presence of God *in this present life*, in the world and in myself, and that my task as Christian is to live in full and vital awareness of this ground of my being and of the world's being."[828] His understanding of himself, his understanding of his relationship with the other and with the world was transformed. This transformation contains an ethical dimension as well, which becomes even more evident as the

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[825] Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, 67-68. Italics original to the text.

[826] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 311-313.

[827] Ibid., 294. Italics original to text.

[828] Ibid., 320. Italics original to text.

years pass from this mystical experience. Merton's writing on the Christian responsibility called every Christian to be a peacemaker. His critique of our "modern suicidal age" sought to awaken humanity to the oppressive power of technology and progress. Furthermore, his concern with the human responsibility toward creation was not only a direct result of his own transformative mystical experience in 1958, but also contributed to ecological ethics since he sought to awaken within each person our inherent responsibility to care for Earth.[829]

In order to apply McIntosh's "interpretive approach to mystical texts that gives maximal value to the texts themselves, with all their particularities of imagery, structure and language," it is necessary to embrace the role of and references to creation in both Teilhard and Merton's mystical experiences.[830] For Teilhard, the setting of World War I, the focus on fire, Earth, sacramental objects, and the presence of Christ in his mystical experiences were critical components of these experiences that demonstrated his nature mysticism. For Merton, the setting of the city Louisville, the presence of other persons, his nature poetry involving animals (such as deer) or the wilderness surrounding his hermitage were likewise critical components of his nature mysticism. These details, as McIntosh suggests, cannot be overlooked, because when they are overlooked the mystical experiences of both Teilhard and Merton are altered and the true depth of their nature mysticism has been lost.

This nature mysticism is not exclusive to Merton, or Teilhard, since as McIntosh explains, the testimony of a mystical experience has the ability to transform a person or a group of people by inviting the reader into a new way of life. This is exactly what both Merton and Teilhard do in their writing. Teilhard's texts call for an awakening of humanity to enter into the divine milieu, and that each person "*needs to live* with his whole heart, in union with the totality of the world that carries him along, *cosmically*." [831] Merton's works urge humanity to live an authentic life as each person's true self, to reject the life of a guilty bystander, and to instead cultivate an ecological consciousness and a peacemaking consciousness where our responsibility for Earth is

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[829] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 90-91, and Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 308-309.

[830] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, 122.

[831] Teilhard de Chardin, "Cosmic Life," in *Writings in Time of War*, 33. See also, Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 115-116. Italics original to text.

taken seriously.[832] The nature mysticism of Merton and Teilhard also contains a clear call for justice, specifically justice for Earth, which McIntosh argues the theologian needs to seriously consider because a "spirituality that builds *justice* has a powerfully valid claim on the attention of the theologian."[833]

Case Study: Nature Mysticism and Genetically Modified Seeds

In order to further demonstrate how Teilhard and Merton's nature mysticism can contribute to ecological ethics, I will apply their nature mysticism when addressing the ethical issue of using genetically modified (GM) seeds as employed by the American multinational corporation, Monsanto. I will first explain how this product is related to climate change and how Monsanto makes use of genetically modified seeds. Then, I will demonstrate how such genetically modified seeds violate the three characteristics of nature mysticism, and how Teilhard and Merton's nature mysticism can respond to this ecological ethical issue.

There is an increasing human population on Earth and the majority of humanity currently experiences food shortages and will continue to experience food shortages due to climate change. Additionally, consumers in the developed world must assess their over-consumption and waste, and find ways to lessen, and eventually remove, the global ethical issue of unequal access to the necessities of life (such as food).[834] A study on this issue released by Chikelu Mba, Elcio P. Guimaraes, and Kakoli Ghosh explains that,

> data provided by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), conclude that an additional 40 to 170 million more people will be undernourished as a direct consequence of climate change. Indeed, the overwhelming prognosis is that extreme weather events such as heavy precipitation, heat waves, and rising sea levels will occur in many parts of the world during the 21st century with resulting floods, drought, and salinity as the most critical consequences. …[There will be a] generational challenge of producing enough food for a rapidly growing population under extreme and changing

[832] Merton, *News Seeds of Contemplation*, 7-8, Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letter of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 74, and Patrick F. O'Connell, ed., "The Wild Places," in *Thomas Merton: Selected Essays*, 451.

[833] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, 145. Italics original to the text.

[834] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Città del Vaticano: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2004, 483.

> weather conditions…[which will be] further exacerbated by dwindling agricultural land and water resources.[835]

In terms of farming, Mba, Guimaraes, and Ghosh clarify that these climate change issues will impact farming globally by reducing crop yield, threatening natural vegetation, creating drier climates or wetter climates (due to unpredictable rain patterns), the loss of good farm land, and an increase in blights and pesticide use.[836] Many agricultural companies have attempted to address this reality; however, their methods raise some ethical concerns. For example, Monsanto, a multinational agricultural corporation created by John Francis Queeny in 1901, has been producing genetically modified seeds (mainly corn and soybeans) for farming. Monsanto argues that their approach to farming is environmentally friendly since they seek to positively influence how crop seeds can respond to environmental changes in order to ensure the survival of the crop. They argue that they can feed the world through their biotechnology.[837] Rather than waiting for seeds to naturally evolve and cross breed, Monsanto alters the genetic structure of a seed through "agricultural biotechnology [which] employs the modern tools of genetic engineering to reduce uncertainty and breeding time and to transfer traits from more distantly related plants."[838] In addition to this, Monsanto also produces a wide range of chemical pesticides, which they label as agricultural products, that must also be used with their genetically modified seeds.[839] For example, the chemical Roundup, a glyphosate herbicide, "is a non-selective herbicide that does not distinguish between weeds and desirable vegetation, and thus kills all plants."[840] The only plants Roundup does not kill are those grown from Monsanto's genetically modified seeds which have been genetically engineered in order to survive this herbicide. These seeds have also been patented by Monsanto, giving the corporation a substantial amount of power over the production, use, and profit associated with the use of such seeds, especially since "Monsanto requires

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[835] Chikelu Mba, Elcio P. Guimaraes, and Kakoli Ghosh, "Reorienting Crop Improvement for the Changing Climate Conditions of the 21st Century," *Agriculture & Food Security* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-2.

[836] Ibid., 2.

[837] Gordon Conway, "Genetically Modified Crops: Risks and Promise," *Conservation Ecology* 4, no. 1 (2000), http://www.consecol.org/vol4/iss1/art2/ (accessed August 22, 2019).

[838] Geoffrey Barrows, Steven Sexton, and David Zilberman, "Agricultural Biotechnology: The Promise and Prospects of Genetically Modified Crops," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28, no. 1 (2014): 99.

[839] Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Lexington, KY: Kentucky UP, 2016), 96.

[840] Ibid., 98.

farmers who purchase seed with the Roundup Ready trait…to sign a special licensing agreement that prevents farmers from saving and replanting the seed in the following year."[841]

Vandana Shiva further explains the ethical issues regarding Monsanto's genetically modified seeds, particularly in regards to how farmers and communities who use Monsanto's seeds have experienced some significant negative effects. She argues that Monsanto's genetically modified seeds are more expensive than traditional methods of seed saving and sharing "because of the higher costs of the seed, technology fees, and the need for increased use of chemicals." [842] In addition to the increase in cost, Shiva also argues that the food produced from genetically modified seeds has not been adequately proven to be safe to consume.[843] Furthermore, Monsanto's genetically modified seeds require monoculture farming which threatens seed and vegetation diversity. She explains, "the trend toward the cultivation of genetically engineered crops indicates a clear narrowing of the genetic basis of our food supply. …As the biotechnology industry globalizes, these monoculture tendencies will increase, thus further displacing agricultural biodiversity and creating ecological vulnerability."[844] Moreover, many farmers who have used Monsanto's genetically modified seeds have also filed lawsuits against the company claiming serious crop losses, crop failures, and deformed crops unfit for sale.[845]

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[841] Josh Haugo, "The Future of Farming After *Bowman v. Monsanto*," *Journal of Corporation Law* 40, no. 3 (2015): 745.

[842] Shiva, *Stolen Harvest*, 101.

[843] Ibid., 101-103. Shiva discusses in particular the potential issue of genetically modified foods causing antibiotic resistance and hormone disruption.

[844] Ibid., 104.

[845] Shiva argues that there are many examples of the loss of crops, deformed crops, and loss of profit for farmers who used Monsanto's genetically engineered cotton seed, Bollgard, in both the United States and India. This seed was genetically modified to be "resistant to the common bollworm pest." However, this particular seed caused serious deformities to the cotton and did not reduce the infestation of the crops from the unwanted pests (Ibid., 99). In addition to the negative effects Monsanto's cotton seeds have caused, others have also raised concerns regarding Monsanto's use of carcinogenic chemicals and the effect they may be having on the health of those who live near and work in Monsanto plants. Brian Tokar provides detailed documentation regarding how the Monsanto plant located in the city of East St. Louis, Illinois was accused of negatively influencing the health of a high number of people. He writes: "the city has the highest rate of fetal death and immature births in the state, the third highest rate of infant death, and one of the highest childhood asthma rates in the United States." There are also accusations that Monsanto's manufacturing practices have tainted the soil and the company has allegedly been involved in a cover up to hide the influences that their manufacturing plant has had on the health issues of people in this town. While these are serious accusations regarding the effect of Monsanto's practices on human health, they shed light on the kind of corporation Monsanto has become as they reveal the potential risks Monsanto has taken in order to create their genetically modified seeds. Brain Tokar, "Monsanto: A Checkered History," *The Ecologist* 28, no. 5 (1998): 1-2.

Celia Deane-Drummond argues that those who raise concerns about agricultural biotechnology often emphasize a serious uneasiness "in relation to the *spirit* in which these technologies are being developed and encouraged—the motives that animate this development, the level of seriousness and respect with which it is proceeding, and the assumptions about human beings and their place in the world that seem to underlie it."[846] Therefore, Deane-Drummond calls for "adequate moral, ethical or even theological *evaluations*" where these concerns are seriously heard and addressed.[847] Nature mysticism, specifically the nature mysticism proposed by Teilhard and Merton, can contribute to this need to adequately address the ethical issues raised by genetically modified seeds as manufactured by Monsanto. I argue that the main eco-ethical issues Monsanto's genetically modified seeds create include the loss of biodiversity, the harmful effect of excessive chemical use on crops and insects, the role technology plays in manipulating the natural process of growing food, the concerning amount of pressure and influence that Monsanto continues to exert with their patented seeds, and the increasing financial stress faced by poorer nations where genetically modified seeds are used.[848] Moreover, each of these ecological issues violates the three characteristics of nature mysticism.

The first characteristic of nature mysticism, building an intimate relationship between humans and all creation that emphasizes a relationship *with* creation not *over* creation, is directly violated by Monsanto's genetically modified seeds because the purpose of these seeds is to genetically modify them in such a way that humanity gains more control over creation. While it is a good desire to seek to create enough food to feed the growing human population, the method as to how this desire is achieved demonstrates an understanding that humanity is not in relationship with creation; rather, we must exert our power and abilities over creation in order for creation to do what we desire. Moreover, the production and use of genetically modifying seeds reflects a

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[846] Celia Deane-Drummond, Robin Grove-White, and Bronislaw Szerszynski, "Genetically Modified Technology: The Religious Dimensions of Public Concerns About Agricultural Biotechnology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 14, no. 2 (2001): 23. Italics original to text.

[847] Ibid., 24. Italics original to text.

[848] My argument is based on Chikelu Mba, Elcio P. Guimaraes, and Kakoli Ghosh's previously referenced article, "Reorienting Crop Improvement for the Changing Climate Conditions of the 21st Century," and Celia Deane-Drummond's description of GMO seeds in "Genetically Modified Technology: The Religious Dimensions of Public Concerns About Agricultural Biotechnology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 14, no. 2 (2001): 23-41. See also: Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, "Food Justice and Christian Ethics," *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 33, no. 2 (2012): 1-6; Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2013); and Seralini Gilles-Eric, "Update on Long-Term Toxicity of Agricultural GMOs Tolerant to Roundup," *Environmental Sciences Europe* 32, no. 1 (2020): 1-7.

mechanistic view of Earth; specifically, that matter can be molded and altered in any way that suits the success and survival of humanity without regard for how such manipulation affects the rest of creation.[849] Both Teilhard and Merton reject a mechanistic view of Earth. Instead, Teilhard explains how a mechanistic view of Earth results in the neglect of the *within* of creation and a rejection of Earth's inner consciousness.[850] Genetically modifying seeds also has a serious impact on evolution, mainly because only one or two breeds of seeds are genetically altered and produced en masse, which then diminishes diversity and therefore negatively affects the complexification of the evolutionary process.[851] Regarding humanity as the spirit of Earth, Teilhard explains that it is essential we come to a greater understanding of our intimate relationship with creation, our dependence on Earth, and our responsibility towards Earth since humanity "*is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself*, to borrow Julian Huxley's striking expression. It seems to me [Teilhard] that our modern minds (because and inasmuch as they are modern) will never find rest until they settle down to this view."[852]

The second characteristic of nature mysticism, that nature mystics emphasize the divine presence in the phenomenal world that can result in a personal mystical experience involving people and/or nature, is also violated by the ethical issues that genetically modified seeds create. Genetically modified seeds threaten the diversity of vegetation since "when a crop is genetically

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[849] Thomas Berry explains how the mechanistic view of Earth (meaning the view that Earth is simply a collection of objects) has resulted in the exploitation of Earth. He provides great detail on the role of the corporation in the exploitation of Earth in his chapter "The Corporation Story" in *The Great Work* (117-135). He writes, "These corporations now own or control the natural resources of the entire planet directly or indirectly. …They extract the various ores from Earth, fashion and sell the products. Yet they have no proportionate responsibility for the public welfare. …This control by the corporations had its beginning in the period when the colonial powers of the European world assumed the right to invade, possess, and exploit the entire planet for the benefit of the religious, political, and economic powers then in control of the nations of Europe." *The Great Work*, 121. According to Berry, this exploitation reflects humanity's struggle to see the psychic-spiritual dimension of Earth. See: Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 132.

[850] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 56. Teilhard explains how it is the within of the cosmos that contains consciousness and also some form of energy that is intimately bound with the process of evolution. Ibid., 71-72.

[851] On the issue of seed diversity, Chikelu Mba, Elcio P. Guimaraes, and Kakoli Ghosh, explain how "Farmers…have over the several millennia of selecting from, improving, and exchanging local genetic diversity contributed immensely to the diversity of plants we grow. With the upsurge in the ready availability of modern crop varieties bred in research institutes, the roles of farmers in ensuring diversity…have waned significantly. One effect of this shift is the precariously narrow genetic base of the modern crop varieties. The obvious threat that this poses to food security calls for the systematic re-integration of farmers' knowledge and perspectives in the developing of modern crop varieties." Chikelu Mba, Elcio P. Guimaraes, and Kakoli Ghosh, "Reorienting Crop Improvement for the Changing Climate Conditions of the 21st Century," 6.

[852] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 221. Italics original to text.

engineered (or bred) the resultant uniformity brings the desired increase in yield, but also carries a greater vulnerability to disease."[853] With this uniformity comes less diversity, because that which cannot strengthen the seed is removed. Berry explains the need to protect the diversity of creation, "the community of all components of the planet Earth is primary in the divine intention. …our sense of the divine [will not be] so exalted if the earth is diminished in its glory. It is all quite clear. If we pull the threads, the fabric falls apart."[854] By reducing the diversity of creation we are also threatening the potential relationship between humanity and the divine presence in creation. For example, this potential relationship is threatened by the patenting seeds. To patent something is to declare ownership over that object, which allows the owner to use the object for potential profit. Seeing the divine presence in the world is then clouded by the possibility of conferring exclusive ownership and access to a part of creation. As Deane-Drummond explains, it used to be "there was a general consensus that anything 'natural' could not be patented" but now corporations invested in agricultural biotechnology have managed to argue that genetically modified seeds are "not nature's handiwork."[855] This issue of patenting seeds further discourages people from building a relationship with creation where we allow ourselves to have an openness to encounter the divine in creation. Instead, Berry explains that as corporations

> take over responsibility for 'feeding the world,' we can only wonder at the reduction of the peoples of Earth to a condition of being nurse-maided by some few corporation enterprises. We might conclude that Mother Monsanto with her sterile seeds wishes to take over the role of Mother Nature herself.[856]

In an effort to address Monsanto's patented genetically modified seeds, some countries are employing the Precautionary Principle. This principle states that we should exercise caution when there is doubt and uncertainty regarding the consequences of influential decisions.[857] This

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[853] Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (Toronto, ON: Novalis, 2008), 23.

[854] Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 79. Berry builds this argument from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, specifically Aquinas's explanation of how the diversity of creation is an essential way the divine goodness is revealed. Ibid.

[855] Ibid., 26.

[856] Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*, 135.

[857] The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESDOC) articulated the Precautionary Principle in 2005 in order for nations to be better equipped to assess how to ethically respond to new scientific and technological discoveries. They define this principle as follows: "when human activities may lead to morally unacceptable harm that is scientifically plausible but uncertain, actions shall be taken to avoid or diminish that harm. *Morally unacceptable harm* refers to harm to humans or the environment that is threatening to human life or health, or serious and effectively irreversible, or inequitable to present or future generations, or imposed without

principle is "an integral principle of sustainable development" that provides communities with "a strategy to cope with scientific uncertainties in the assessment and management of risks. It is about the wisdom of action under uncertainty: 'Look before you leap', 'better safe than sorry'."[858] Employing this precautionary principle reflects the second characteristic of nature mysticism by ensuring that proposed changes to creation proceed cautiously in order to protect the integrity and diversity of creation. As Berry outlines in his essay "Agenda for an Ecological Age," "human technologies should function in an *integral relation with earth technologies*, not in a despotic or disturbing manner or under the metaphor of conquest, but rather in an evocative manner. The spontaneities of nature need to be fostered, not extinguished."[859] Monsanto's genetically modified seeds do not function in "an integral relation with earth technologies" because they require such substantial changes in the seed itself and the environment in which the seed is grown that the natural and traditional farming and seed sharing techniques are threatened and in some cases extinguished.[860]

Furthermore, employing this precautionary principle from the perspective of the second characteristic of nature mysticism also demonstrates Merton's call for the need to better ethically assess the use of scientific and technological advancements, and the power of the corporation. From the perspective of the second characteristic of nature mysticism, the precautionary principle could help address the potential risk that Monsanto's genetically modified seeds limit or diminish the opportunity for each person to encounter the divine in creation because such severe manipulation of creation creates a barrier between humanity and nature where nature is understood only in terms of how it can be further controlled and molded. In *Seeds of Destruction*, Merton critiqued the free and unlimited use of technology and science in order to supposedly enhance life and society, as well as the power allotted to corporations (in relation to the civil rights movement in America). On this topic, he raised a point that is also valid for the issue at

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adequate consideration of the human rights of those affected." At present, European nations have invoked this principle in response to genetically modified foods. See: *The Precautionary Principle: World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology* (Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005), 14. Italics original to text.

[858] Ibid., 8.

[859] Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 65.

[860] Deane-Drummond discusses how genetically modified seeds are threatening, and potentially permanently damaging, indigenous farming techniques that are integrally connected with indigenous culture. I will discuss this more in relation with the third characteristic of nature mysticism. See: *Eco-Theology*, 23.

hand here, that is: "we have little genuine interest in human liberty and in the human person. What we are interested in, on the contrary, is the unlimited freedom of the corporation."[861] In the case of Monsanto and genetically modified seeds, this corporation has been permitted to experiment with biotechnology and genetically engineer seeds while also successfully ensuring that the results of their experimentation (genetically modified food) are not labeled as such in North America. This is an example of Merton's concern that society has embraced the belief that too often science and technology are considered to be above ethical scrutiny because "science can do everything, science must be permitted to do everything it likes, science is infallible and impeccable, all that is done by science is right. No matter how monstrous, no matter how criminal an act may be, if it is justified by science it is unassailable."[862] When corporations are not held accountable with better ethical scrutiny, then it becomes possible for corporations to interfere with the relationship between humanity and creation, meaning that the potential for other individuals to encounter the divine in creation is jeopardized. This is the case with Monsanto's genetically modified seeds because their biotechnology does not desire to enhance "the spontaneities of nature," nor does it support any possible understanding of the divine presence in creation. Monsanto's genetically modified seeds also do not support the possibility of a mystical encounter with the divine through creation, because the desire to gain control over creation through patented seeds obscures the deeper psychic-spiritual dimension of creation. Encountering the divine in creation is an essential part of Merton's own mystical experience in Louisville. As a result of this mystical experience, he was suddenly able to see those around him with God's eyes he wished others could see what he saw:

> if only they could all see themselves as they really *are*. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. …I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other. But this cannot be *seen*, only believed and "understood" by a peculiar gift.[863]

In order to ensure we support a positive relationship between humanity and nature so that each individual has the opportunity to see the divine in creation, it is essential that the actions of corporations be held accountable to ethical scrutiny, and that nature not be viewed and treated as a source of matter to be exploited.

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[861] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 26.

[862] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 75.

[863] Ibid., 158. Italics original to text.

The third characteristic of nature mysticism, that nature mysticism evokes an Earth ethic of care and justice that may also be evident in the mystic's own actions, is also violated by the proliferation of genetically modified seeds. One example of a serious environmental injustice this biotechnology creates is the financial burden placed on poor farmers, often in developing countries, who use genetically modified seeds and then lose traditional seed-saving practices while also becoming separated from their cultural connection with the land. Deane-Drummond describes how the use of genetically modified seeds has impacted farming communities in Mexico.

> The introduction of GM maize in Mexico, for example, has not only impacted the ecology of the native varieties, but also undermines the close association between people and the cultivation of specific varieties of maize built up over centuries of farming. Indigenous peoples speak of humanity being made by maize, and maize as a gift of God to the people, a reflection of the religious as well as social affiliation between maize and people that suffers radical disruption with the introduction of genetically modified crops.[864]

Such genetically modified seeds are creating a deep separation between humanity and Earth by replacing traditional farming techniques with chemically enhanced farming, and removing the need to save or share seeds when genetically modified seeds are instead continually purchased new each season. There are serious injustices that further undermine our ability to care for and protect Earth.

The argument that genetically modified seeds can feed the world and prevent starvation, as promoted by Monsanto, further misleads people about how best to feed the growing population; "problems of starvation and lack of access to healthy diets cannot be whitewashed by simple technological 'solutions' that cover up the underlying social and political causes of poverty."[865] Instead, we must consider how the nature mysticism of Merton and Teilhard can help us cultivate an Earth ethic of care and justice. Merton argues that each Catholic must always examine one's own conscience, to evaluate one's actions as an individual and as a member of the Christian community, and ask whether one truly realizes and actualizes one's responsibility to "manifest Christ to the world."[866] Moreover, in order for Christians to adequately respond to ecological

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[864] Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, 23.

[865] Ibid., 22.

[866] Merton, *Seeds of Destruction*, 19. This call to conscience was in reaction to the civil rights movement in America.

issues Merton suggests we develop an ecological conscience, which is also a peace-making conscience.[867] This ecological conscience requires that we see our vocation in this cosmic creation, our responsibility to care for Earth not to exploit Earth, to renounce our destructive ecological behaviour, and "to be the source and exemplar of all being and all life."[868] In the case of genetically modified seeds, Merton's ecological conscience calls us to recognize and address the destructive reality these seeds generate environmentally and the disruption they cause in the relationship between human society and the land.

Both Teilhard and Merton's Christology offer a model on how to act in creation, which demonstrate an Earth ethic of care and justice. According to Teilhard, Christ is the best example of how humanity ought to live in relationship with Earth.

> Christ…put himself in the position (maintained ever since) to subdue under himself, to purify, to direct and superanimate the general ascent of consciousness into which he inserted himself. By a perennial act of communion and sublimation, he aggregates to himself the total psychism of the earth.[869]

Therefore, our actions have great consequences because we are building up Earth and completing the work of Christ in our actions.[870] Choosing to make use of genetically engineered seeds creates numerous environmental consequences, and potentially consequences for human health.[871] Such consequences do not build up Earth; rather, they create serious challenges in ensuring the success of Earth. As Merton explains in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, the life we lead and the actions we choose will reflect how we see our own self. A life consumed by our false, exterior self, will be reflected in selfish, worldly actions. "The 'I' that works in the world, thinks about itself, observes its own reactions and talks about itself is not the true 'I' that has

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[867] Patrick F. O'Connell, ed., "The Wild Places," 451.

[868] Merton, *Witness to Freedom: The Letter of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis 1960-1963*, 71-72.

[869] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 294.

[870] Ibid., 62. Teilhard writes: "Owing to the interrelation between matter, soul and Christ, we bring part of the being which he desires back to God *in whatever we do*. With each one of our *works*, we labour—in individual separation, but no less really—to build the Pleroma; that is to say, we bring to Christ a little fulfilment." Ibid. Italics original to the text.

[871] The environmental consequences I am referring to are those discussed in this case study. They include: the interference in the process of evolution, the limitation of genetically modified seeds to enable crops to produce seeds for future use, and the loss of traditional farming methods and community seed sharing. These environmental consequences are also outlined by Shiva. See: Shiva, *Stolen Harvest*, 101-104. For the potential human health consequences of genetically modified seeds and foods, see footnote 843.

been united to God in Christ. It is at best the vesture, the mask, the disguise."[872] Alternatively, a life lived in an awareness of our true self in Christ is reflected in actions that are not self-serving or short-sighted because an awareness of the true self is an awareness of "the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God."[873] Merton's own application of his theology of the self to our relationship with creation can again be applied to this eco-ethical issue. Our false self-serving self, focussed on individual profit and well-being, struggles to see how genetically modified seeds negatively interfere with the evolutionary development of seeds and farming techniques by changing creation in such a way that we are no longer building up Earth and contributing to Christ's work of returning creation to God and we limit the potential for humanity to experience the divine in creation. If we are to truly be the 'eye of the body' as Merton declares, then we must embrace an ecological conscience that has a greater awareness of the presence of God in creation and the human responsibility to care for creation. Our response to genetically modified organisms very much reflects our attitude toward creation. As Merton explains "our attitude towards nature is simply an extension of our attitude toward ourselves, and toward one another. We are free to be at peace with ourselves and others, and also with nature."[874]

These three characteristics of nature mysticism reflect Teilhard and Merton's own mystical experiences and the transformative effect they had on their individual lives. Their nature mysticism has resulted in a transformation where they now have a greater awareness of the human relationship with creation, the opportunity to experience the divine presence in creation, and the human responsibility to care for and protect Earth. Applied to this ecological ethical issue, nature mysticism offers not only the opportunity to incorporate the voice of Christian mystics into ecological theology, but also offers one approach to assessing ecological ethical issues.

Conclusion

While I have examined the specific ecological ethical issue of genetically modified seeds here and applied the nature mysticism of Teilhard and Merton, I also argue that there are many other

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[872] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 7.

[873] Ibid.

[874] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 139.

ways that the nature mysticism of Teilhard and Merton can be incorporated into ecological theology and ethics more generally. Firstly, their nature mysticism provides a greater source of meaning behind why Christians should act responsibility and ethically within creation. While ecological theology has explained why we should care for Earth, the nature mysticism provided by Teilhard and Merton justifies why caring for Earth is also a Christian responsibility, and that such a responsibility can come out of a mystical experience of the divine in creation. Secondly, the nature mysticism of Teilhard and Merton incorporates the Christian belief of the divinization of human actions. It is no longer that we should act justly and ethically within creation because we ought to; there is now an emphasis on the transformative role our actions can have and can receive. Moreover, this divinization is intimately linked with both Teilhard and Merton's understanding of the presence of God in creation, and their individual mystical experiences where they describe their own transformation and their own experience of divinization. Thirdly, their nature mysticism results in a radical reorientation of the relationship between humanity and Earth. Both Teilhard and Merton reject the idea that the world is a machine, or empty matter; instead, both promote a view of Earth as alive and full of the presence of God. We can therefore no longer act within creation as if Earth is without value; now, there must be more serious ethical reflections regarding human actions in creation that focus not on how to benefit the corporation but instead on how to benefit both humanity and Earth in a mutually enhancing way.[875] Specific human actions regarding the handling of toxic waste, the industry of factory farming, and the unchecked exploitation of non-renewable resources such as coal and oil cannot simply be accepted as necessary human behaviour when the consequences of these actions results in the destruction of many plant and animal species, and the forced relocation of vulnerable human societies (often Indigenous societies).

In conclusion, since mystical texts are "invitations to particular ways of life," and the mystical texts explored here of Teilhard and Merton offer a nature mysticism that calls for a transformation in how we live within Earth, the nature mysticism offered here can be applied to ecological ethics.[876] As stated in my thesis statement, the integration of Christian mysticism, and especially the nature mysticism as found in the work of Teilhard de Chardin and Merton who

[875] Cf., Berry, *The Great Work*, 11.

[876] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, 145.

both employ a cosmology of cosmogenesis, will enrich ecological theology with a mystical theology that will provide a foundation for ecological ethics. The nature mysticism within the Christian tradition of mystical theology that can be retrieved and applied to ecological theology and ethics provides a compelling source of meaning that supports and justifies an Earth ethic of care and justice. Furthermore, since nature mysticism inspires this Earth ethic through an awareness of the divine immanence of Christ in creation and by emphasizing the need for a relationship with, not over, creation, there is also no question that this mystical theology is not only an excellent reflection of the Christian life, but also an example of how nature mysticism can enable humanity to better address the current ecological crisis.

Conclusion

Thomas Berry argued that there was a shift happening in human consciousness and that this shift was necessary in order to address the current ecological crisis. Building from the work of Teilhard, he explained:

> this awakened consciousness of the earth comes after a period when the human phase of the earth had set itself in radical opposition to the earth, when man had devalued the earth as subject and treated the earth as object to be exploited. Man had forgotten that he is himself the psychic dimension of the earth and that the earth is the basic dimension of his own reality. Shocked at his own actions man has suddenly become aware of a new mood in earth-man relations. For the earth has suddenly thrust upon man responsibility for the entire human process and to some degree the earth process itself. …Man now becomes the master of life and death, he knows the genetic code, he is penetrating into the great mysteries of matter, he holds the fate of earth in his hands.[877]

According to Berry, this change in consciousness regarding Earth also requires a transformation in human action towards Earth, and such a change in action is absolutely necessary in order to ensure the success of all aspects of the planet. The nature mysticism explored in this dissertation offers a way to support the change in consciousness and the required transformation in human action called for by Berry. Both Teilhard and Merton go through their own transformative mystical experiences in which they are brought into a more intimate relationship with creation where they encounter the divine in creation and become aware of the human responsibility to care for Earth.

Echoing my thesis statement, I have argued that the integration of Christian mysticism, and especially the nature mysticism as found in the work of Teilhard and Merton who both employ a cosmology of cosmogenesis, will enrich ecological theology with a mystical theology that will provide a foundation for ecological ethics. This thesis has demonstrated that by incorporating the mystical theology of nature mystics that emphasizes the presence of God within the cosmos and the sacredness of all creation, we will be better able to address the current ecological crisis by building an ethic of creation. As outlined in my thesis statement, I have also explained three characteristics of nature mysticism (building an intimacy with creation, emphasizing divine

[877] Berry, "Cosmic Person and the Future of Man," 5. Berry's male exclusive language here should not be interpreted to mean Berry values only the male perspective. This exclusive language use is reflective of the time in which Berry was writing.

immanence, and establishing an Earth ethic of care and justice) that can contribute to ecological theology and ethics. I have also explored in detail the third characteristic, the ethical dimension of nature mysticism, and I have argued how this particular characteristic contains the potential for mystical experiences to elicit social transformation and inform ecological ethics, and how this is an important characteristic of nature mysticism.

My dissertation has provided an examination of the value of the nature mysticism of both Teilhard and Merton for ecological theology, and in particular ecological ethics. In Chapter One, I provided a detailed review of the limited research currently available on nature mysticism in ecological theology. I examined influential studies on mysticism and mystical theology provided by William James, Evelyn Underhill, and Bernard McGinn in order to gain a sense of the study of mysticism and to come to an understanding as to how mystical theology could inform ecological theology and ethics. In this chapter I also examined how a cosmology of cosmogenesis is important in ecological theology and how it is relevant for nature mysticism since it too fosters a sense of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all creation. Moreover, a cosmology of cosmogenesis, when framed within a Christian perspective, supports a greater appreciation for the sacredness of creation.

Chapters Two and Three focused on the nature mysticism found in the work of Teilhard and Merton, respectively. A brief and focused biography of each was provided in order to contextualize their writing and to connect their nature mysticism with pivotal life events. For example, Teilhard's mystical experiences recounted in *Hymn of the Universe* happened during his time serving as a stretcher bearer during WWI, and had an immense impact on his writing and his theology. Likewise, Merton's mystical experience recounted in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* had such an impact on Merton's spirituality and his writing that his work after this experience (on which this dissertation focused) has been recognized by Merton scholars as significantly different from his writing before this experience. Therefore, the biographical details provided in these chapters seek to highlight the important moments in both Teilhard and Merton's lives that were critical for their personal development and theological reflection.

In addition to these details, I have provided an examination of Teilhard's nature mysticism contained in *The Human Phenomenon* (1955), *The Divine Milieu* (1957), *Hymn of the Universe* (1961), and *Writings in a Time of War* (1968). These particular books contain Teilhard's own

mystical experiences, while also demonstrating a more developed cosmology where evolution has been incorporated into his theology. Teilhard's nature mysticism does not simply call for an appreciation of nature, but rather a deep reorientation of the understanding of the role of humanity as the consciousness of Earth.

In addition to Teilhard, I also provided an examination of Thomas Merton's nature mysticism contained within *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1962), *Seeds of Destruction* (1964), and *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966), and selections of *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (1977). These particular books were selected because they contain Merton's theology after his own mystical experience in 1958, and because they demonstrate his own theological development and his concern regarding many social issues of his time. Merton's nature mysticism calls for a new understanding of the self, and the Christian responsibility towards other persons and Earth. Similar to Teilhard, Merton's nature mysticism is very much informed by his own mystical experience and his relationship with nature.

My last chapter provided a more detailed analysis of Teilhard and Merton's nature mysticism, along with a further analysis of how their nature mysticism can enrich ecological theology by providing an ecological ethic. I argued that by incorporating the mystical theology of nature mystics that emphasizes the presence of God within the cosmos and the sacredness of all creation, we will be better able to address the current ecological crisis by building an ethic of creation. In this chapter, the characteristics of nature mysticism were examined in detail. I also devoted particular attention to the ethical imperative of nature mysticism and provided a case study that applied nature mysticism to the ecological ethical issue of genetically modified seeds. This ethical dimension of nature mysticism is principally important because it demonstrates the potential for mystical experiences to elicit social transformation and inform ethics. This ethical dimension is very much the result of the first characteristic of nature mysticism (an emphasis on becoming aware of the intimate relationship between humans and all creation by building a relationship *with* creation not *over* creation) and the second characteristic (that nature mysticism relies heavily on the mystic's experience of the divine in the phenomenal world, which can include personal, emotional, and mystical encounters with God through and in other people or nature). These elements of nature mysticism, evident in both Teilhard and Merton, are further

connected to the third characteristic of nature mysticism, that being the development of an Earth ethic of care and justice.

Implications for Future Research

There are two significant implications of this dissertation's research: firstly, how ecological theology can benefit from an in-depth engagement with mystical theology; and secondly, how the Christian tradition of nature mysticism has the potential to bring about social transformation, particularly ethical transformations as reflected in the lives of nature mystics, thereby adding to and strengthening ecological ethics.

The notion that ecological theology can benefit from greater engagement with mystical theology builds from McIntosh's argument that the academic study of theology has turned away from mysticism, viewing this rich Christian tradition as a sort of personal, spiritual devotion lacking in academic integrity.[878] The separation between mysticism and theology has also been noted by Hans Urs von Balthasar, who like McIntosh, laments the segregation of mystics and mystical theology from the broader theological academic community.[879] Taking this critique into consideration, my dissertation has brought mysticism and theology back into dialogue by incorporating the voice of nature mystics into ecological theology and ethics. In doing do, my dissertation demonstrates how nature mysticism can benefit ecological theology. Some examples of such benefits include supporting a deeper appreciation of cosmic Christology, emphasizing Divine Immanence in all creation, and building an ecological ethic that stems from mystical theology. Ecological theology can only gain from the incorporation of nature mysticism since, as McIntosh reminds us,

> mystical consciousness is the impression in human existence of infinite coherence, expressivity and meaning, namely the trinitarian life of God. Mysticism bears this speech of God, God-talk, theo-logy, within it and is therefore inherently theologically fruitful….

[878] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 12. Similarly, Sandra M. Schneiders has discussed how scholars within theology have also demonstrated a lack of acceptance of spirituality. See her articles, "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *Horizons* 13, no. 2 (1986): 253 – 274; and "Spirituality in the Academy," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 676 - 697.

[879] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," in *Explorations in Theology*, vol 1 of *The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A.V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1989): 181-210.

> In this view, the mystic and the theologian are always being led to a perception of the same mysteries, only from different perspectives.[880]

Furthermore, mysticism scholar Bernard McGinn discusses in extensive detail the lives and writings of many mystics within the tradition of Western Christianity, noting the many invaluable ways mystics have contributed to theological development.[881] By incorporating the voices of nature mystics into ecological theology, this dissertation furthers the work of McIntosh and McGinn, by exploring how the nature mysticism of Teilhard and Merton can contribute to ecological theology and ethics.

The second implication of this dissertation is how the Christian tradition of nature mysticism has the potential to bring about social transformation, particularly ethical transformations, as demonstrated in the lives of nature mystics, which can add to and strengthen ecological ethics. This ethical transformation is deeply rooted in the realization that nature mystics are transformed by the Divine presence within creation, prompting a new relationship with the cosmos and an expectation that every person will experience this awareness and transformation. My dissertation has demonstrated how the nature mysticism of Teilhard and Merton resulted in a transformation in both these nature mystics individually, and that their nature mysticism contains an ethical dimension which can be applied to current ecological ethical issues. In my example of genetically modified seeds, the nature mysticism of both Teilhard and Merton provided a new lens to consider this ethical issue based on a nature mysticism that reflected an understanding of the human responsibility to establish an ethic of Earth care and justice. Furthermore, the ecological ethical issue of genetically modified seeds is not the only ethical issue that nature mysticism can be employed to address. Any ecological ethical issue that involves the human relationship with the rest of creation can be considered a potential case study for the application of nature mysticism.

One of the limitations of this dissertation is my focus on only the nature mysticism of Teilhard and Merton. While I focused on how this transformative nature mysticism influenced the life and writings of these two mystics, they are not the only two nature mystics in the Christian tradition.

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[880] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 32-33.

[881] See Bernard McGinn's current 5 volume series *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, and his article, "'Evil-Sounding, Rash, and Suspect of Heresy': Tension between Mysticism and Magisterium in the History of the Church," *The Catholic Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (2004): 193-212.

There are many other nature mystics whose transformative mysticism can be examined and applied to ecological theology and ethics. Francis of Assisi and Julian of Norwich would both be excellent examples of nature mystics who offer a nature mysticism that can contribute to ecological theology and ethics. Thomas Berry also mentions that Hildegard von Bingen, Richard of St. Victor, Meister Eckhart, and John of the Cross demonstrate in their theological writing an intimacy with creation, meaning they too could be considered potential nature mystics.[882] Moreover, some Berry scholars, such as Anne Marie Dalton, have suggested that Thomas Berry could also be considered a nature mystic, specifically because of his nature poetry.[883] These mystics and writers listed here demonstrate the potential future research on nature mysticism with respect to ecological theology and ethics.

My dissertation has also not made use of the papal encyclical *Laudato si'* because my dissertation proposal was completed and submitted before *Laudato si'* was published, and my dissertation subsequently sought to focus exclusively on the writings of the nature mystics Teilhard and Merton. Moreover, the success and popularity of *Laudato si*' occurred while I was writing my dissertation, and it was not until my dissertation was largely complete that the influence of *Laudato si'* was then beginning to be recognized. This has, however, offered an opportunity for future research into nature mysticism to be more seriously in dialogue with this important papal document since there are many potential ways to incorporate the insightful and important points Pope Francis outlines in this document.

In order to successfully focus on my thesis statement, there were some topics and themes that my dissertation could not address. These limitations include restricting my focus to specific books written by Teilhard and Merton rather than considering more of their work, and not going into greater detail regarding the nature language used by Teilhard and Merton. One further limitation of my thesis, but also a potential area for future research, is examining more closely the nature poetry of these nature mystics. Moreover, while my dissertation also focused most on how nature mysticism can contribute to ecological ethics, there are also other ways to examine how nature mysticism can contribute to ecological theology more generally since nature mysticism is not

[882] Berry, *The Great Work*, 23.

[883] Anne Marie Dalton, "*The New Story and* Journey of the Universe *as* Habitus," in *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 42-50.

limited to only providing a foundation to ecological ethics. For example, the potential for nature mysticism to contribute to eco-spirituality more generally through a more serious incorporation of the lives of mystics into ecological theology, or through the inclusion of a nature mystic's unique type of prayer or musical contributions to the Christian life.[884] It is important that the contributions of nature mystics not be left outside of Christian practices when they often contain valuable opportunities to enliven and strengthen not only ecological ethics but also Christian prayer and worship.

Nature mysticism, as explored in this thesis, is a type of mysticism where the mystic emphasizes becoming conscious of the presence of God within the cosmos that subsequently elicits not only a deep awareness of the sacredness and interconnectedness of all creation but also contains an ethical imperative that strives to build an ethic of creation. The mystical experiences of nature mystics offer ecological theology and ethics innumerable opportunities to retrieve the theology of these mystics in order to bring their work into dialogue with ecological theology and ethics in a way that can help us address the current ecological crisis. This crisis is one that requires not only a significant amount of change in human behaviour but also a significant change in terms of how we understand our relationship with creation. Moreover, each nature mystic contains her or his own unique voice and perspective on creation that is very much the result of personal transformative mystical experiences that should not be isolated from the Christian life. Let us hear the voice of the nature mystic who echoes the words of the psalmist who calls us all to seek the wisdom of God, a God who not only creates all life but is present within all creation drawing all things to perfection in Christ.

> The heavens are telling the glory of God;
> and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
> Day to day pours forth speech,
> and night to night declares knowledge.
> There is no speech, nor are there words;
> their voice is not heard;
> Yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
> and their words to the end of the world.
> In them he has set a tent for the sun,
> which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,

[884] I am referring here of Hildegard von Bingen who wrote her own liturgical music, which could contain some characteristics of nature mysticism and perhaps be incorporated into Christian eco-spirituality. I have also already examined Merton's work on contemplation, which could also be incorporated into Christian eco-spirituality.

and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of the them;
and there is nothing hid from its heat.[885]

[885] Psalm 19: 1-6.

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