THE ECOLOGICAL PASTOR:
Toward a New Paradigm of Pastoral Ministry at the Dawn of the Anthropocene

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Humans are becoming increasingly aware of the widespread destruction that modern, industrial society has brought upon the earth, as well as the need for a radical shift in human perception and action in order to avoid catastrophic consequences and to foster the healing of the earth. Instead of leading this shift by embodying God’s love for creation and bearing witness to God’s work of new creation in Jesus Christ, the Church has been mired in modern theological, philosophical, and ecclesial frameworks that prevent it from perceiving creation correctly and acting in creation redemptively. Pastors have played a key role in the Church’s modern captivity and must play a key role in its reform.

To that end, this thesis offers a new paradigm of pastoral ministry – the Ecological Pastor – that enables pastors to diagnose what has gone wrong, emboldens them to confront those errors, empowers them to change people’s perceptual framework, and encourages them to create new models of congregational ministry and mission. Chapter 1 establishes the need for a new paradigm by comparing the leadership of Moses in Israel’s journey out of Egypt with the call for pastors to guide their churches out of modernity’s destructive worldview and practices. Chapter 2 provides the paradigm’s foundation by bringing together the worldviews of arcadian ecology and contemporary agrarianism with an eco-agrarian reading of biblical leadership. Chapter 3 shows how pastors embody the paradigm through the perceptual practices of contemplative ecology and the emerging model of Watershed Discipleship. Chapter 4 explores how ecological pastors can lead their congregations through the requisite cultural change utilizing the philosophy of
Adaptive Leadership and concludes with some provisional reflections on key practices ecological pastors can employ in each stage of the transformational process.

The thesis is intended as a starting point; more will need to be done to refine and expand what an ecological pastor looks like in theory and practice.
Dedication

To my children, Mary, Luke, and Theodore:

May you experience and contribute to creation’s healing.

And to Emily:

Thank you for making this possible.
Acknowledgements

This thesis comes from my attempt to find hope in a time of increasing despair. Every day we learn more and more about the destructive effects of our rapacious, unsustainable, and unbiblical way of life. The personal, social, and ecological costs are mounting, and for the most part the Church is on the sidelines, waging less important battles and wondering why so many people are leaving institutional faith. This has weighed heavy on me in my work as a pastor and now as the director of an organization, Circlewood, committed to “Re-forming faith from the ground up.”

The good news is that we are also learning more and more about the Bible’s ecological perspective, and Christians from diverse traditions are exploring what it means to reform the faith into a more creation-centric direction. I am grateful to the scholars, writers, and practitioners who are laying out a new path for us to follow; my own discipleship has certainly been radically reshaped by the work of these reformers and pioneers. This thesis is my contribution to the movement; we need wise and courageous pastoral leaders to help bring about the kind of cultural change that reform requires.

Though in many ways a solitary activity, writing this thesis has been a revelation of all the ways my life is connected to others. I am thankful for the people of Highland Covenant Church who supported me when I started the Doctor of Ministry program. That support continued when I transition to Circlewood; the board not only encouraged me in my research and writing but saw it as part of what Circlewood is trying to do. I am particularly grateful to board member Louise Conner, who helped edit multiple drafts. Special thanks goes to my advisor, Dr. Norman Wirzba, for his willingness to meet with me during my campus visits and his wise direction in the shaping of this thesis. You will
also see the influence his writing has had on me in the numerous footnotes that reference his work.

Finally, I cannot thank my family enough. I am grateful for my parents, David and Iris Amadon, who have encouraged my curious nature and supported my seeking and searching. I am thankful for the support of my wonderful in-laws, Mike and Kathy Holmgren, without whom I would not have been able to say yes to this program. My children are endless sources of delight to me, and I have been humbled by their patience during my absences and their interest in what I have been working on. Most of all, I am thankful for my wife and partner, Emily. Her unshakeable encouragement, even while she was carrying more of the load at home, has sustained and taught me throughout. As I said in the dedication, this would not be possible without her.
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CHAPTER ONE: THE NEED AND CALL FOR A NEW PARADIGM

“We do not need merely good leaders but entirely different conceptions of leadership.”¹

In light of the crisis brought on by the degradation and destruction of the earth at the hands of humanity, pastors are faced with an urgent question: “Can there be a healthy church on a sick planet?”² Pastors who seek an answer to that question are faced with a problem: current paradigms and practices of vocational ministry are mired in the same theological, cultural and philosophical frameworks that created and perpetuate the crisis. To lead the church in and through this precarious moment in history requires a new paradigm that enables pastors to diagnose what has gone wrong, emboldens them to confront those errors, empowers them to change people’s perceptual framework, and encourages them to create new models for congregational ministry and mission.

We start this forward-focused work by looking back at a similar moment of crisis in biblical history. The story of Moses provides a compelling analogy for pastors who lead congregations enmeshed within a globalized culture of unfettered power and consumption that has literally spread Pharaonic destruction across the entire planet.³

1.1 The Call of Moses and the Future of Creation

The poetic opening of Genesis tells the story of the original creation and God’s intention for it to grow and mature.⁴ This intention is thwarted when human beings, made

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⁴ The interpretation of Scripture in this thesis is informed by recent scholarship that restores creation to its central place and role in the Bible and in Christian thought and practice. For a representative sample of biblical scholarship that includes an extensive bibliography see Richard Bauckham, The Bible and Ecology:
in God’s image to partner with God in the care and development of creation, reject their vocation. This rejection begins to unravel creation’s life-giving connections between God, humans, and the non-human world; before long, the entire earth is corrupt and “full of violence” (Gn 6:11). Only God’s partnership with Noah keeps the original creation intact and moving forward, followed by God’s promise to Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants to form a people who will partner with God to recover what has been lost and heal what has been broken.

As Genesis gives way to Exodus, however, we find God’s people languishing in the slave fields of Egypt. After seeing their misery and hearing their cries, God decides to come down “to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8). God’s strategic plan continues to include human beings, this time in the person of Moses, a fugitive from Egypt living a quiet, pastoral life in Midian. Tending his sheep on the far side of the wilderness, Moses is drawn into the divine drama by a bush that burns but is not burnt up. Standing barefoot before this strange fire, Moses encounters the God of his ancestors and of all creation, who calls him to a momentous task: “I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (Ex 3:10). After arguing against God and losing, Moses makes his way to Egypt as a reluctant leader short on self-confidence, overwhelmed by the task ahead of him, and troubled by the knowledge of how hard it will be.

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5 All biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.
Moses’ concerns are justified: God has chosen him to spearhead an epic confrontation and lead a massive communal transformation that will have ramifications for the future of creation. Liberating the oppressed Israelites is just God’s opening act; their slavery is preventing them from fulfilling their role as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation called to proclaim God’s name “in all the earth” (Ex 9:16). They are part of God’s comprehensive mission of redemption, which “is for the purpose of creation, a new life within the larger creation, and, finally, a new heaven and a new earth.”

1.1.1 Confronting Pharaoh

Standing in the way of God’s purposes is Pharaoh and his “death dealing Egyptian regime.” Exuding god-like power and exerting totalitarian control over the land and its people, Pharaoh is the antithesis of God’s intention for humanity, setting himself apart as a hard-hearted master of men and lord of creation. When Moses walks into Pharaoh’s court and voices God’s demand, “Let my people go” (5:1), he challenges the foundation of this ideology and sets off an epic confrontation.

The only weapons Moses brings to this battle are the ones God gave him – his shaky voice, his powerful staff, his ally Aaron, and his trust in God. But he also brings his dual identity as someone who has lived on both sides. As an adopted prince of Egypt, he was raised as a son of the empire, enjoying its benefits and learning its ways, though ultimately rejecting its ideology and religion. As a member of the oppressed Israelite community, he narrowly escaped death twice at the hands of Egyptians and has tied his fate once again to the Hebrew people and their god.

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Neither his skills nor his credentials impress Pharaoh, whose stubborn refusal to heed God’s command instigates a series of dramatic displays of power that reveal the broad scope of the battle. As the substance and intensity of the ten plagues increase, “the entire created order is caught up in this struggle against Pharaoh’s anticultural designs.”

The battle finally ends when Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt through the parted waters of the sea, which then close and swallow the pursuing Egyptian army. This dramatic conclusion is a “re-creation of part of the creation event, creating now a whole people who, for the first time in history, would trust and fear the Lord together.”

1.1.2 Life in the Wilderness

Though the battle with Egypt was over, the challenges were just beginning. Through Moses, God had promised the people a new life of holiness and wholeness in a land overflowing with abundance. But first, the Israelites had to rid themselves of Egypt, rejecting “an identity held captive by either productivity and achievement or consumption,” in order to become people who “trust radically in God’s grace and provision.”

This would not be easy; as the Israelites took their first steps into the desert, a few were ready to charge ahead into Canaan, many pleaded to go back, and most were unsure, like sheep looking for their shepherd.

Though Moses likely drew from his experience as a shepherd in the Midian wilderness caring for vulnerable creatures who looked to him for protection, provision, and guidance, as well as from his encounters with Pharaoh, this wilderness work would

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require a different kind of leadership. For Moses to guide them through the comprehensive transitions required “to cultivate a radically different way of living in community on the land,” he had to shift from prophetic liberator to wilderness pastor.

A key part of this new role was facilitating and mediating Israel’s encounters with God, whose unpredictable and unfixed presence journeyed with them through the wilderness. These encounters began to change their perception of God and the world as they experienced the Creator in and through creation. Moses led them as they met God on mountains, experienced God’s goodness through the provision of water, manna, and quail, and eventually constructed a mobile sanctuary (the Tabernacle) that facilitated worship wherever they were and symbolically reflected the unity of heaven and earth.

Moses guided the people as they combined this new perception with the comprehensive way of life prescribed by the Law given by God at Sinai. Teaching the Law became a central task for Moses, for the Law provided the foundation of Israel’s new life, ordering their relationships with God, each other, the land and its creatures. In its comprehensiveness, it called Israel to the original human vocation to tend the well-being of creation. In this way, the Law was not a new reality but “a fuller particularization of how the community can take on its God-given creational responsibilities for the sake of life in view of new times and places.”

As they wandered through the wilderness, Moses continued to enculturate this way of life by exercising a third leadership role, servant ruler. Through executive

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11 Ellen Davis, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 69.
12 Fretheim, God and World in the Old Testament, 146.
13 While the classic terms for Old Testament leadership roles are prophet, priest, and king, throughout this thesis I intentionally use the term servant ruler instead of king. Human authority to rule derives from God’s role as creation’s sovereign. Genesis 1 is full of royal imagery, such as the “Let us make” pronouncement of 1:26, and the Old Testament often refers to God as king over creation (see Ps 95:1-3),
decisions and administrative work, Moses embedded God’s new life for Israel in
organizational structures and practices. These included setting up a system of
administrative oversight by delegating power to tribal leaders (Ex 18), enforcing
community discipline when the people strayed from the new path (Ex 32), overseeing the
construction of the Tabernacle (Ex 36), ordaining Israel’s high priests (Lv 8), setting
aside cities of refuge (Dt 4), supervising a census of all the tribes (Nm 1), sending
advance scouts into Canaan (Nm 13), organizing military campaigns (Nm 21), and
facilitating the transfer of Israel’s leadership to Joshua (Nm 27).

Moses led the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years, navigating the
community through conflicts with God, each other, and surrounding nations. This
required adapting his leadership to meet a wide range of needs and situations, deftly
slipping between prophetic, priestly, and ruling roles. Throughout these decades of
wandering, Moses’ leadership was precarious; he was routinely questioned, challenged,
doubted, and undermined. It was also costly; he experienced deep frustration with the
people and with God. Tragically, he suffered the same fate as the first generation out of
Egypt and died on the threshold of Canaan: “The great leader must leave his leadership
task incomplete.”

Yet through his obedience to God in confronting Pharaoh and forming
a new people in the wilderness, Moses “confounded all things as they are in order to
create a newness in the world.” His leadership prepared the people to enter the land and

king over the nations (see Jer 10:7; Ps 22:28), and king over Israel (see Pss 4:4; 93; 95-99; 149:2).
However, Genesis 1 conspicuously avoids the term king. This does not mean the text is amonarchical or
antimonarchical (contra Fretheim, God and World in the Old Testament, 47), but that it seeks to subvert the
ideology and practice of kingship in Israel and the ancient Near East in order to define God’s kingship
independently. ‘Servant ruler’ captures God’s intentional use of power and authority for the benefit of
creation, and defines what it means for humans to exercise divine authority on the earth.

14 Walter Brueggemann, Deuteronomy, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon
15 Ibid., 289.
enabled God’s purposes for creation to continue. When Moses died, the Israelites wept for him in the plains of Moab for thirty days, and the Pentateuch concludes with this epitaph:

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel (Dt 34:10-12).

1.2 The Modern Wilderness and the Great Work

Though the person and work of Moses is inimitable, we need leaders like Moses to rise up, for once again the whole earth is full of violence. Though the impulse to control and dominate the world is as old as Adam and Eve’s desire to “become like God” (Gn 3:5), the modern period’s thoroughgoing dualism and radical human autonomy, coupled with rapid industrialization and technological advances, have unleashed human power upon the earth like never before. In his appraisal of this development, Wendell Berry appropriately draws upon Genesis: “It seems as though industrial humanity has brought about phase two of original sin.”

1.2.1 Life in the Anthropocene

Our success in becoming “masters and possessors of nature” makes Pharaoh’s accomplishments seem small, and plagues are now upon us that dwarf those of ancient Egypt. The influence of humanity on the earth is so pervasive that many scientists believe

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we have entered a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene.\textsuperscript{18} David Orr frames this epochal change as a new kind of exile:

We are in the process of evicting ourselves from the only paradise humankind has ever known – what geologists call the Holocene. This 12,000-year age has been abnormally benign with a relatively stable and warm climate, more or less perfect for the emergence of \textit{Homo sapiens}. But CO\textsubscript{2} levels are now higher than they’ve been in hundreds of thousands of years and rising still higher each year. We are creating a different and more capricious and hostile planet than the one we’ve known for thousands of years.\textsuperscript{19}

Many scientists are sounding the alarm that this harsh new reality has already arrived. One of the key findings of the 2018 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted that “we are already seeing the consequences of 1°C of global warming through more extreme weather, rising sea levels and diminishing Arctic sea ice, among other changes.”\textsuperscript{20} Some of these other changes include an increase in climate refugees, extreme weather, habitat destruction, and an unprecedented rate of species extinction; we have lost so many fellow creatures that biologist E.O Wilson calls our time the “Eremocine” – the age of loneliness.\textsuperscript{21} Though scientists and activists continue to identify ways to mitigate our influence, the reality is that many of these changes are

\textsuperscript{18} See Clive Hamilton, et al., eds. \textit{The Anthropocene and the Global Climate Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch}, Routledge Environmental Humanities Series (New York: Routledge, 2015). While there remains a debate as to the geological appropriateness of naming a new epoch, the pervasiveness of human influence on the earth’s natural systems is a matter of broad scientific consensus.


\textsuperscript{21} Edward O. Wilson, \textit{Half-Earth: Our Planet’s Fight for Life} (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2016). Reflecting on Romans 8, Ellen Davis writes, “Paul’s view that the creation is still waiting for human beings to look like God is more credible in this sixth great age of species extinction as we awaken painfully to the recognition that human dominion over ‘the birds of the air and the fish of the sea’ has brought glory neither to God nor ourselves.” Davis, \textit{Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture}, 73.
essentially irreversible. Bill McKibben describes what we are facing with arresting frankness:

> The planet on which our civilization evolved no longer exists. The stability that produced that civilization has vanished; epic changes have begun...We may, with commitment and luck, yet be able to maintain a planet that will sustain *some kind* of civilization, but it won’t be the same planet, and hence it can’t be the same civilization. The earth that we knew – the only earth that we ever knew – is gone.”

As the negative effects of the Anthropocene continue to build, the cries of the poor and oppressed, along with of the deep groans of the non-human creation (Rom 8:22), rise from the earth with increasing volume and pitch. Thomas Berry argues that history is shaped “by those overarching movements that give shape and meaning to life by relating the human venture to the larger destinies of the universe.”

He contends that every civilization has its movement, or “Great Work,” and that the Great Work of this and coming generations is “the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans [are] present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.”

### 1.2.2 The Great Work and the Failure of the Church

This Great Work needs people of faith, for the roots of the problem are, in large part, spiritual and religious. The modern era has torn apart the relational connections that make life both possible and meaningful. This has resulted in “a cleavage, a radical discontinuity, between Creator and creature, spirit and matter, religion and nature, religion and economy, worship and work, and so on.”

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24 Ibid., 3.
25 Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community* (New York: Random House, 1993), 103. For Berry, this pervasive dualism is “the most destructive disease that afflicts us.”
The role of religion is to reconnect and heal that which has been torn apart (re-ligio, literally “re-bind”). Unfortunately, Western Christianity has largely neglected this role, remaining entrenched within a modern framework of faith that distorts perception of the world and resists the systemic changes needed to change course. Not only is the church slow to respond, it is complicit in the crisis. This is the argument at the heart of Lynn White’s influential essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” which lays the blame at the feet of Western Christianity’s theological anthropocentrism, which in White’s reading of history presided over the wedding of science and technology and legitimated the modern period’s rampant abuse of the natural world. Though White’s essay is not without its critics, its argument has had a large impact. Wendell Berry notes that “the culpability of Christianity in the destruction of the natural world and the uselessness of Christianity in any effort to correct that destruction are now established clichés of the conservation movement.” Though Berry skewers these critics’ understanding of the Bible and argues for a creation-centered reading of Scripture, he acknowledges and laments the contemporary chasm between biblical instruction and Christian behavior:

It is hardly too much to say that most Christian organizations are as happily indifferent to the ecological, cultural, and religious implications of

29 “[T]he anti-Christian environmentalists have not mastered the first rule of the criticism of books: you have to read them before you criticize them.” Ibid., 306.
industrial economics as are most industrial organizations. The certified Christian seems just as likely as anyone else to join the military-industrial conspiracy to murder Creation.\textsuperscript{30}

This complicity is perpetuated by biblical and theological systems entrenched in modern categories.\textsuperscript{31} Will Willimon wryly notes, “Once we allowed the likes of Immanuel Kant to divide the world into the phenomenal and the noumenal, the natural and the supernatural, the Bible was on its way to becoming incomprehensible.”\textsuperscript{32} This has had consequences across the theological spectrum, from the conservative tendency to reduce the biblical narrative to one of rescue, in which Jesus saves individuals from personal sin in a way that enables them to “go to heaven” when they die, to the progressive emphasis on social justice, which frequently ignores the personal and ecological dimensions of community disintegration and injustice.\textsuperscript{33}

Compounding this captivity to modernity’s philosophical and moral framework is a general lack of awareness that there is a problem. Alasdair MacIntyre ends his

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 305-6.
\textsuperscript{31} For an example of this see Jonathan R. Wilson, \textit{God’s Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 3-14.
\textsuperscript{33} See David Horrell, \textit{The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology} (London: Equinox Publishing, 2010), 14-18. Some evangelical and most mainline Protestant churches and denominations incorporate the personal and social but not the ecological. Will Willimon’s comments about preaching are representative in their lack of an ecological dimension: “The consequences of Spirit-filled speech tend to be political, economic, and social, therefore we must discipline ourselves to read Scripture congregationally, ecclesially, and therefore politically.” Willimon, \textit{Pastor}, 256. Even some of the new expressions of church, such as the Emerging Church movement, struggle to move beyond the social: “The gospel of emerging churches in not confined to personal salvation. It is social transformation arising from the presence and permeation of the reign of Christ.” Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, \textit{Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 63. This is also generally true for those who are part of the “missional” movement. In a recent book, two leaders of the movement declare, “God is about a big purpose in and for the whole of creation,” but then essentially leave creation out of the rest of the book. Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, \textit{The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), xv. Ched Meyers points to three crucial theological commitments behind this error: functional docetism, anthropological presumption that humans rule over Creation, and divinely ordained entitlement to land and resources; see “From ‘Creation Care’ to ‘Watershed Discipleship’: Re-Placing Ecological Theory and Practice,” \textit{Conrad Grebel Review} 32 (2014): 253.
penetrating critique of the moral failure of modernity, *After Virtue*, with a cautious comparison of the decline of the Roman empire with that of modern Europe and North America, noting that in our time, “the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament.”34 Walter Brueggemann offers an additional historical comparison, arguing that the same cultural and theological ideology of exceptionalism that led ancient Israel to deny the looming Babylonian invasion propels the denial regarding cultural, spiritual, and ecological decay in the West, and that the Church has often appealed to the language of exceptionalism in its legitimation of racial, economic, and ecological oppression.35

Douglas Christie contends that this modern framework has left us with spiritual traditions that render us unable “to imagine ourselves as participating in a larger whole or as capable of intimate exchange with another,” restricting us within boundaries that are too rigid and categories of thought that are too narrow. Christie notes that, despite this spiritual poverty, “the hunger for such exchange remains strong.”36

Christians who hunger for a more integrated life and desire to live in closer harmony with creation often cannot do so because they lack the necessary cultural knowledge and skills. Alluding to Martin Luther’s famous “Here I stand” statement, Ched Meyers highlights a very practical reason the North American church has not been able to facilitate change:

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Industrial culture has rendered most Christians unable to answer the question: “Where is the here upon which we take our stand? We have been socialized to be more loyal to abstractions and superstructures than literate in the actual biosphere that sustains us: more adept at mobility than grounded in the bioregions in which we reside (but do not truly inhabit).”

Increasing numbers of churches have added some environmental education and action to their ministries. Though this is to be celebrated and encouraged, the changes are typically incremental (light bulbs and recycling bins), not on the level of “perception, language, values, and motives” needed to address the root theological and cultural problems.

Ministries of “environmental stewardship” or “creation care” are good starts, but do not go far enough in terms of placing creation at the center of God’s redemptive work. In fact, they run the risk of perpetuating modernity’s dualistic framework by ignoring humanity’s place within and dependence upon the community of creation. For the Church to break free from modernity’s grip, it needs to pursue a more comprehensive solution, articulated here by Myers:

"To promote pastoral and theological disciplines that are on the one hand radical, diagnosing the root pathologies within and around us while also drawing deeply on the roots of our faith traditions, yet which on the other hand are practical, empowering deliberate steps toward significant change. Our task as Christians is nothing less than working to help turn our history around – which is, as it happens, the meaning of the biblical discourse of repentance.”

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39 Richard Bauckham, The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 1-12. Critics also point out that the language of stewardship is too broad and ill-defined, ranging from significantly changing the planet through human action to only preserving what is already here to protecting the earth from human involvement. See R.J. Berry, ed., Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives – Past and Present, (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).
1.2.3 The Failure of Pastoral Leadership

Central to the task of leading the Church in repentance of its theological, spiritual, cultural, and practical orientation are pastors, for “the effectiveness of the church’s leadership is crucial to its vitality and faithfulness, its spiritual health, and its fulfillment of God’s mission in the world.” This includes every pastor, for “[t]he crisis of sustainability, the fit between humanity and its habitat, is manifest in varying ways and degrees everywhere on earth.”

Like the church as a whole, however, the pastoral vocation is mired in a modern framework that prevents pastors from leading the necessary change. Historically, many pastors have not only failed to confront the church’s role in historical abuse of the world noted above but played a key role in it:

[T]he complicity of Christian priests, preachers, and missionaries in the cultural destruction and economic exploitation of the primary peoples of the Western Hemisphere, as of traditional cultures around the world, is notorious. Throughout the five hundred years since Columbus’s first landfall in the Bahamas, the evangelist has walked beside the conqueror and the merchant, too often blandly assuming that their causes were the same.

Attempts to offer alternative models of pastoral ministry have typically drawn from the same framework. Contemporary ministry has been the victim of “images of leadership that are borrowed not from scripture, but from the surrounding culture – the

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41 I am writing primarily with pastors in mind who serve congregations situated in the developed world and formed by modern Western culture. Though it is truly a global crisis, pastors leading congregations in the developing world, or those formed by non-Western, premodern, or post-modern cultures, will need to adapt some of what follows.
43 David W. Orr, Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 83. This statement is all the more striking in that it was made over 25 years ago.
44 Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” 305.
pastor as CEO, as psychotherapeutic guru, or as political agitator.” These images and models mimic the specialization and reductive nature of modernity. Pastors who specialize in evangelism risk reducing people to disembodied souls destined for a distant heaven. Pastors specializing in growth run the risk of reducing ministry to numbers. Pastors who specialize in social ministry run the risk of reducing members to recruits for culture war campaigns or volunteers in a social service agency. In each of these cases, ministry and mission is reduced to one dimension of God’s comprehensive and integrated work to redeem humanity and renew creation.

Without addressing these fundamental deficiencies, pastoral work in the Anthropocene will be significantly hampered. If pastors cannot diagnose and treat the diseases of modernity, change people’s fundamental perception of the world, and imagine new forms of congregational life and mission, their ministry will be perpetually palliative.

1.3 The Call for Reform

The need to reimagine pastoral ministry begins in the growing call within Christianity to reform the faith in a more creation-centric direction. This call is coming from the top and bottom of almost every Christian tradition:

[A] new birth is happening. You can hear it as the earth groans for salvation, as poets and philosophers tell its stories, as scientists search the soil and cosmos for life, as the oppressed, poor, and marginalized push for dignity and economic justice. It is time for the church to wake up. There is nothing worse than sleeping through a revolution.

1.3.1 The Greening of Christianity

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45 Willimon, Pastor, 55. A notable exception to this is the life and work of Eugene Peterson; see, for example, Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

In the last few decades there has been significant movement towards the “greening of religion,” a growing awareness within religious communities that there needs to be a reassessment of religion’s relationship to the natural world.\textsuperscript{47} Some of this comes from the general increase in knowledge of how the earth’s systems support life and how human behavior is increasingly damaging those systems. But there is also an internal factor, evidence that “members of religious communities are discovering that the beauty and power of their own faith traditions is deepened when it is conceived of as more intimately related to the living world.”\textsuperscript{48}

Despite the ways in which Western Christianity helped lay the foundation of the current ecological crisis and contributed to its expansion, the greening of Christianity is taking place in diverse traditions and communities, particularly those that understand the Church to be “\textit{semper reformanda}, always in the process of recreation and re-discovery.” Though the Church is rooted in history and tradition, “it knows no final form, no fixed and forever pattern of ministry, no formulation of doctrine which cannot be revised.”\textsuperscript{49} Reflecting on the current ecological crisis from this understanding of continual change and refinement, leaders from across the denominational and theological spectrum have started calling for reform. The clearest example of this comes from leading Lutheran

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[47]{Douglas E. Christie, \textit{The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4. It is important to note that some religious communities have maintained an ecologically-oriented faith despite the upheavals of the modern period, including indigenous/native communities as well as sects and movements within the world’s major religious traditions. For examples of these perspectives see Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee, ed., \textit{Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth} 2nd ed. (Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2016) and David Landis Barnhill, ed., \textit{At Home on the Earth: Becoming Native to our Place – A Multicultural Anthology} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).}
\footnotetext[48]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[49]{T.J. Gorringe, \textit{A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 192. Gorringe sees in this reformational self-understanding that the Church “is sacramental for the human community at large.”}
\end{footnotes}
scholars who marked the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant
Reformation with a call for a new reformation:

In the midst of many appeals for reformation today, an overarching chorus
is becoming audible in which human cries join with croaks and squawks
and storms: the slowly suffocated or violently silenced voices of people,
cultures, species, and ecosystems at risk. That is, a growing number of
theologians, scholars, and activists around the world...believe that
Reformation celebrations in 2017 and beyond need to focus now on the
urgent need for an Eco-Reformation.\textsuperscript{50}

This call for a significant reform extends far beyond the Lutheran fold and has the
potential to bring Christians from diverse and often separated traditions together on
common ground. In a wonderful example of the reconciling possibilities of this
movement, the Lutheran leaders calling for reform suggest that Pope Francis may be “a
voice today like that of the 1517 Luther.”\textsuperscript{51} Francis’ prophetic encyclical \textit{Laudato Si’}
includes an incisive Catholic critique of modernity and calls for an “integral ecology”
that unites us to God, humanity, and the earth in ways that foster healing and peace.\textsuperscript{52} The
Pope’s ecological vision of reconciliation is shared by the leader of the Eastern Orthodox
Church, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who issued an unprecedented joint
statement with Francis on September 17, 2017 that culminated in a forceful call:

We urgently appeal to those in positions of social and economic, as well as
political and cultural, responsibility to hear the cry of the earth and to
attend to the needs of the marginalized, but above all to respond to the
plea of millions and support the consensus of the world for the healing of
our wounded creation.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin Schramm, eds., foreword to \textit{Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope
for a Planet in Peril} (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), xi-xii.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., xii. This is a long way from Luther’s description of the papacy as the kingdom of the
Antichrist!
\textsuperscript{52} Pope Francis, \textit{Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home} (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015). Francis takes his name from St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecologists.
\textsuperscript{53} “Joint Message of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the World Day of Prayer
The call for reform also comes from conservative Protestant circles. In 2012, evangelical leaders of the Lausanne Movement, which mobilizes leaders around the world to collaborate in mission, formed the Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel. This resulted in a call “to the whole church, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, to respond radically and faithfully to care for God’s creation, demonstrating our belief and hope in the transforming power of Christ.”

These calls for reform have been strengthened by ecumenical, ecologically-informed Christian scholarship that is transforming the way Christians read the Bible and form theology. After a long period in which the place and role of creation has been overlooked within the academy, increasing numbers of scholars are working to explore Scripture’s ecological perspective and bring creation and redemption back into theological unity. These efforts have brought to light the ways in which care for the earth is at the heart of human vocation and Christian mission, and is woven into the Bible’s comprehensive story of salvation, which follows the exiled first family out of Eden, winds its way through the tumultuous history of ancient Israel, finds its turning point in the new creation begun in Jesus Christ, and reaches its denouement in the new heaven and new earth of Revelation. As one recent work succinctly puts it: “Salvation means creation healed.”

54 Colin Bell and Robert S. White, eds., Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 8. This book includes the 10-point Jamaica Call to Action and essays by leading evangelical scholars and activists from around the globe.

55 Chapter four’s exposition of biblical leadership is an example.

This vision of God’s intent to renew or redeem creation may be “the Bible’s best-kept secret, typically unknown to most church members and even to many clergy, no matter what their theological stripe.”

Despite this unfortunate knowledge gap, people are intuitively moving in this direction. In addition to church leaders and scholars, the greening of Christianity and the call for change is being propelled by ordinary people working out their relationship to God, the Church, and the world in light of our current ecological reality. Many of these people are leaving institutional Christianity, which is a problem to those who are busy lamenting, hand-wringing, and finger-pointing over the statistical decline of church attendance and the growth on the so-called “nones.” But to others, such as Dorothy Butler Bass, the exodus reveals an opportunity rather than a problem: “All those statistics – the ones about decline – point toward massive theological discontent. People still believe in God. They just do not believe in the God proclaimed and worshipped by conventional religious organizations.”

For Bass, they are part of a “spiritual revolution – people discovering God in the world and a world that is holy, a reality that enfolds what we used to call heaven and earth into one.” Rather than lament, judge, or fight what is happening, Bass encourages us to see it as “a rebirthing of faith from the ground up.”

There is growing evidence that many Christians agree with Bass and are facilitating this rebirth. The last decade has seen a proliferation of denominational and parachurch ministries focused on greening the Church. Scores of Christian environmental

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58 To see these trends see the work of the Pew Research Center: http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.

59 Bass, *Grounded*, 278

60 Ibid., 279.

61 Ibid., 16.
organizations are bringing ecological perspectives and concerns to the attention of believers.\textsuperscript{62} There are also over 300 organizations associated with the Christian Food Movement, reflecting an increase in agrarian concerns among people of faith.\textsuperscript{63} Christians are learning about conservation through organizations such as A Rocha, supplementing their formal education with ecological programs like the Au Sable Institute or Princeton Seminary’s Farminary, and advocating for political change through grass-roots organizations like Young Evangelicals For Climate Action and Interfaith Power and Light.\textsuperscript{64}

Reformation usually begins to take shape outside the center of institutional life and structures, and the work of these organizations is encouraging. But the fact that most of these groups formed because of the lack of eco-agrarian perspectives within institutional Christianity highlights the need for comprehensive reform around a paradigm that brings these perspectives into the heart of discipleship.

Faithful mission requires wholistic, earthed discipleship – a discipleship that rejects the divorce of heaven and earth and works for reconciliation. We need a discipleship that is earthed, a lived eschatology – living the kingdom of God \textit{now} in the present, on earth, with all the hope and frustrations that involves, embodying the new creation in the power of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{65}

For this call for reform and vision of discipleship to be enculturated into institutional Christianity, pastors must play a central role.

\textbf{1.3.2 The Pastoral Task}

\textsuperscript{62} For a partial list see https://www.webofcreation.org/links-to-eco-faith-groups/faith-based-environmental-groups, and https://sites.up.edu/envscitheobook/relig-env-organizations/.
\textsuperscript{63} See http://christianfoodmovement.org/directory/.
\textsuperscript{65} Snyder and Scandrett, \textit{Salvation Means Creation Healed}, 132.
The task before pastors is essentially cultural. Cultures form a shared way of life around common answers to four key questions:

1) What is the world? (The nature of reality)
2) What is our place in the world? (Human nature)
3) What is our role in the world? (Human vocation)
4) Where is the world going? (Purpose, meaning, and destiny)

Western culture’s answers to these questions have led us into our current ecological crisis. The Church’s answers, even when couched in biblical and theological language, have either reinforced the wider culture or failed to provide adequate correctives and alternatives. To begin the work of ecclesial reform, pastors “must call the church out of its captivity to Western culture and into a faithful obedience to Jesus.”

Like Moses, this begins by confronting an oppressive and destructive way of life and leading people on a transformative journey that frees them to reconnect with God, each other, and the earth, and helps them rediscover their vocation as partners with God in the healing and flourishing of creation. Though the challenge is similar, the opponent is quite different. There is no single authoritarian leader or nation-state to confront; instead, there is a globalized system of abuse underwritten by philosophical commitments that cross borders and shape cultures in ways that are often difficult to see and even more difficult to address. Pastors must learn how this reality has shaped their local congregation and its wider community, and confront the ways in which their people have contributed to and been malformed by these dynamics.

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67 I do not wish to oversimplify the modern era or ignore its benefits. It is important to see, however, that modernity’s philosophical foundations are shaky, its benefits short lived, its way of life unsustainable, and its socio-economic arrangements unjust.
This prophetic work will encounter resistance, which comes in part from those who are blissfully unaware of the crisis, insulated like those who lived in Pharaoh’s palace and feasted at his table, falsely justified by the illusion of cultural superiority, permanent abundance and consequence-free consumption. And those who are aware of the crisis often respond by seeking to preserve and protect their place at the table. Reinforcing both of these perspectives are the intentional and widespread forces of obfuscation and denial, which come in a thousand forms and intensify in direct proportion to the amount of affluence and influence that is threatened. Like Moses, pastors confront this system and its propagandists as those who live in multiple worlds, sons and daughters of the Anthropocene who must reject its gods and ideology and embrace their identity as members of God’s redeemed community (see Eph 2:18-20).

Pastors who pursue this prophetic task must then gather those who respond and lead them into the wilderness where, like the Israelites, they must reject a destructive way of life in order to become the people God intended them to be. Unlike the Israelites, the journey will not necessarily be literal; in the midst of a transitory and placeless culture driven by a restless and relentless colonial mindset, an alternative way will be cultivated by planting roots and settling down.68 With this in mind, the pastoral battle cry might just be, “Let my people stay!” although the journey will be just as physical as people learn how to live in and care for their particular places in redemptive ways.

Reforming a community in the wilderness requires, like Moses, the ability to shift from the prophetic to pastoral leadership. This is priestly work in that it positions the

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68 For a vision of post-colonial Christian faith and mission see Al Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 5-56. Tizon focuses more on the social effects of colonialism, though his theology of reconciliation includes the non-human world.
pastor at the intersection of heaven, earth, and the believing community in order to reveal, heal, and nurture the life-giving connections within creation.\textsuperscript{69} Christopher Beeley draws on Gregory of Nazianzus’ phrase to describe this aspect of ministry as “a kind of healing treatment, or “cure of souls,” by which the habits, commitments, loves, and desires of believers are transformed into ones that reflect the nature and will of God more fully.”\textsuperscript{70} Through this type of work, pastors help their people begin to let go of the past and think about new forms of faith.

Also like Moses, this work of communal transformation requires pastors to play the role of servant ruler, shaping the practical ministry and mission of churches to reflect a creation-centered faith. This is crucial work: “How life together is ordered makes it easier for people to be and do good and harder for them to be and do evil or, conversely, makes it easier to be and do evil and harder to be and do good.”\textsuperscript{71} Ordering communal life creates and preserves culture, and pastors play a key role in the practical decisions that immerse congregants in “a mélange of habits, words, rituals, practices, tradition, and stories that move the participant into a different world than that person would live in without the imposition of the images, practices, and words of a religion.”\textsuperscript{72}

Pastors begin this difficult work, once again like Moses, with the tools God has given them – their voice, ministry skills (the “staff” of word and sacrament), colleagues and allies, training, and trust in God. And also like Moses, these tools need to be adjusted and supplemented; to confront Modernity’s oppressive system, navigate the ensuing

\textsuperscript{69} For a description of biblical priesthood see Marty E. Stevens, \textit{Leadership Roles of the Old Testament} (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 64-90.
\textsuperscript{70} Beeley, \textit{Leading God’s People}, 27.
\textsuperscript{72} Willimon, \textit{Pastor}, 208.
wilderness, and guide their people through the necessary transitions, pastors need to lead and care for their people in new ways. Though most pastors already play the multiple roles of prophet, priest, and servant ruler, how these roles are played needs to change. Like Moses, they must learn how to adapt their leadership to the shifting needs of a community going through systemic change and moving toward an unknown future.

The formal training that most pastors receive will not have adequately prepared them for this task. Acquiring more knowledge and new skills will be necessary but will not be enough. Pastors must “realize that we will never cope with this new world using our old maps. It is our fundamental way of interpreting the world – our worldview – that must change. Only such a shift can give us the capacity to understand what’s going on, and to respond wisely.” This new perceptual framework is formed at the feet of Jesus and creation or, more accurately, Jesus in creation. This may be unsettling to pastors steeped in Western theology’s emphasis on God’s transcendence and conditioned to separate creation from redemption in theory and practice. It aligns, however, with both Israel’s experience in the wilderness and the inclination of increasing numbers of people in Western culture who are searching for God outside of traditional religious environments: “Roiling around the planet is a shifting conception of God. In a wide

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73 Nathan Stucky argues that one of the reasons Christians have been slow to acknowledge and respond to the current crisis is our captivity to the educational framework and practices of modernity: “The contradiction that theological education faces is that too much – from congregation to university to seminary – continues to assume an industrial or consumer anthropology by way of its methods, curriculum, and understanding of teacher and student. It looks too often to efficiency, productivity, profitability, and ceaselessness as ideals, and too little to educational practices rooted in our best theological anthropology.” Stucky, “A More Excellent Way: The Promise of Integrating Theological Education and Agrarianism,” 102.

74 Margaret J. Wheatley, prologue to Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006), x
variety of cultures, God has become unmediated and local, animating the natural world and human activity in profoundly intimate ways.”

To begin the process of perceptual change, pastors must dismantle modernity’s sacred/secular divide and begin to see all the ways in which “Earth’s crammed with heaven.” They must discern the presence of God in the world’s beauty and desecration, for

There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places.

Pastors must also exchange the modern theological map, which places the institutional church at the center of society, for a topographical one, which re-places the church within particular bio-regions. This transformed vision is the first step toward reimagining church life and mission in the Anthropocene.

The next step entails learning the distinct ways of life that will bring glory to God and healing to the damage wrought by modern humanity. This comes, in part, from applying and adapting the Law taught by Moses and perfected in the life and mission of Jesus through “eyes that are open to its ecological wisdom” and in conversation with “our own traditions, including their ecological insights.” For example, consider Jesus’ identification of the greatest commandments: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”

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75 Bass, Grounded, 9.
78 Bouma-Prediger, For the Beauty of the Earth, p.59.
(Mt 22:37-40). Pastors who bring an ecological perspective to their study of this text will note the non-dualistic, integrated way Jesus describes human love for God. They will understand the need to expand our definition of neighbor to include all the earth’s life forms, and will see the need for a whole-life discipleship that roots human beings within particular neighborhoods of creation.

Pastors must learn, live, and teach this way of life with their congregations as they lead them through the wilderness, modeling “metanoia (repentance) in the true sense of the word, a mind change and a behavior change.”79 This is a precarious form of leadership, just as it was for Moses and Jesus. It involves guiding communities through internal and external conflicts while facing inevitable questions, challenges, doubts, and resistance. It is costly work, requiring persistence to counter resistance, imagination to create alternatives, and trust in God to maintain hope when the future looks bleak and uncertain. Pastors may not see much fruit from their labor; a majority of the work may be planting seeds that help future generations inhabit creation wisely and faithfully.

1.4 The Need for a New Paradigm

Pastors leading congregations in a post-Christian world teetering on the brink of planetary catastrophe undoubtedly feel as overwhelmed and underprepared as Moses. Tinkering with existing models and practices of pastoral ministry will not be enough. A new paradigm of pastoral ministry that frees it from its modern framework is needed.

Such a shift is already happening in wider leadership thinking; new metaphors for leadership are emerging - gardeners, midwives, stewards, servants, missionaries,

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facilitators, conveners. And Christians have been adapting leadership roles and definitions since the beginning. In the early church, leadership roles were fluid; the New Testament offers no fixed theological model or practical examples. Though there are lists of leadership roles (e.g. 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11), these lists clearly varied from place to place. Arthur Boers argues that the early church was marked by leadership innovation, both in the multiplicity of roles and who was called to those roles. He notes that “new gifts and capacities were called out among more and more people. Leadership, rather than narrowing its focus, expanded its embrace.”

Throughout the ages, the challenge for pastors has been “to find those metaphors for ministry that allow [them] appropriately to embody the peculiar vocation of Christian leadership.” A promising metaphor for renewed ministry in the Anthropocene is the pastor as ecologist. Ecologists understand the earth as a living system, and study how various life forms interact with their environment to create, sustain, and change the ways this living system works. A pastor who embraces this ecological perspective sees his or her congregation as part of the complex web of relationships within a particular ecosystem or bio-region, and focuses pastoral ministry on the cultivation of these relationships in order to form disciples in the image of Christ who live for God’s glory and creation’s good.

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80 Wheatley, Leadership and the New Science, 165.
81 For instance, the first Christians adapted forms of Greco-Roman leadership (and in some cases rejected those forms) in creating leadership roles and structures for the early church. See Andrew D. Clarke, Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).
83 Ibid., 156. This insight alone invites us to explore new paradigms of Christian leadership today.
84 Willimon. Pastor, 55.
The rest of this thesis begins to expand this metaphor into a new paradigm by bringing together ancient and contemporary insights, movements, and practices. The next chapter begins with Arcadian ecology, which offers a scientific, ethical, and spiritual account of the world that resonates with a Christian understanding of creation. This ecological worldview is then brought into conversation with contemporary agrarianism, which unites nature and culture in a comprehensive way of life that offers a compelling framework for pastoral ministry. The chapter concludes with a reading of the Bible’s metanarrative from an eco-agrarian perspective that reveals the scriptural roots of ecological leadership. Chapter three explores how practices of contemplative ecology provide pastors a pathway for the changes in perception needed to perceive creation wholly, and explores the emerging model of Watershed Discipleship as a framework for pastors to reimagine what it means to follow Jesus. The final chapter argues that the practice of Adaptive Leadership provides a process that helps pastors cultivate the systemic, cultural change needed to reform congregational life and ministry, and concludes by offering examples of what these changes can look like. Bringing these insights, movements, and practices together creates the foundation of this new paradigm - the Ecological Pastor – and empowers those called by God to lead congregations in the Great Work that lies before us.
2 – PREPARING THE SOIL:
Mixing Arcadian Ecology, Contemporary Agrarianism, and Biblical Leadership

“Consider the lilies.” (Mt 6:28)

_The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”_ (Mk 4:26-29)

Paradigmatic change occurs when the ways in which we see and live in the world are challenged, and new perspectives and frameworks begin to emerge. The paradigm for the ecological pastor is formed, in part, by the transformative vision and practices of arcadian ecology and contemporary agrarianism, as well as an eco-agrarian reading of biblical leadership.

2.1 The Ecological Revolution

The practice of intentional inquiry into the relationship between animals, plants, and their natural environments can be traced back to at least the fourth century BCE. What we know as the modern science of ecology began in the eighteenth century and came into scientific and popular prominence in the second half of the twentieth century. Ecology is mostly focused on the first of the four cultural questions we introduced in chapter 1, “What is the world?,” though this inevitably involves answering the other three questions to some extent. Ecologists focus their study on the “interactions between living beings and their environment, identifying patterns, networks, balances, and cycles.”

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goal is greater understanding of how the earth’s living systems work, especially in the ways particular parts interact to create something whole.

Ecology’s recent rise in status and influence has led many to declare that we are in an “Age of Ecology” that is radically shifting human perception and behavior:

The teachings of ecology promise a revolution in self- and cultural understanding that matches, if not exceeds, in importance the sixteenth-century Copernican astronomical revolution. Just as Copernicus forced a fundamental reorientation in how the universe and thus also we ourselves are to be perceived and understood, so too ecological insight compels a transformation in basic presuppositions about nature and human nature.²

As this transformative way of understanding the world developed, different schools of thought emerged within ecology that have shaped the burgeoning revolution in different, and sometimes contradictory, ways. It is important for pastors to know the basic framework of these traditions, the ways they have shaped perceptions and actions, and why pastoral ministry should embrace one and resist the other.

2.1.1 - Arcadian ecology

Donald Worster’s influential investigation of the history of ecology identifies two dominant traditions, “arcadian” and “imperial,” that provide significantly different answers to the core questions about the world and our place in it.³ Worster traces the origins of arcadian ecology, in part, to Gilbert White, an eighteenth century English pastor and amateur naturalist who spent the vast majority of his life in the small village of Selborne, Hampshire. In addition to his pastoral duties, White spent over two decades intensively studying the flora and fauna of Selborne, writing down extensive and detailed

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observations in journals and letters to friends. He focused his attention almost exclusively within the framework of his parish, and, though he was not a trained scientist, White grasped “the complex unity in diversity that made of the Selborne environs an ecological whole.” One of White’s goals was to understand the natural world in ways that could improve human life, but he was also motivated by a strong desire to live in simple harmony with the world. This vision was reinforced and amplified by his religious faith: “He was drawn to an ecological perspective both by an intense attachment to the land and the creatures he had known from childhood and by an equally deep reverence for the divine Providence that had contrived this beautiful living whole.”

In 1789, White’s writings were published in a widely read and celebrated book, *The Natural History of Selborne.* The book paints a picture of pastoral life in which “ecological study is the means by which the naturalist establishes communion with nature: it becomes an innocent pursuit of knowledge about one’s neighbors, an integral part of the curate’s devotional life, excluding in no way a sense of piety, beauty, or humility.” Its compelling vision of an integrated life became not only a best seller but a significant starting point for the arcadian branch of ecology.

Of course, Gilbert White was not the first to articulate a harmonious vision for life. There have been various understandings and practices of living in harmony with the natural world in pagan, animistic, and agrarian cultures throughout human history. Christian history includes notable examples such as Francis of Assisi, some forms of Celtic Christianity, and contemporary Amish communities, though they are part of a

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4 Ibid., 7.
5 Ibid.
distinct minority. The specifically arcadian vision of this way of life originates in the Greek region of Arcadia, which in Greek mythology was the home to the god Pan and his court of nature spirits. The region’s mountains, forests, and sparse population led to its widely admired reputation as a place of exemplary natural beauty and harmony. Over time, “Arcadia” become a universal symbol for any Edenic vision of paradise; its usage was popularized by the Greek poet Virgil, taken up by Renaissance artists, and employed by many English poets and writers. In the modern era, the arcadian vision has been carried forward in the writings of Romantics such as Henry David Thoreau, the work of ecologists such as Rachel Carson, and the activism of organizations such as Greenpeace and the Sierra Club.  

Although arcadian ecology includes a wide range of people, communities, and perspectives, there is a basic framework shared by most within this tradition. Arcadians understand the world as a unity of diverse life forms and processes; while there are clearly identifiable parts, they cannot be known apart from the whole. Arcadians tend to use organic language when describing the world, often comparing the world to the human body or a spiderweb. Though it is understood in diverse ways, most arcadians perceive a divine or spiritual essence to the world, and understand the world to be generally benevolent and cooperative.

In the arcadian view, humans are embedded within the webbed world as one aspect of it, connected to the whole just like all the other constituent parts. Arcadians advocate a simple, humble life for humans oriented toward the goal of living in peaceful

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8 Historically, environmental organizations have focused almost solely on wilderness preservation. This is changing as other concerns, such as those put forth by arcadian proponents of sustainable agriculture, are increasingly integrated into advocacy goals and agendas.
coexistence with other organisms. This involves, emphasized in various degrees, integrating inner and outer harmony, empathizing with non-human life forms, learning from nature, following nature’s patterns, and respecting nature’s limits.

2.1.2 – Imperial Ecology

When Gilbert White’s book was published in 1789, the Industrial Revolution was picking up steam. Technological advances were enabling humans to change their environments in dramatic ways. Industrial cities were rising and expanding with astonishing speed. Long established cultural patterns of perception and ways of life were upended, and the emerging science of ecology was no exception; the rise of imperial ecology quickly overshadowed the arcadian vision.

Though imperial ecology, like the arcadian tradition, includes a wide range of people, communities, and perspectives, there is a basic framework shared by most of its adherents. While imperialists see the world as a whole, they also believe its parts can be separated, isolated, understood, and manipulated. A chief characteristic of the natural world is its productivity, both real and potential, which means that parts are often described in terms of human resources or reduced to units of energy. For imperialists, the dominant image of the world is mechanistic, the world as machine, its parts as cogs and its systems part of a great chain of being. Within imperial ecology there are diverse opinions as to whether the world is divine or not, as well as whether it is fundamentally benevolent or malevolent toward human beings. Thanks in large part to Darwin (and his interpreters), there is broad agreement that the world is fundamentally competitive.

As noted above, imperialists understand humans as unique beings, set apart from the rest of the world by virtue of their rationality and power. Civilization is preferred to
wildness, and, for many imperialists, furthering civilization and conquering wildness is both right and good. The human role is as masters, manipulators, and managers of the world; nature’s limits are not boundaries to be respected but obstacles to be overcome. The success of this role has increasingly been measured by imperialists in narrow economic terms measured by the acquisition of material goods and expressed in the language and logic of finance capitalism.

Worster argues that one of the roots of imperial ecology can be found long before the Industrial Revolution in what he calls “Christian pastoralism.” He notes that, unlike Gilbert White’s harmonious vision of pastoral life, the ideal relational image in Western Christianity had not been humanity’s relationship to nature but a pastor’s relationship to the congregation. In this vision,

the shepherd does not merge with nature through his flock nor is his occupation a protest against urban alienation from the natural world, both of which are key themes in the arcadian version. On the contrary, he is the defender of the flock against the hostile forces of nature – wolves, lions, bears – and his profession is to lead his lambs out of this sorry world to greener pastures.\(^9\)

This perspective separated humanity from nature, and oriented ecology toward studying the natural world for utilitarian purposes.

Another significant building block of imperial ecology came through the work of Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), a Swedish botanist who combined scientific rigor with his fervent Christian piety. His study of flowers helped make ecological classification more orderly, efficient, and accessible, and his writings on the economy of nature presented a picture of the earth as a tightly organized and rational world that was divinely designed and sustained. Linnaeus believed that God had made this orderly, hierarchical world for

\(^9\) Ibid., 26.
the benefit of humanity, and that by learning its secrets the earth could be managed in a way that increased its natural abundance.

There were other roots as well. Modern philosophy delineated a wide gap between humanity and nature; humans were rational subjects, fundamentally different from, and superior to, other creatures. The father of modern philosophy, René Descartes, declared that the goal of humanity, as it relates to the wider world, was to be “masters and possessors of nature.”\(^{10}\) Worster makes the case that these theological and philosophical streams of thought were brought together in a practical way by the work of Francis Bacon. Bacon was one of the founders of modern science, an intellectual giant who brought together the theology of Christian pastoralism, the rationalism of modern philosophy, and the techniques of modern science in a way that made it possible to think about pursuing paradise not by living in harmony with nature, but by remaking it. Though he did not personally relate to the non-human world in strictly utilitarian ways, Bacon furthered a movement in which “the good shepherd of the Christian tradition had become a scientist and technocrat.”\(^{11}\) Since Bacon, imperial ecology has been shaped by figures such as Charles Darwin, Frederic Clements, and a host of scientists who have drawn from ecology to expand industrial possibilities and technological innovation.

2.1.3 – Ecology Today

Over the last few decades, the science of ecology has divided into many specialized branches, and the presence of diverse ecological perspectives in public life and political discourse makes it hard to identify a common center. There are some


general agreements, such as belief in the basic interconnectedness of all forms of reality, famously articulated by John Muir: “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.”\textsuperscript{12} Related to this interconnectedness is the generally agreed upon reality of interdependency; all life forms depend on other life forms and natural processes (both terrestrial and cosmic) to live.

These core ecological observations have been confirmed by developments in other branches of science. Two examples include the fixed and predictable world of Newtonian physics, which has been upended by the dynamic and unpredictable discoveries of quantum mechanics, and Neurobiology, which has shifted from picturing the brain as comprised of relatively separate spheres to speaking of neural nets that show the brain working as a whole. The ecological perspective of these, and other, scientific discoveries “keeps reminding us that in this participative universe, nothing living lives alone. Everything comes into form because of relationship.”\textsuperscript{13}

Though imperial ecology has been the dominant tradition in the modern era, growing awareness of the ecological crisis we are in, along with growing criticism of modernity’s core philosophical foundations, has led to a resurgence of the arcadian perspective. This scientific and popular revival is being led by ecologists who are critical of modernity’s reductive approach to science, its confidence in technological solutions, and its commitment to an industrial-based economy pursuing unlimited growth.

\textsuperscript{12} John Muir, \textit{My First Summer in the Sierra} (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1988), 110.
\textsuperscript{13} Margaret J. Wheatley, \textit{Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World} (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006), 145. This ecological framework can also be seen in other large scale shifts: from consolidated power among modern nation-states to a more dispersed reality in which smaller groups can affect the whole (e.g. terrorists and corporations); from hierarchical models of family (patriarchy) to increased egalitarian practices; from information controlled by the print media elite to the rise of digital democracy; from modernity’s philosophy of objective certainty to postmodernity’s emphasis on subjective contingency.
Ecologists with an arcadian perspective are actively facilitating changes of perception, “serving as teachers for a new generation intent on recovering a sense of the sacred in nature.”¹⁴ Many have also moved into an activist role, becoming a “powerful threat to established assumptions in society and in economics, religion, and the humanities, as well as the other sciences and their ways of doing business.”¹⁵

2.1.4 – The Ecological Pastor and Arcadian Ecology

The insights of ecology can play a significant role in reforming pastoral ministry by reminding pastors of the revelatory nature of creation and encouraging them to be students of the world, not unlike Job’s counsel to his friends:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;
or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish in the sea inform you.
Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD had done this?¹⁶

Modern ecology enriches the biblical picture of the world and invites creative engagement between faith and science. The principles of interconnectedness and interdependence encourage pastors to ask questions about themselves, their congregations, and their ministry. In what ways is a pastor connected to and dependent upon the congregation and its wider social and ecological community? What does it mean to be a church in an ecological world, and what should ministry and mission look like?

We have seen that both arcadian and imperial ecology have Christian roots and connections, but it is the arcadian perspective that is most promising to the formation of

an ecological pastor. Arcadian ecology aligns more closely with the Bible than imperialism, and helps correct imperial misinterpretations of Scripture. The arcadian view aligns with the biblical picture of the wholeness of creation (we could also say holiness), as well as its fundamental goodness and divinely infused essence. It also lines up well with the biblical understanding of humanity’s empathetic connection with other creatures and the earth. In general, the arcadian vision of harmonious life fits well with biblical visions of shalom. Arcadian ecology can also help pastors diagnose the ways in which Christian practice has been mis-formed by the modern period, and offers at least one role model in Gilbert White of how pastors might incorporate the non-human world into their life and ministry.

That said, the arcadian perspective can only shape pastoral ministry to a limited extent. It is a broad tradition with commitments that can be taken in any number of directions. What does it mean to live in harmony with nature? Does this require churches to return to a long-lost paradisal state like Eden that turns back the clock to a pre-modern way of life free from industrial and technological changes? Should pastors help the church “go wild?” How should pastors understand the relationship between nature and human culture? What would go into creating and pastoring a sustainable church? What does it mean that the world has a divine essence or quality? Many Christians are wary of the various spiritual orientations that arcadians carry with them, and many arcadians are deeply suspicious of Christian theology and practice. Is an arcadian-oriented church on a slippery slope to paganism? What does it mean to worship and serve a God who is both transcendent and imminent, outside of creation and incarnate within it? Pastors searching
for answers to these questions will find few role models. Even Gilbert White’s example is ambiguous; it is unclear how much he actually integrated his work as a naturalist into the life and ministry of his church. To explore these questions more deeply we will need to look beyond arcadian ecology to the philosophical and practical wisdom of contemporary agrarianism.

### 2.2 Contemporary Agrarianism

Agrarianism is a “way of thinking and ordering life in community that is based on the health of the land and of living creatures.” Agrarians use “land” as a kind of shorthand to refer to “the life-giving sources of soil, water, and air, as well as the communities of organisms they support.” It overlaps with ecology in its belief in the interconnectedness of all things and interdependence of living beings: “The heart of agrarianism shares the ecological insight that people do not exist in isolation as autonomous beings. We live with and from others in extensive webs of interrelatedness.”

Agrarians include ecological insights as part of a comprehensive cultural vision that seeks to weave the personal, social, and ecological dimensions of life into an integrated whole. This endeavor to integrate nature and culture “takes seriously what we

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17 Francis of Assisi is one exception, and a good place to start. See, for example, Paul Sabatier’s *The Road to Assisi: The Essential Biography of St. Francis*, ed Jon N. Sweeney (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2004).


20 Ibid., 91.
know (and still need to learn) about the earth – the scientific ecological principles that govern all life forms – and what we know about each other – the social scientific and humanistic disciplines that enrich human understanding.” Agrarians understand that our relationship to nature is the foundation of human culture, and also delineates its possibilities and limits.

Agrarianism is rooted in the practice of agriculture: “The agrarian mind begins with the love of fields and ramifies in good farming, good cooking, good eating, and gratitude to God.” This is not because contemporary agrarians imagine returning to a time when the family farm was at the center of an arcadian paradise purged of all technology and industry, or because they advocate for urban dwellers to abandon cities, move to the country, and become farmers. Agriculture is the center of agrarianism because it reveals and fosters the connections that make human life and culture possible; and since everyone has to eat, agrarianism includes rural, suburban, and urban people.

But it also goes beyond farming. Using the lens and practice of agriculture as a starting point, agrarianism creates “a mindset, a whole set of understandings, commitments, and practices that focus on the most basic of all cultural acts – eating – and ramify into virtually every other aspect of public and private life.” In other words,

22 Wendell Berry, “The Whole Horse” in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 2002), 241. While farming is the central practice for agrarians, it includes all cultural activities that combine wise use and care of the world: “Exactly analogous to the agrarian mind is the sylvan mind that begins with the love of forests and ramifies in good forestry, good woodworki

24 Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 22.
agrarianism is a comprehensive way of life, a culture focused on developing “stable, sustainable, locally adapted land-based economies.”25 This economic framework is intentionally ethical and ecological, built on the recognition that our need to use the land does not entitle or require us to abuse it. It is a vision that encourages personal and local self-sufficiency, stability, and long-term care.

Like arcadian ecology, agrarianism is broadly religious; most agrarians perceive a divine or spiritual essence or vitality that is entwined with the physical world.

The agrarian mind is, at bottom, a religious mind...It prefers the Creation itself to the powers and quantities to which it can be reduced. And this is a mind completely different from that which sees creatures as machines, minds as computers, soil fertility as chemistry, or agrarianism as an idea.26 This religious orientation integrates the mystical and the ethical, for “what is at stake in agrarianism is responsibility for the grace and mystery of life.”27

Agrarianism has grown in popularity over the past half century, in part because “agrarian thought and values have been given their fullest articulation in the nearly three millennia of agrarian writing.”28 Much of this is due to the work and witness of Wendell Berry, whose six decades’ worth of novels, essays, and poetry articulate, defend, and advocate agrarianism with force, intelligence and eloquence.

Agrarianism, as described by Wendell Berry, is no small, whittled-down philosophy for rural folks. It is, rather, a full blown philosophy rooted in the realities of soil and nature as “the standard” by which we also come to judge much more. It is grounded in farming, but is larger still. The logic of agrarianism, in Berry’s work, unfolds like a fractal through the divisions and incoherence of the modern world.29

26 Ibid., 240-241.
27 Wirzba, The Art of the Commonplace, 277.
28 Davis, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture, 1.
Berry’s “full blown philosophy” of agrarianism unveils the destructive aspects of modernity, particularly the abuses and unsustainability of a globalized industrial economy. Paralleling the arcadian/imperial dynamic, Berry notes, “although industrialism has certainly conquered agrarianism, and has very nearly destroyed it altogether, it is also true that in every one of its uses of the natural world industrialism is in the process of catastrophic failure.” Agrarianism also includes a strong critique of modern dualism – “By dividing the body and soul, we divide both from all else” – and offers an alternative:

If we are to live properly and responsibly, with an honest appreciation of who we are and what our situation recommends, we must start by placing our souls firmly within the contexts of bodies and things, just as we should place culture securely within the land (ager).

Agrarianism’s growth in popularity has not necessarily coincided with a similar rise in influence. As Berry himself has admitted, “We agrarians are involved in a hard, long, momentous contest, in which we are so far, and by a considerable margin, the losers.” While increasing numbers of people have adopted agrarian perspectives and implemented agrarian practices, this has not resulted in major cultural or political change. Contemporary agrarianism has not formed any large-scale structured political movements or advocacy organizations, partly because of agrarianism’s resistance to being identified with particular political and social movements. In general, agrarians prefer to focus on local solutions rooted in local communities and worked out by locally led democratic

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processes and institutions.

2.2.1 – Agrarianism and the Ecological Pastor

Many contemporary agrarians have contributed to the criticism of Christianity for its role in the formation and expansion of modern industrial and technological society, and its general neglect of the non-human world. Christian communities who have maintained an agrarian way of life, such as the Amish, are few and far between. In the last few decades, however, Christians from more mainstream traditions have explored the relationship between agrarianism and Christianity and discovered many areas of connection and enrichment.

Biblical scholars such as Ellen Davis have shown how agrarian the Bible is: “Beginning with the first chapter of Genesis, there is no extensive exploration of the relationship between God and humanity that does not factor the land and its fertility into that relationship.”\(^ {34}\) Theologians such as Norman Wirzba have explored the way agrarianism can facilitate cultural and religious renewal: “Scientific ecology, particularly when it is made concrete in authentic agrarian practices and responsibilities, enables us to reintegrate this ancient and necessary wisdom within our own cultural life.”\(^ {35}\) For Christians, this means discovering what it means to practice humanity’s original vocation to care for the earth today, “to learn again how to live in the garden: not the Eden we’ve lost, but the garden of the New Jerusalem toward which we’re bound.”\(^ {36}\)

\(^{34}\) Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 8. Davis notes later on, “agrarianism is the mind-set native to many if not most of the biblical writers themselves,” (27).


Agrarianism contributes to the formation of an ecological pastor by offering a particular vision of how to include humanity within ecological perceptions of wholeness. While ecology helps pastors see that the people in their congregation, and their church as a whole, are irrevocably connected to creation, agrarianism reveals how those connections relate to everyday life. This calls pastors to examine the culture of their churches and communities, starting with the sources of life in their area – food and water – and learning how connected (or not) their congregations are to them. This can help pastors understand the health of congregants and congregations in a more comprehensive manner, bringing a pastoral lens to the observation of famed English botanist and organic farming pioneer Sir Albert Howard: “the whole problem of health in soil, plant, animal, and man is one great subject.”37 This can also assist pastors in establishing a framework for ministry, for a Christian understanding of agrarianism “promises a path toward wholeness with the earth, with each other, and with God, a path founded upon an insight into our proper place within the wider universe.”38

Agrarianism encourages ecological pastors to focus this comprehensive vision for ministry on particular geographical and social boundaries: “It seems that if we follow the agrarian conversation through ecology to the need for a locally adapted land economy, then we are obliged to go on to the need for locally adapted religion.”39 This both frees and confines the pastor to shape ministry and mission to the possibilities, limits, and needs of a particular place.

39 Wendell Berry, foreword to *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* by Ellen Davis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xiii.
Eugene Peterson’s reflections on Wendell Berry speak for a growing number of pastors who have discovered in agrarianism a way to articulate a holistic vision for ministry that is oriented toward locally-focused care and cultivation: “Whenever Berry writes the word farm, I substitute parish; the sentence works for me every time.”

Peterson connects pastoral work to agrarianism’s emphasis on particularity, humility, and stability:

The pastor’s question is, “Who are these particular people, and how can I be with them in such a way that they can become what God is making them? My job is simply to be there, teaching, preaching Scripture as well as I can, and being honest with them, not doing anything to interfere with what the Spirit is shaping in them. Could God be doing something that I never even thought of? I don’t have any idea. Am I willing to be quiet for a day, a week, a year? Like Wendell Berry, am I willing to spend 50 years reclaiming this land? Am I willing to spend 10 years, 20 years, 50 years with these people?

Despite such provocative reflections, the potential for contemporary agrarianism to shape pastoral ministry remains largely untapped. Some of this has to do with the relatively small (but growing) number of people working to articulate a distinctly Christian understanding of agrarian thought and practice. This is particularly true when it comes to pastoral ministry within a local church. Peterson’s analogical use of agrarian language and imagery is helpful, but it does not go far enough, and even runs the risk of perpetuating the dualism that agrarianism seeks to overcome. At the dawn of the Anthropocene, it is not enough to see the church as a farm, and pastoral work like farming; we need pastors who can make more direct connections between pastoral ministry, church life, and the land. The church is not like a farm, it is embedded within a

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farm, or, to be more biblical, a great earthly garden. The ecological pastor does not simply care for people as a farmer would care for soil; they find new ways to care for both and enculturate that comprehensive vision within their churches’ understanding of salvation and vocation.

Cultivating this kind of change requires leadership, something which agrarian proponents do not spend much time exploring or articulating.42 It is one thing to advocate for cultural change and paint a picture of what it might look like, quite another to figure out how to get there. To begin examining how an ecological pastor might lead a congregation into the vision that arcadian ecology and contemporary agrarianism puts before us, we turn to Scripture to explore the ways eco-agrarian leadership plays a central role in the Bible’s epic story of creation and new creation.

2.3 Eco-Agrarian leadership in the Bible’s Metanarrative

The metanarrative of the Bible is an ambitious story that runs from creation to new creation and revolves around the relationships between God, human beings, and the non-human creation; it is fundamentally ecological and agrarian.43 Central to this drama is the destiny of the earth and the leadership role that human beings play in shaping the earth’s future. It is within this universal call to leadership that ecological pastors find their particular vocation. Reading the Bible through this lens of leadership helps ecological pastors connect their work to God’s leadership of creation, learn from the

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42 One exception is Eric Freyfogle, who calls for a national environmental leader who would help people awaken to the environmental predicament, stimulate a desire for change, and provoke cultural change. He does not, however, suggest how a leader might accomplish these things. Eric Freyfogle, *Agrarianism and the Good Society: Land, Culture, Conflict, and Hope* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 146-157.

43 For exposition of the Bible’s metanarrative as eco-narrative see Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 141-178.
positive and negative examples of Old Testament leaders, model their leadership on the example of Jesus Christ, and orient their ministry toward the eschatological shalom of God’s new creation.

2.3.1 God’s Leadership of Creation

There is perhaps no better word to describe the new world of Genesis 1 and 2 than ‘ecological.’ Richard Bauckham notes that Genesis 1 “stresses the profusion and diversity of living things, and it portrays the creation, animate and inanimate, as an interdependent whole.”\(^{44}\) Genesis 2, in its more explicitly agrarian focus on Eden, is no less descriptive of a world that is diverse yet inherently interconnected; God plants a garden and creates a gardener to tend it, and everything is “being and becoming in relationship to and with the other…It is the essence of harmony and balance.”\(^{45}\) This intricate web of being is intimately connected to its creator; in Genesis 1 and 2 we see “the presence of God in the world and the presence of the world in God.”\(^{46}\)

God leads the world from the moment of creation, and in that leadership we can discern subtle hints of the key leadership roles humans will play. Like a prophet, God ushers in new aspects of reality with spoken words. Like a priest, God discerns and blesses the goodness and sacredness of the world. Like a servant ruler, God oversees creation and makes decisions for its future flourishing.\(^{47}\) But the original act of creation is not the end of divine leadership; God continues to be intimately involved in “the ongoing

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 15.
\(^{45}\) Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 42. Will Willimon describes ordination as “a creative act of God, not unlike the creation of the world or the call of Israel, that brings order out of the chaos, a world out of the void.” Willimon, *Pastor*, 33.
\(^{46}\) Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 13. We could also make connections here with God’s trinitarian life apart from creation; that God is essentially relational and creation flows out of that relationality.
\(^{47}\) For my use of the term ‘servant ruler’ see page 5, note 13.
development of those earthly conditions that are most conducive to the flourishing of life in view of new times and places.”

2.3.1.1 The Character of God’s Leadership

God creates, permeates, sustains, and leads creation out of the divine ontological reality described in 1 John 4:8: “God is love.” Here we discover the source and sustenance of God’s relationship to creation. Jürgen Moltmann asserts, “If God creates the world out of freedom, then he creates it out of love. Creation is not a demonstration of his boundless power; it is the communication of his love, which knows neither premises nor precondition: *creatio ex amore Dei.*” Pope Francis eloquently echoes Moltmann in his declaration that the whole material universe “speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.” This caress sustains creation in the midst of sin and death, inspiring the poet of Psalm 145:9 to declare, “The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.”

Though purposeful, the love that flows from God’s being into creation is not coercive. God leads but does not force, choosing to include creation in its own becoming by ceding power and authority to the sun, moon, and the creatures of the earth (Gn 1). This is true empowerment; God does not intervene every time his uniquely empowered

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49 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 75-76.


51 Wisdom of Solomon 11:24-26 says it even more clearly:

For thou lovest all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made, for thou wouldst not have made anything if thou hadst hated it. How would anything have endured if thou hadst not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by thee have been preserved? Thou sparest all things, for they are thine, O Lord who lovest the living.
human creatures neglect or abuse their power and authority. This leaves God a truly vulnerable leader; as the first Sabbath dawns, Moltmann observes that the God “who rests in the face of his creation does not dominate the world on this day: he ‘feels’ the world; he allows himself to be affected, to be touched by each of his creatures.” This mixture of love and freedom sets the conditions for God’s relational creation to unfold. Genesis 1 and 2 describe a God who has a clear purpose for creation, but no fixed plan. The goal is clear but the way is open, and God invites creation to shape the journey.

### 2.3.1.2 God’s Shared Leadership With Humanity

The crux of this invitation to shared leadership comes as the cadences of creation reach deep into the sixth day and God speaks the words that brings forth creatures who will significantly shape the destiny of the nascent world:

> Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”
>
> So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
> God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves upon the earth.” (Gn 1:26-28)

The dominant Western interpretation of what it means for humans to be created in the image of God has focused on the metaphysical relationship between God’s being and the human soul. Often called the “substantialist” model, this approach focuses on what distinguishes humans from animals, with most interpreters focused on humanity’s unique

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capacities – consciousness, will, reason, intellect, and freedom.\textsuperscript{53} The Reformation brought alternative interpretations, such as Martin Luther’s emphasis on the image of God as ethical conformity with God. Though this remained a minority view, other Reformers adopted this ethical focus to a greater or lesser extent, such as Karl Barth’s focus on humanity’s ability to be addressed by and respond to the Word of God.\textsuperscript{54}

Recent Old Testament scholarship has called these readings in question. The substantialist interpretation has been criticized for being more dependent on Platonic thought than the biblical text, and the ethical view, while having New Testament connections (1 Cor 11:7; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 3:10), has been criticized for lack of Old Testament grounding.\textsuperscript{55} The virtual consensus of recent Old Testament scholarship is that the image of God in Genesis 1 is primarily a royal image, rooted in God as King over creation and informed by ancient Near Eastern models of kingship.\textsuperscript{56} While this does not exclude ontological or relational aspects to the image of God, it prioritizes what Richard Middleton calls a “functional” or “missional” understanding, focused on the call of humanity to share in God’s royal rule on the earth.\textsuperscript{57} To be made in the image of God is to be endowed with a vocation to represent and extend God’s rule in the world; in other words, it is a call to share in God’s leadership of creation.

This functional understanding of the image of God has been criticized for its propensity toward human hierarchy, legitimation of human domination of the earth, and overemphasis of humanity’s distinctiveness from the rest of creation.\textsuperscript{58} From the

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 20-24.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{56} Davis, \textit{Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture}, 56.
\textsuperscript{57} Middleton, \textit{The Liberating Image}, 26.
\textsuperscript{58} See Daniel L. Brunner, Jennifer L. Butler, and A.J. Swoboda, \textit{Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology};
perspective of history, these criticisms ring painfully true. From the perspective of Scripture, however, they are unjustified. Recent scholarship has noted that traditional translations and interpretations of what it means to “rule” (rādā) over the earth and “subdue” (kābaš) it miss the servant care and nurture at the heart of these commands. 59

Human leadership in creation is rooted in service to God and flows from God’s self-giving love; humans “correspond to the inner relationships of God to himself - the eternal, inner love of God which expresses and manifests itself in creation.” 60 This is love that refuses to consolidate power and privilege, seeking to serve and empower others despite the vulnerability that ensues. It is at the heart of God’s command to Adam to “till and keep” the garden (Gn 2:15). It invites Adam, and all future humanity, to live creatively and adaptively within the framework of God’s purposes for creation, to exercise their power toward the enhancement of the world. 61

2.3.2 Human Leadership After the Fall

Richard Bauckham observes that human partnership in God’s loving rule of creation as creatures made in God’s image requires humans to differentiate themselves from God.

Humans are not demi-gods with creative power, set like God above creation, but creatures among other creatures, dependent, like other creatures, on the material world of which they are part, and immersed in a

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60 Moltmann, God in Creation, 77-78.

61 Bauckham, The Bible and Ecology, 34-36. Bauckham defines enhancement as “what humans do when they modify nature in ways that are not destructive but productive.” Ellen Davis notes the power and open-endedness of image of God language, and suggests that its meaning “cannot be fully grasped within the first chapter of the Bible, even by the most thorough exegete. Rather, one must keep reading, and living in biblical faith, in order to know what our creation in the image of God yet might mean.” Davis, Scripture and Agriculture, 56.
web of reciprocal relationships with other creatures. The unique tasks and roles of humans, given them in Genesis 1:26 and 28, are bound to be misunderstood and abused unless the fundamental solidarity of humans with the rest of creation is recognized as their context.\textsuperscript{62}

The rejection of divine difference and creaturely solidarity is at the heart of what Terence Fretheim calls “the originating sin.”\textsuperscript{63} Adam and Eve’s refusal to submit to creaturely limits, coupled with the prioritizing of their own needs and desires above those of the garden, brings expansive consequences that ripple through the fabric of creation like an earthquake.

These shock waves reveal again the Bible’s ecological understanding of the world. James Bruckner highlights four key relationships in which mutual trust is broken: Creator-human (Adam and Eve hide from God), human-human (Adam blames Eve), human-animal (Eve blames the serpent), and human self-understanding (they are ashamed of their nakedness).\textsuperscript{64} God’s pronouncement of curses (Gn. 3:14-19) adds additional layers of friction between God and animals (the serpent is cursed), between humans and animals (enmity between Eve and the serpent), between women and the fruit of their labor (childbearing becomes painful), between men and the fruit of their labor (Adam must now work unfriendly soil), and between men and women (patriarchy replaces egalitarianism).

Although these fundamental ruptures change the course of the world and threaten its future, God remains faithful in a solidarity that “suffers with the sufferings of his creatures” and “experiences their annihilations.”\textsuperscript{65} God also continues to entrust, in part,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 27-28.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Fretheim, \textit{God and World in the Old Testament}, 70-77.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, 96-97.
\end{itemize}
the well-being of the world to the very creatures who have initiated its rupture, endeavoring to partner with humanity in the healing of creation.\textsuperscript{66} To this end, God begins to call individuals to leadership.

\subsection*{2.3.2.1 The Ambiguous Witness of Old Testament Leaders}

The Old Testament is distinctly ambivalent about human leadership after Eden. John Goldingay argues that Scripture has no category of leadership as we understand it, preferring the expression “servants of Yhwh.”\textsuperscript{67} Human sin corrupts this universal servanthood, for human beings were meant to be “servants of the land and servants of one another, but the idea that some are regularly in a position of servanthood to some other people in a one-way fashion was not part of creation’s design.”\textsuperscript{68} We see this play out in the Bible’s realistic portrayal of leadership, which reveals “an attitude toward power torn between ideal and reality.”\textsuperscript{69}

Yet the Old Testament upholds some leaders as exemplary figures who serve God and creation through leadership formed by an eco-agrarian understanding of the world. The primary example of this is Noah, whose righteous life offers us the first example of a post-Fall human bearing the image of God well. In his obedience to God we see “the epitome of the kind of responsible care for other creatures with which humans had been entrusted by God at creation.”\textsuperscript{70} When God essentially starts over after the flood, we see this eco-agrarian framework continue in Abraham and Sarah’s willingness to set off for a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In this decision we begin to see the theological necessity of the incarnation.
\item Ibid., 709.
\item Bauckham, \textit{The Bible and Ecology}, 24. In addition to his care for animals, Noah is described as “a man of the soil” (Gn 9:20).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
new land in order that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Gn 12:1-3).

Though the blessings do not explicitly include the earth or non-human creatures, Walter Brueggemann draws out the connections to God’s larger plan:

The purpose of the call is to fashion an alternative community in creation gone awry, to embody in human history the power of the blessing. It is the hope of God that in this new family all human history can be brought to the unity and harmony intended by the one who calls.  

As the story of this new family unfolds, Abraham and Sarah’s great-grandson Joseph offers a particularly interesting example of ambiguous biblical leadership, particularly the dangers inherent in formal positions that consolidate power. Having rashly shared his dreams of authority and power with his brothers, Joseph ends up in Egypt and becomes Pharaoh’s right-hand man. Through dreams it is revealed to him that seven years of agricultural abundance will be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph’s decision to centralize Egypt’s surplus food in the nation’s cities assures there will be enough for the people during the lean years (and saves his family), but when the people run out of money, Joseph demands their livestock and their land, and “reduced the people to servitude, from one end of Egypt to the other” (Gn 47:21).

Is Joseph an exemplary eco-agrarian leader? Terence Fretheim writes that Joseph’s “careful attention to environmental issues, including the anticipation of times when the land will not produce because of famine, provide an exemplary way in which individual leadership can be harnessed on behalf of the best life for all in God’s often precarious creation.”  

Ellen Davis, on the other hand, notes that Joseph’s agricultural policies enriched Pharaoh’s treasury and increased his international power, and John

72 Fretheim, God and World in the Old Testament, 93.
73 Davis, Scripture, Culture and Agriculture, 72-73.
Goldingay argues that Joseph paved the way for his people’s enslavement by turning them into serfs of the state. Joseph’s story reveals the complexity of eco-agrarian leadership in the context of competing demands, constituencies, and cultural frameworks. His descendants would continue this struggle with leadership as they sought to inhabit the land of Canaan.

2.3.2.2 Israel’s Landed Leadership

In chapter one we explored the leadership role played by Moses in the transition from Egypt to the land of Canaan. When the people finally begin to inhabit the land, formal leadership becomes more pronounced in the roles of judge, prophet, priest, and king, and the accounts of leaders who occupy these roles reinforce the Old Testament’s eco-agrarian perspective as well as its ambivalent picture of leadership.

Shortly after crossing the Jordan, the Israelites turn away from the LORD and run after the gods of other people groups. God’s hand of protection is removed, leaving them “in great distress” (Jgs 2:15). As in Exodus, we see God respond to the misery of his people (this time self-inflicted) by calling human beings to the role of judges to provide the necessary leadership that will put an end to suffering and lead the people back toward God’s intended shalom.

While the task of these leaders is narrowly focused on military deliverance from Israel’s enemies, the ecological impact of their leadership is clear. “In Judges, Israel experiences God’s presence and sovereignty over its affairs as either blessing (peace in the land) or curse (oppression at the hands of enemies), very much as Moses warned it

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would.”76 We see this most clearly in the aftermath of Othniel’s successes, when “the land had peace for forty years” (3:11; see also 3:30; 5:31, 8:28),77 and in Deborah’s victory song, which credits the stars and the Kishon River for fighting with her against Sisera (5:20-21). Despite these victories, peace is temporary; the era of the judges is marked by increasing chaos, and “the Israelite landscape is strewn with the victims of violence.”78 Judges ends with a somber and proleptic statement about leadership: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” (21:25).

The era of kingship continues the ambivalent witness of Israel’s leadership. On the one hand, God’s response to Samuel after the people’s request is unequivocal: “they have rejected me as their king” (7:7). God instructs Samuel to tell the people what a king will require, a warning which can only be described as eco-agrarian in its breadth and depth:

This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day. (7:11-18)

77 The judges after Gideon are increasingly compromised morally (as are the people), which may explain why this phrase does not reappear, even when the length of a judge’s reign is reported (see 15:20; 16:31).
78 Block, Judges, Ruth, 584.
This is the antithesis of God’s sovereign rule over creation. God does not hoard creation’s bounty but gives away power and authority so that the world may freely flourish; God serves creation, but Samuel warns that creation will serve Israel’s king.

On the other hand, the Old Testament offers a positive ideology of kingship in several places. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 assumes there will be a king in Israel and that God will choose him. It lays out strict ethical guidelines for the monarch: he is to resist acquiring great wealth and must live under the Law. Several psalms refer to the king as God’s anointed one, deserving of obedience and respect (Ps 2; 89:19, 27; 110). The ideal king provided stable leadership as the conduit of God’s blessing (Ps 72), securing property, prosperity, and God’s presence. Ultimately, the ideal purpose of kings was “to arrange and administer power in the face of chaos so that people can be human after the image of God.”

The actual record of Israel’s royal leadership is mostly one of failure. The kings are frequent recipients of scathing prophetic rebukes for their failure to lead the people according to God’s ways. Marty Stevens offers a concise summary of this period of Israel’s history: “For most of the Old Testament narrative, the reigns of the earthly kings do not mirror the reign of the Divine King. Creation does not flourish to its fullest potential. All people of society do not experience justice. Life is not abundant nor generous.”

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80 Walter Brueggemann, Peace (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2001), 102.
81 See e.g. 1 Sam. 8; Eccl 5:8-9; Isa 24:21; Jer 13:13; 32:32
82 Stevens, Leadership Roles of the Old Testament, 28.
Throughout the tumultuous reigns of Israel’s kings, priests attempted to lead people toward lives of wholeness and holiness rooted in the eco-agrarian orientation of the Law.

As the Priestly vision unfolds through Torah, it becomes evident that if that ideal form of human life is to be realized anywhere, it will be in Israel, and the form of life intended for Israel is specified as holiness… holiness is the character of a community observing a comprehensive pattern of life that is healthful…the Priestly vision of holiness emphatically includes the land, the covenant community of creatures who prosper along with a people living in accordance with the design of creation – or, alternatively, who suffer when the intended pattern is violated.  

The witness of priests such as Samuel and Ezra provide positive examples of this vision in action, and texts such as Zechariah 1-8 argue that a strong priesthood is necessary to respond to “the crisis of a defiled land, sanctuary, and priesthood.” Despite these examples, Zephaniah’s complaint that Israel’s priests “have profaned the sanctuary” and “done violence to the law” is not uncommon.  

It is Israel’s prophets who provided the most consistent example of leaders who led from an eco-agrarian framework and called people toward vocational faithfulness. This can be seen clearly in the work of Amos and Hosea, which Ellen Davis calls “distinctly ‘agrarian.’” Rooted in Israel’s rural life as a “shepherd of Tekoa” (Amos 1:1), Amos understood the connections between the decisions of Israel’s leaders and the well-being of its people and land. For Amos, “Israel’s political disorder is a disturbance of creation itself”; the centralization of power and wealth by Israel’s kings, cemented by

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83 Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 56. For an in-depth reading of Leviticus, see pp. 80-100.  
85 Zeph. 3:4. See also Jer 5:31; Ez 22:26; Hos 5:1; 6:9, and Mic 3:11.  
86 Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 120.  
87 Ibid., 128.
the consolidation of land and practice of commodity agriculture, will shake the very soil on which the powerful depend:

Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn?
The whole land will rise like the Nile; it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt. (Amos 8:8)

Amos sees clearly that those in power have set themselves up as god-like manipulators of creation. Though for the moment the wine is flowing and the storehouses are full as they “trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground” (2:7) with impunity, Amos puts them in their place with an image that evokes the original creation, the cataclysmic flood of Noah, and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt:

[H]e calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land – the LORD is his name” (9:7).

It is a reminder to Israel’s leaders that God ultimately holds the power to bring life or death to creation.

Hosea echoes Amos’ harsh assessment of Israel’s leaders, couching his critique in the rhetoric of sexual abuse and unfaithfulness. But even this seemingly anthropocentric language points to the wider suffering and de-creation that occurs when those in power neglect social justice:

Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away. (Hos 4:3)

At the root of Amos’ and Hosea’s attacks is the tendency of Israel’s leaders to understand their covenantal relationship with God as unconditional (through birth) rather
than conditional (through obedience to the law). Their preference for the former leads to an “ideology of chosenness” that legitimates “the power, privilege, and entitlement of the urban elite who clustered around the king and who lived off the produce of the peasant economy that surrounded the city.”

Not that the prophets saw urban life as an inherent problem; cities and their surrounding countryside would have been understood as an integrated unit. Writing to Israel’s exiles living in the heart of Babylon, the symbol in scripture of “the arrogant city that claims all for itself and thus lives as a parasite on both its own soil and on distant vassal states,” Jeremiah shares with them God’s command to “seek the peace (shalom) of the city…for in its peace you will find peace” (Jer 29:7). Here we see that God’s intended shalom is not contingent on where people live but how they live.

Despite the courageous leadership of biblical prophets such as those highlighted above, there were also many false prophets in Israel who hid ethical lapses, perpetuated communal denial, and mocked God’s intentions for creation with declarations such as, “Peace [shalom], peace, when there is no peace” (Jer 6:14).

Taken as a whole, Israel’s leaders failed to live up to their calling; their failures are frequently framed in an eco-agrarian perspective. One significant source of their failure comes from their insatiable appetites; Isaiah does not mince words in calling this out:

Israel’s watchmen are blind,
    they all lack knowledge.
They are all mute dogs,

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89 Ibid., 8.
90 Davis, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture, 158.
91 Ibid., 166.
they cannot bark;  
they lie around and dream,  
they love to sleep.  
They are dogs with mighty appetites;  
they never have enough.  
They are shepherds who lack understanding;  
they all turn to their own way,  
they seek their own gain.  
“Come,” each one cries, “let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer!  
And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better.” (Is 56:10-12).

This false confidence in the perpetually expansive ability of the earth (and those who work it) to satiate their desires belies God’s impending judgment:

How long will the land lie parched  
and the grass in every field be withered?  
Because those who live in it are wicked,  
the animals and birds have perished.  
Moreover, the people are saying,  
“He will not see what happens to us.” (Jer 12:4)

God does see what is happening, and when God brings judgment Israel’s leaders will be revealed as useless:

When terror comes, they will seek peace in vain.  
Calamity upon calamity will come, and rumor upon rumor.  
They will go searching for a vision from the prophet,  
priestly instruction in the law will cease,  
the counsel of the elders will come to an end.  
The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed in despair,  
and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. (Ez 7:26-27)

This judgment reveals the connections between Israel’s leaders, the people’s covenantal obedience, and the health of the earth. In perhaps the most stunning example of this, Jeremiah envisions a day when “the king and officials will lose heart, the priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be appalled” (Jer 4:9). He then describes the earth going through a process of de-creation in a clear reversal of Genesis 1:

I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty;  
and at the heavens, and their light was gone.
I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking;
       all the hills were swaying.
I looked, and there were no people;
       every bird in the sky had flown away.
I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert;
       all its towns lay in ruins
       before the LORD, before his fierce anger. (Jer 4:23-26)⁹²

The failures of Israel’s “shepherds” (Ez 34) is a key reason that Israel was exiled
from the land. Yet judgment is never the final word; the Old Testament includes multiple
promises that God will restore Israel. Just like judgment, this restoration is thoroughly
ecological. Isaiah’s visions of comprehensive restoration are particularly sharp.⁹³ In
chapter 14, after picturing the fall of the king of Babylon and the end of his oppressive
ways, the people of Israel are released from their suffering, but they are not the only ones
rejoicing:

       All the lands are at rest and at peace;
       They break into singing.
       Even the junipers and cedars of Lebanon exult over you and say,
       “Now that you have been laid low,
       no one comes to cut us down.” (14:7-8)

Return from exile meant a return of fruitfulness and flourishing to the land of
Israel, for God “will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the
LORD” (51:3). Isaiah’s visionary descriptions of God’s judgment and restoration reaches
an eco-agrarian crescendo in chapter 65 when God declares, “See, I will create new
heavens and a new earth” (65:17). This renewed creation embodies comprehensive

⁹² See also Jer. 23:10; Joel 1:2-12; Ezek. 33:27-29. Bill McKibben echoes Jeremiah in his less poetic
assessment of our current crisis: “We’re hard at work transforming [the earth] – hard at work sabotaging its
biology, draining its diversity affecting every other kind of life that we were born onto this planet with.
We’re running Genesis backward, decreating.” Bill McKibben, Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New
shalom; people flourish as the land produces bountifully, and predatory beasts eat alongside their former prey (65:19-25).  

When the people did return from exile, however, they did so as a colonized people still waiting for full liberation. Though there was much diversity of thought in post-exilic Judaism regarding how God would eventually usher in this new age, there was widespread belief in a mysterious messianic figure who would inaugurate this age of liberation and renew creation as a divinely empowered servant of God.  

N.T. Wright dramatically sets the scene:

It was to a people cherishing this hope, and living in this (often muddled) state of tension and aspiration, that there came a prophet in the Jordan wilderness, calling the people to repent and to undergo a baptism for ‘the forgiveness of sins,’ and warning them that Israel was about to pass through a fiery judgment out of which new people of Abraham would be forged. It was to this same people that another prophet came, announcing in the villages of Galilee that now at last Israel’s god was becoming king.

2.3.3 Human Leadership Redeemed and Perfected in Jesus Christ

As the Old Testament ends, the ambiguity and ambivalence surrounding human leadership remains; no individual human or community had been able to fully bear God’s image or lead humanity back to its original vocation. As we have seen, many leaders made things worse, and Israel, God’s chosen people, had not become “a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6). Despite this long record of failure, God remained committed to bringing salvation to the earth through humanity; from a leadership perspective, God was in a bind.

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94 For additional examples of ecologically-pictured shalom see Am 9:14-15; Ez 40-48; and Hos 2:14-23.
96 Ibid., 338.
2.3.3.1 Image of God Incarnate

Seen in this light, the incarnation is a stunning act of creative leadership that holds the tension of divine/human partnership together in the body of Jesus. When “the Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14), the Creator became part of creation and began to lead its renewal from the inside out. The incarnation places Jesus at the center of God’s work to restore and renew creation. We see how the incarnation is connected to humanity’s original vocation in Jesus’ designation as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15; see also 2 Cor 4:4 and Heb 1:3). As the image of God incarnate, Jesus embodies God’s intention for all humanity, fully reflecting God’s image and calling others to become like him.

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, we hear an echo of the original Genesis blessing in God’s declaration that he is “well pleased” with Jesus (Mt 3:17). This blessing flows, in part, from Jesus’ solidarity with humanity (and, by extension, solidarity with all creation) and acceptance of his vocation, which begins when the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness. In the same dry and barren desert where Moses led the Israelites, Jesus not only reenacts the Exodus journey but, in the words of the second-century theologian Irenaeus, “recapitulates all things.”

His time in the wilderness also reveals the creational scope of Jesus’ vocation. In addition to fasting and praying, Jesus intentionally encounters the non-human beings of

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97 From the perspective of adaptive leadership (see chapter four), God avoids a technical solution (God acting alone to solve the problem) by creating a solution that focuses on those who are at the heart of the problem (humanity) in a way that solves the problem and facilitates their transformation. This observation risks placing the biblical God within a 21st century human leadership framework, but it also illuminates the necessity, creativity, and risk of the incarnation.

98 See Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; 1 Jn 3:2-3.

the world, because he must “establish his messianic relationship to these before he can preach and practice the kingdom of God in the human world.” He confronts Satan, the supernatural version of Pharaoh, who claims to have complete authority over the earth. In his attempts to corrupt Jesus, we see echoes of the original temptations of Adam and Eve. In daring Jesus to turn stones into bread, Satan tempts him to misperceive humanity’s place within creation and manipulate it for his own desires. In challenging Jesus to throw himself off of the temple, Satan tempts him to misinterpret God’s word and test the limits of creaturely life. In promising Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, Satan tempts him to rule over the world by rejecting his identity as God’s servant.

Additional evidence of the creation-wide scope of Jesus’ time in the wilderness comes in Mark’s brief account: “At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him” (1:12-13, emphasis mine). While the identity and role of Satan (an enemy to be confronted) and the angels (his ministering friends) are clear, the wild animals are a bit more ambiguous. The Genesis account of Eden pictures an initial idyllic relationship between humans and wild animals, with God even bringing them to Adam to name (2:19-20). Adam and Eve’s fall into sin ushers in an age of increasing violence, however, and we see that after the Flood a state of fear exists between humans and wild animals (9:2). When God promises to restore Israel in Ezekiel 34, it comes with a promise to “rid the land of wild animals so that [people] may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety” (34:25; see also verse 28).

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100 Richard Bauckham, Living With Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology (Croydon, UK: Paternoster, 2012), 109-132.
Other Old Testament writers, however, imagined a restoration of the relationship between humans and wild animals. The best known example of this is Isaiah 11:6-9:

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together,
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
Infants will play near the hold of the cobra;
young children will put their hands into the viper’s nest.
They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.\(^{101}\)

It is this vision of messianic peace with wild animals that becomes reality during Jesus’ time in the desert. Richard Bauckham elaborates the nature of this peace:

Mark’s simple but effective phrase (‘he was with the wild animals’) has no suggestion of hostility or resistance about it. It indicates Jesus’ peaceable presence with the animals…Mark could have thought of the ideal relationship between wild animals and humans, here represented by their messianic king, as domination over them or as recruiting them to the ranks of the domestic animals who are useful to humans. But the simple ‘with them’ can have no such implication. Jesus befriends them. He is peaceably ‘with’ them.\(^{102}\)

Jesus offers the wild animals a priestly blessing with his presence, echoing the original goodness of creation. His physical proximity to them communicates to us that they are included in his work to heal and restore the broken relationships in creation.

**2.3.3.2 Leader of the New Creation**

Jesus emerged from the wilderness ready to continue his work of new creation in the human world. This centered on calling Israel to follow him as he taught and demonstrated what life in the new creation entailed. The leadership he exhibited during

\(^{101}\) See also Hos 2:18; Job 5:22-23

\(^{102}\) Bauckham, *Living With Other Creatures*, 127.
this period both conforms to and transforms the traditional structures of Israelite leadership. While it is virtually impossible to isolate a specific role Jesus is playing in any particular moment, examining the ways he leads through these roles further illuminates the inherently eco-agrarian nature of his leadership.

N.T. Wright notes that Jesus is firmly within Israel’s prophetic tradition as an ‘oracular’ prophet proclaiming the word of God. Like the prophets before him, Jesus announces a divine message: “The Kingdom of God has come near” (Mk 1:15). While this phrase was interpreted differently within Israel’s various schools of thought, Jesus’ life and teaching reveal that he had in mind a time when God would fully reign over creation and “the whole world, the world of space and time, would at last be put to rights.”103

Wright also identifies Jesus as a ‘leadership’ prophet who calls people to follow him.104 The failure of Israel’s leaders to embrace his vision and respond to his call results in escalating confrontations. At the heart of these conflicts is the tension within Israelite leadership between those who believed Israel’s election was unconditional and those who believe that their identity was contingent on obedience to God’s Law. In one of his confrontations with the Pharisees, Jesus clearly shows which side he is on: “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did” (Jn 8:39). Like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus’ ethical focus had an ecological orientation. When told to keep his disciples quiet as he rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, Jesus replied that if they were silent “the very rocks would cry out” (Lk 19:40). This is a quote of Habakkuk 2:11, which is part of a judgment speech from God against a nation for its pattern of “human

104 Ibid., 162-197.
bloodshed, and violence to the earth” (2:8, 17), and includes the promise, “but the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (2:14).

In addition to prophetically proclaiming God’s vision and confronting opponents, Jesus did the priestly work of reconnection and healing. While the majority of Jesus’ priestly words and actions focused on cultivating divine-human and inter-human relationships, there are clear indications that this was connected to his priestly work in the wider creation. This is particularly vivid in his encounter with the Gerasene demoniac (Mt 8:28-34; Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-38). Like his post-baptismal journey into the wilderness, Jesus crossed a topographical and political boundary (Lake Gennesaret) and encountered Satan (the demons) and a wild creature (the possessed man) in a place associated with fear and death (a graveyard). Jesus confronted the demons and healed the man through exorcism. These actions made it possible for the wild man to be at peace with himself and others. When people from the surrounding area came to see what had happened, the man, like the wild animals of the wilderness, was simply with Jesus. And like he did with the wild animals, Jesus left the man in his native habitat to live out his vocation, which in this case involved returning to his community and telling them how much the Lord had done for him.

Jesus’ preaching and teaching also reveals an eco-agrarian framework to his priestly work. It is important to note how much of his work “takes place outdoors: on

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105 The letter to the Hebrews goes to great lengths to describe Jesus as a priest (see esp. 4:14-5:8 and 6:19-10:22).
106 Problematic to this ecological reading is the casting of demons into pigs, which then proceed to run into the lake and drown. For a nuanced treatment of this see Bauckham, *Living With Other Creatures*, 97-98.
mountainsides, lake shores, river banks, in fields and pastures, places populated not only
by humans but by animals and plants, both domestic and wild.” Far more than just
providing interesting but irrelevant backgrounds, or fodder for spiritual analogies, these
details remind us that for Jesus, the whole earth is caught up in the inbreaking of God’s
kingdom. This is captured in Jesus’ priestly work of teaching his followers to pray:

This, then, is how you should pray:
Our Father in heaven,
    hallowed by your name,
    your kingdom come,
    your will be done,
    on earth as it is in heaven. (Matt 6:9-10)

Jesus fulfilled this prayer in the ways his actions enacted God’s will on the earth
as a servant ruler, such as the moments when Jesus’ life radiated power in ways that
affected physical reality. Richard Feldmeier sees these moments as seamless integrations
of Jesus’ redemptive work and calls them “small-scale anticipations of the kingdom”
whose “holistic character points to the coming of the kingdom in all creation.” He
points out that Scripture does not call these actions of Jesus miracles (thaumata), which
would indicate a breaking of the laws of nature, but “deeds of power” (dunameis),
because they are “concerned with making the creation whole.” Rather than simply
exhibiting Jesus’ power over nature, they show Jesus’ oneness with the created world and
his ability to turn God’s vision for the world into reality. This includes his acts of power
on behalf of human beings, for these acts reveal human connectedness with the wider

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109 Ibid. The traditional explanation of miracles as the breaking of the laws of nature assume that “pure
nature” exists apart from God. The biblical witness is that God has been with creatures from the beginning.
Jesus’ acts are the fullest expression of God’s compassion and care for creation, and are a sign of the
eventual liberation of all creation. I thank Dr. Norman Wirzba for this observation.
world. Many of them bring to mind the original creation: unsuccessful fishermen are told to throw their nets where the water “teems” with fish (Lk 5:1-11; see Gn 1:20); threatened travelers are delivered from a chaotic storm-tossed sea by verbal commands (Lk 8:22-25; see Gn 1:9); hungry seekers on a mountainside are given abundant food to eat (Mk 6:30-44; see Gn 1:29).

This ecologically-oriented power to lead the world into abundance, health and newness flows from the unity that Jesus has with the one he calls Father, and it is this deep and powerful connection that he prayed might be extended to his followers (Jn 17:20-25). It is a prayer that includes a promise that they will share in his leadership over a renewed creation: “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28). This call to leadership also includes a mandate to emulate the manner in which Jesus exercises leadership. His followers are not to lord their power over others, but instead, “the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves” (Lk 22:26).

The great paradox of Jesus’ powerful exercise of prophetic, priestly, and servant ruler leadership is that it inflames his opposition and hastens his journey to the cross. Instead of leading people to the Tree of Life, he is led to a tree of death, anointed with a crown of leafless thorns, and defeated by the destructive power unleashed in Eden that he came to overcome. The fractures that spread throughout creation after the originating sin tore through the body and being of Jesus as he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34). Yet even in this moment of separation and defeat, we are given signs of an interconnected creation bearing witness to something transformative.
The synoptic gospels (Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33; Lk 23:44) tell us that for three hours the land was covered with a deep darkness that signaled a moment of eschatological significance (see Amos 8:9-10) and testified to injustice and divine judgment (see Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). This darkness may also have been an act of mourning, and brings to mind the primordial darkness that preceded the initial creation (Gn 1:2).  

If the crucifixion revealed Jesus as creation’s suffering servant, his resurrection vindicated him as leader of the new creation. This is why Colossians 1:15 calls him “the firstborn over all creation,” a powerful phrase unpacked by James Dunn: “What is being claimed is quite simply and profoundly that the divine purpose in the act of reconciliation and peacemaking was to restore the harmony of the original creation, to bring into renewed oneness and wholeness ‘all things.’” It is no coincidence that the Gospel of John includes a post-resurrection encounter between Mary and Jesus in which she mistook him for a gardener (Jn 20:11-16). Though she did not recognize him as Jesus, she identified him correctly; he is the gardener of the new creation who is ending humanity’s exile from Eden and leading creation toward its comprehensive flourishing. 

Michael Northcott notes that it is only from the perspective of the resurrection that we can perceive creation for what it truly is, “the product of the holy will of God whose plan is to restore its goodness, wholeness and harmony, and to draw it towards its final end in complete relationality with and reflection of the goodness of God.

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112 We can see Jesus acting this out in miniature in his movement from exile in the Garden of Gethsemane to the violence of the cross and subsequent identification as the gardener post-resurrection. I thank Christine Sine for this observation.  
The victory of the resurrection is followed by Jesus’ ascension, a symbolic act that permanently establishes him as lord and leader of the new creation and anticipates the full unification of heaven and earth. This triumphal moment signals the beginning of the next stage of humanity’s partnership with God in the healing of creation. The hymn of Philippians 2 specifically calls Jesus’ followers to imitate Jesus in his incarnational journey of sacrificial leadership for the benefit of creation:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself;
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death –
even death on a cross.
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

2.3.4 Christ’s Shared Leadership with the Church

Just as God hands over power and authority to human beings in the original creation, Jesus shares leadership of the new creation with his followers. This is not just a restoration of humanity’s original vocation as bearers of God’s image, it is its fulfillment. This can be seen in the profound declaration of 2 Corinthians 5:17, which connects the personal dimension of salvation to its wider framework: “If anyone is in Christ, there is

the new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.”

Jürgen Moltmann traces out the implications of this transformative journey: since Jesus “is the messianic imago Dei, believers become imago Christi, and through this enter upon the path which will make them gloria Dei on earth.” While this enables believers to be justified and begin the journey towards personal glorification, the process is intimately connected to the development of human vocation:

In the messianic light of the gospel, the appointment to rule over animals and the earth also appears as the ‘ruling with Christ’ of believers. For it is to Christ, the true and visible image of the invisible God on earth, that ‘all authority is given in heaven and on earth’ (Matt. 28.18). His liberating and healing rule also embraces the fulfilment of the dominum terrae – the promise given to human beings at creation. This vocational fulfillment extends beyond the individual to the church community as a whole. Ephesians 1:22-23 makes a profound claim about the church’s intimate connection to Jesus and his creation-wide rule: “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Forming a community in this vocation requires leadership, which initially came through the work of the apostles. We see how their leadership flowed directly from Jesus in the theological artistry of 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, in which Paul describes Jesus as the true “image of God,” roots apostolic leadership in being “servants for Jesus’ sake,” and grounds it all in the language of creation: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of

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114 Author’s translation. In Greek, the first part of this verse reads “ὁστε εἰ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις,” literally, “If one is in Christ, new creation.” Another possible translation: “If anyone is in Christ, they are part of (or evidence of) God’s new creation. See J. Paul Samply, The Second Letter to the Corinthians. NIBC Vol. 11 (Nashville, Abingdon, 2005), 93. See also Gal 6:15.
115 Moltmann, God in Creation, 226.
116 Ibid., 227.
darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.”

We noted in chapter one that after the initial apostolic period, the forms and function of church leadership were fluid. As the church continued to spread and new Christian communities formed, however, the practice of selecting and empowering particular leaders to serve as pastors became more normative.117 The historical work of pastors has been to narrow “the gap between the sociological reality of the church and the theological vocation of the church.”118 This entails aligning church ministry and mission with the eschatological shalom inaugurated by Jesus. The fulfillment of this shalom is captured in Revelation 21-22 as the New Jerusalem descends from heaven, an evocative image signifying the final unification of heaven and earth, the realization of the Bible’s eco-agrarian vision in which God has reconciled and redeemed “all things.”119 Richard Bauckham captures the integrative nature of this vision in his description of the New Jerusalem:

> It is a garden city of a kind to which humans have often aspired, a place where human culture does not replace nature but lives in harmony and reciprocity with it. It represents the final reconciliation of culture and nature, of the human world and the other creatures of Earth. It lives from the vitality of the natural world without plundering and exhausting its resources.120

And so, the Bible ends with a decisive act of God that finishes the work of new creation and ushers in a permanent sabbath. What, then, becomes of the leadership role

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118 Ibid., 22-23.
119 Jürgen Moltmann observes a chiastic structure to this theological movement: “Creation in the beginning started with nature and ended with the human being. The eschatological creation reverses this order: it starts with the liberation of the human being and ends with the redemption of nature.” *God in Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 68.
120 Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 177-78.
that humans had been given in the work of new creation? Perhaps our leadership role is complete. As Moltmann notes about biblical sabbath, “In the sabbath stillness men and women no longer intervene in the environment through their labor. They let it be entirely God’s creation.”

If a finished new creation ushers in a perpetual sabbath situated within an ecotopia, perhaps the only roles humans play is to worship God and rest with God. Yet Revelation 22:5 declares that human beings “will reign forever and ever.” That suggests the possibility that creative, servant leadership continues in a new creation that is not a static, finished reality, but an open world of infinite possibilities that flow from an eternally creative God.

Ultimately, these visions must leave us like Job, silently awestruck before things too wonderful for us to know (Job 42:3). We must carry these visions back to the world as it is, a world that often seems closer to dystopia than ecotopia. But in the hands of ecological pastors, these visions become seeds to plant within the hearts of men and women who want to join God in the work of tending the new creation in the midst of a world that often appears broken, barren, and beyond repair.

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121 Moltmann, God in Creation, 277.
122 For discussion of biblical visions of ecotopia see Bauckham, Bible and Ecology, 115ff.
We have set the ecological pastor paradigm in Arcadian ecology, Christian agrarianism, and an eco-agrarian reading of Scripture, which roots the paradigm within a complex picture of creation. All things are created, sustained, and redeemed by God, but creation participates in its own life and development. The earth and its creatures are fundamentally good, beautifully diverse, and relationally interdependent, but also vulnerable to evil and sin, thoroughly fractured, and increasingly threatened. Human beings are part of creation and dependent upon it, yet uniquely created in God’s image. They are created to partner in God’s leadership of creation, but their disobedience initiated and perpetuates its fracturing. They are redeemed and renewed in Jesus Christ, but struggle to embrace a full discipleship that joins Jesus in the work of new creation.

Understanding this complexity does not come quickly, for the world’s nature and significance “is something we have to discover and learn. It is something we have to work toward.” Though this certainly includes studying ecological principles, agrarian practices, and the Bible’s eco-agrarian perspective, a deeper perception is needed, one that comes through intentionally contemplating creation from our own position as

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creatures immersed and enmeshed in its complexity. This not only changes perception, it changes the perceiver. This process is a key piece in the formation of ecological pastors as they become contemplatives of creation.

3.1 Contemplation of Creation Defined and Described

Contemplation of creation is the intentional practice of cultivating awareness of God’s presence and purpose within and for the sake of creation. It recognizes that God, while in some ways transcendent and unknowable, is primarily revealed to us in and through the mundane elements of existence – God in creation and creation in God. The contemplative of creation “is invited to notice everything and to experience all things as part of a sacred whole.” This involves paying attention to God’s presence in particular places – the intersecting physical realities of the contemplative’s body, home, community, and landscape. It also involves paying attention to God’s presence within time – the contemplative’s experience of a particular day, season, historical era, and geological epoch. Paying attention to God’s presence in a particular place and time slowly transforms the way the world is perceived. Such transformed perception begins to reveal a transfigured creation, which Thomas Merton describes as perceiving how, in Christ, “the world and the whole cosmos has been created anew (which means to say restored to its original perfection and beyond that made divine, totally transfigured).”

3.1.1 Perceiving Creation Wholly

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As contemplatives begin to perceive a transfigured creation, everything is revealed as part of a sacred whole. This is what Larry Rasmussen calls “web of life sacramentalism,” where Earth itself is a sacrament, a “disclosure of God’s presence by visible and tangible signs, like the waters of baptism and the waters of the Columbia river and its salmon.” This requires a sacramental imagination, which takes time to develop because “learning to look for wholeness is a new skill for us, and it has been difficult not to rely on old measures, even when we know they don’t give us the information we need.”

Learning to perceive creation wholly comes in part from understanding creation as an icon. A religious icon is a work of art created to be “a means of prayer, an exercise in self-detachment, which leads people to seeing every created thing anew because in an icon’s veneration disciples are invited to see the world in its divine light, bathed in God’s transfiguring love.” Jesus is the ultimate icon of creation, “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), the one who reveals the fundamental unity and goodness of heaven and earth. And if all creation is connected to Jesus, each particular element can be iconic.

Iconic perception cultivates in the contemplative a deep sense of wonder that enlivens even the most mundane moments of human experience. Countering the reductive tendencies of the modern world, the contemplative sees that the world remains an enchanted place...in both the difficulties and delights of relationships, in the immediacies of every kind of cultural experience, from the pub and café to the theater and concert hall, and in our encounter with both the natural world and many parts of the built environment.

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7 Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 77.
The deeper this sense of wonder becomes, the more we see God in creation and creation in God. At times, it “takes us to the edge, where language loses its power to describe and where analysis, the taking apart of things, goes limp before the mystery of Creation, where the only appropriate response is prayerful silence.”

The pervasive wonder that comes through perceiving creation as a sacred whole does not preclude the recognition that it is not yet fully whole. The beginning of Edwin Muir’s poem “Transfiguration,” which opened this chapter, captures a moment of purified perception that “gave us back the unfallen world.” The poem goes on to recognize the passing nature of this revelation within a world that remains fallen:

If it had lasted but another moment
It might have held for ever! But the world
Rolled back into its place, and we are here,
And all that radiant kingdom lies forlorn,
As if it had never stirred; no human voice
Is heard among its meadows, but it speaks
To itself alone, alone it flowers and shines
And blossoms for itself while time runs on.10

A sacramental imagination recognizes the reality and ecology of sin, a world in which fields are devastated, the ground mourns, domestic and wild animals cry out to God, and Jesus weeps over doomed cities and dead friends (Jl 1:12-20; Lk 19:41; Jn 11:35). This painful perception is threatened by the ever-present human temptation to distort, deflect, and hide. In our time this is especially true of ecological destruction:

Farms, feedlots, wells, clear-cuts, waste dumps, and factories are mostly out of sight and so out of mind. As a result we do not know the full costs of what we consume. Ignorant of the damage we do, we leap to the conclusion that we are much richer than we really are.11

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11 Orr, Hope is an Imperative, 177.
The contemplative of creation refuses to look away, and perceives connections between ecological, social, and personal sin. As Native American theologian Randy Woodley observes, personal and corporate theft, injustice, and the abuse of power “help to create poor and oppressed peoples” and “serve to exploit and destroy the earth.”12 This includes injustices that are not typically understood ecologically. For example, James Cone connects racism directly with ecological destruction: “People who fight against white racism but fail to connect it to the degradation of the earth are anti-ecological – whether they know it or not. People who struggle against environmental degradation but do not incorporate it in a disciplined and sustained fight against white supremacy are racists – whether they acknowledge it or not. The fight for justice cannot be segregated but must be integrated with the fight for life in all its forms.”13 This perception leads contemplatives of creation to honest self-reflection about one’s personal contribution to such abuses.14

As contemplatives of creation, ecological pastors pay particular attention to creation’s wholeness and brokenness within the local and particular context of their lives and ministries. Set within this contemplative framework, life is not regional or national, let alone global, but local. It must know on intimate terms the local plants and animals and local soils; it must know local possibilities and impossibilities, opportunities and hazards. It


depends and insists on knowing very particular local histories and biographies.15

This includes, of course, congregations in all their particularity. The wisdom of Eugene Peterson is particularly helpful here: “Every church is located someplace. There are no churches in general, no generic churches, no one-size-fits-all churches. And the pastor is the person set down in the named location.”16 This particularity extends to all individuals within the church, a perspective which came to Peterson through the writing of Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose insightful observations about the lives of ordinary Russians transformed and transfigured his perceptions of the people in his suburban Maryland congregation:

He trained my antennae to pick up the suppressed signals of spirituality in the denatured stock language of these conversations, discovering tragic plots and comic episodes, works-in-progress all around me. I was living in a world redolent with spirituality. These were no ordinary people.17

Perceiving creation’s wholeness and brokenness in the particularities of a place and its people is made possible when pastors have contemplatively rooted themselves in those same particularities. The testimony of writer Scott Russell Sanders is apt:

It has taken me half a lifetime of searching to realize that the likeliest path to the ultimate ground leads through my local ground. I mean the land itself, with its creeks and rivers, its weather, seasons, stone outcroppings, and all the plants and animals that share it. I cannot have a spiritual center without having a geographical one; I cannot live a grounded life without being grounded in a place.18

3.2 Practicing Contemplation of Creation

16 Eugene Peterson, Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 123.
17 Ibid., 62.
Contemplating creation involves intentional, embodied practices that focus and shape the contemplative’s inner thoughts, attitudes, and dispositions as well as exterior habits, actions, and choices. These practices engage all the senses as they increase contemplatives’ multi-dimensional perceptual awareness.

3.2.1 A Multi-sensory God

Though it may seem strange at first, contemplating creation as an embodied creature reflects the biblical picture of God as a multi-sensory, perceptual being. After finishing each day of work in the original creation, God “saw that it was good” (Gn 1). Other texts in the Old Testament expand this imagery, often comparing God to non-sensate idols and equating idolatry with misperception:

Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.
They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes, but do not see.
They have ears, but do not hear;
noses, but do not smell.
They have hands, but do not feel;
feet, but do not walk;
they make no sound in their throats.
Those who make them are like them;
so are all who trust in them. (Ps 115:4–8)\(^{19}\)

Granted, this is anthropomorphic language, but in Jesus’ incarnation, God literally became a fully sensory human being, and it is through his body that the inbreaking of God’s kingdom on earth was revealed. As he called his disciples, listened to the cries of the poor, smelled the thin Palestinian soil, ate with sinners, felt the diseased skin of the sick, and offered his body on the cross, Jesus sought to transform human perception in a

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\(^{19}\) See also Dt 4:28.
contemplative style that wholly engaged those around him. His miracles also have a
contemplative, sensory dimension: it is no accident that the gospels include multiple
accounts of Jesus touching and healing the blind.

This is true of his teaching as well. Most of his parables, which “function as a lens
that allows us to see the truth and to correct distorted vision,” involve descriptions of
regular life (many depicting agrarian scenes) that are altered enough to arrest the hearer
and invite new perspectives. When asked why he spoke so often in parables, Jesus
responded with a lesson on deep perception:

The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive,
and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ With them indeed
is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:
   ‘You will indeed listen, but never understand,
   and you will indeed look, but never perceive.
   For this people’s heart has grown dull,
   and their ears are hard of hearing,
   and they have shut their eyes;
   so that they might not look with their eyes,
   and listen with their ears,
   and understand with their heart and turn—
   and I would heal them.’
   But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. (Mt 13:13-16)

On one occasion, Jesus blessed the eyes of Peter, James, and John as they went up on a
mountain to pray with Jesus and “the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes
became dazzlingly white” (Lk 9:29). This moment of transfiguration gave the disciples a
glimpse of Jesus in his fullness, forever transforming their perception of him. It also
anticipated his resurrection, which itself revealed creation’s transfigured future.

3.2.2 Attuning the Senses

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20 Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand
As contemplatives of creation, ecological pastors root themselves deeply in Jesus, knowing that creation “flows from Jesus at its beginning, flows through Jesus as it is healed, and flows to Jesus as it is fulfilled.”21 This involves attuning their senses to perceive God in creation and creation in God. Reflecting on the visual array of life, the ecological pastor seeks to see with “the eyes of the heart” (Eph 1:18), discerning what is seen through the already/not yet reality of new creation. The summer sunshine that illuminates an endless field of strawberries also reveals migrant workers living in the shadows and lifeless soil washing away after a rainstorm. The glow of a streetlamp that highlights the edges of a perfectly trimmed suburban yard also shows the red lines of racist housing practices and the fatigue of upward mobility. The fluorescent bulb that illumines the lowered gaze of a congregant asking for help hints at a past fraught with pain and hope for a future full of possibility.

Such is also the case with hearing; when ecological pastors attune their ears to the world they hear the sound of “fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling [God’s] command” (Ps 148:8). When focused on human voices, they notice what is said and left unsaid in conversations, as well as the sighs, intakes of breath, pauses, stammers, and silences that often communicate more than words. Listening for these voices is difficult work in a world full of noise, but in them and through them (and sometimes in their absence), the voice of the Creator shouts and whispers and sighs.

Less obvious is the importance of smell, yet much can be perceived in the diverse aromas of life. When Jacob dressed up like his brother Esau to steal his father’s blessing, Isaac declared, “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has

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blessed” (Gn 27:27), a moment that reveals humanity’s capacity for both perception and
deception. This mixture of virtue and vice can be discerned in the smells of warming
spring soil and the odors of a chemically-laden garden supply store. There is much to be
pondered in holding together the sweet smell of a baptized baby and the street smell of a
homeless person. In these moments, ecological pastors seek a greater understanding of
what it means to be “the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and
among those who are perishing” (2 Cor 2:15).

When it comes to touch, an ecological understanding of creation remind pastors
that everything touches everything else. The modern world distances people from this
truth as people speed from one place to another in air conditioned vehicles, eat without
ever touching the soil that makes food possible, and live in isolation behind closed doors
and electronic screens. Ecological pastors seek contact with the world, allowing the heat
of the sun, the power of the wind, and the and rise and fall of the landscape to touch and
teach them. Special attention is given to the complicated nature of human touch, which
can heal and harm; ecological pastors are conscious of the ways in which their bodies can
be agents of both.

Psalm 34:8 declares, “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” Taste can be
revelatory: the chief steward at the wedding in Cana tastes the water-become-wine and
knows something strange has happened (Jn 2:1-11); two disciples do not recognize the
risen Jesus until he breaks bread with them (Lk 24:1-35). Ecological pastors intentionally
seek good, nutritious food grown in a sustainable manner, and build on these connections
to perceive with Wendell Berry that all of life is eucharistic:

To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation.
When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a
sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.22

In addition to these physical senses, ecological pastors’ minds are engaged in the contemplative life, studying creation with curiosity, humility, and expansiveness. In this area, specialization comes second to a broad approach to learning. This follows Paul’s advice: “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8). Through the habit of regular study, ecological pastors seek to understand the connections between things, particularly the family, community, and ecological systems within which their life and ministry unfolds.

As contemplatives of creation attune their bodily senses and focus their minds, a deeper ‘spiritual sense’ begins to develop through “the transformed epistemic sensibilities of those being progressively reborn in the likeness of the Son.”23 The spiritual sense tradition dates back to at least the third century, although Western Christianity has tended to downplay this progressive or multi-leveled understanding of spiritual perception (you either receive revelation and grace, or you do not). The spiritual sense tradition recognizes that human beings’ perceptual abilities grow and mature, including our perception of God. This comes through a “process of change, one only rarely achieved at speed; it will involve an initial ‘turning-around’ morality, then practice in seeing the

world differently, then only finally the full intimacy of ‘spiritual/sensual’ knowledge of Christ.”

The apostle Paul has this process of change in mind in his invitation in Romans:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (12:1-2)

Ecological pastors who accept this invitation incorporate specific contemplative practices into their daily patterns of life and ministry.

3.2.3 Contemplative practices: Meditation, Asceticism, and Study

The transformation of perception we have been describing can occur in unexpected, mystical experiences (like the Transfiguration), but more often it comes through disciplined attention to daily experience through intentional, habitual practices. This is one of the lessons of monasticism, a movement within Christianity that, in its diverse expressions, creates ways of life that foster perceptual change. The monks of the second and third century who initiated the movement “believed that this encompassing, penetrating way of seeing, while possible for everyone, must be cultivated, brought into the center of consciousness through disciplined practice.” They knew that transforming one’s perception requires patience and commitment. If our powers of perception are underdeveloped or shaped by a culture of misperception, how can we “engage the world as God’s creation, or hope to come to what Saint Isaac the Syrian called eternal life, the “experience of all things in God?”

3.2.3.1 Meditation

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24 Coakley, Powers and Submissions, 140.
26 Wirzba, From Nature to Creation, 62.
The intentional practices that form the heart of monastic life focus on connecting inner and outer experience in an integrated life of perception and action. The inner life is developed through meditative practices, which include “any act habitually entered into with our whole heart as a way of awakening and sustaining a more interior meditative awareness of the present moment.” For pastors, the core meditative practices are Scripture reading and prayer. Ecological pastors bring an intentional integration of creation to these practices.

Meditative reading of the Bible is different than formal study. It requires readers to focus on the ways Scripture encounters them personally, so that they can detach from the negative and unhealthy aspects of the world and re-center their lives in God. As they meditate on Scripture, ecological pastors perceive the ways specific texts connect God, land, and humanity in an integrative way and then place their own lives within this integrated worldview. This builds scriptural imagination in a way that slowly transfigures one’s life and place.

This approach carries over to the practice of prayer, which for ecological pastors includes praying for all of creation. Since nothing is outside God’s love and care, everything is included in the life of prayer. This meditative prayer comes with an awareness that one is also praying with creation, recognizing that non-human creatures, as well as the land, have a ‘voice’ that communicates with God (see Joel 1; Rom 8).

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28 An example of scriptural imagination that can transfigure one’s place is a story Wendell Berry relates about the painter Harlan Hubbard who, when asked by a local church for a painting of the Jordan river, made them a painting of their own river, the Ohio. Wendell Berry, foreword to *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* by Ellen F. Davis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, xii-xiii).
Scripture reading and prayer are not the only meditative practices ecological pastors engage in; all the particular practices of pastoral ministry – administration, care and counseling, spiritual direction, teaching, ministry and mission – can be meditative if done intentionally and reflectively. In fact, ecological pastors do not limit meditative practices to formal ministry; they reject “the dichotomy between exercises that are “spiritual” – prayer, meditation, Scripture reading – and those that are “embodied” – taking walks, practicing Pilates, eating well.”29 They find freedom in James Finley’s description of possibilities:

The meditation practice we might find ourselves gravitating toward could be baking bread, tending the roses, or taking long, slow walks to no place in particular. Or we might find ourselves being interiorly drawn to painting or to reading or writing poetry or listening to certain kinds of music. Our meditation practice may be that of being alone, truly alone, without any addictive props or escapes. Or our practice may be that of being with the person in whose presence we awakened to what is most real and vital in our life. . . . We cannot explain it, but when we give ourselves over to these simple acts, we are taken to a deeper place. We become once again more grounded and settled in a meditative awareness of the depth of the life we are living.”30

Ecological pastors engage these meditative practices as embodied creatures within particular places, cognizant of how inner experience is shaped by social and ecological context. Meditative practices will be shaped differently when practiced inside or outside, in a healthy or distressed landscape, at particular times of year, and by what is happening in the lives of the pastor, the congregation, and the wider community. All of these

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30 Finley, *Christian Mediation*, 45-46.
elements are brought within meditative practices as a way training and refining perception.31

3.2.3.2 Asceticism

A necessary partner of meditation is asceticism, the intentional discipline of self-denial and limitation. If meditation focuses on the inner life of perception, asceticism is the discipline “that polishes the glass on our doors of perception so we can see the world as the manifestation of God’s love, and then also go through the door to meet the world in acts of kindness, compassion, and hospitality.”32 This is not a renunciation of the physical world, but “the correction of the chaotic desire and moral disorder within us so that we can perceive and welcome the world as God does.”33 Ascetic practices help us to disconnect from our sinful, disordered selves so that we can be connected to the world, and God, in a rightfully loving way.

In a world that reduces creation to meaningless matter or raw material for human consumption, and reduces human beings to disembodied souls or cogs in a ceaseless economic engine, ascetic practices such as fasting, solitude, and simplicity can help ecological pastors see the ways in which these misperceptions have formed them, and

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31 It is particularly interesting and instructive to note the numerous biblical stories in which leaders have a highly sensory, meditative encounter with God that transforms their perception, transfigures creation, and reconfigures their social relationships. We looked at Moses before the burning bush in chapter 1, but there is also Elijah’s experience as he flees to the wilderness in fear for his life. There a fierce wind, followed by an earthquake and fire, precede the presence of God, who speaks to Elijah in “a sound of sheer silence” (1 Kgs 19:12). In that experience of silent solitude, God helps him to see that he is not alone in his faithfulness. In the New Testament, Paul’s dramatic conversation happens on the desert road to Damascus, where a flashing light blinds him and he hears the voice of Jesus reveal himself as the one whom Paul has been persecuting. Paul’s perceptive transformation continues when his sight is restored by Ananias, one of Paul’s enemies, as he lays hands on him and calls him “brother” (Acts 9:1-19).

32 Wirzba, From Nature to Creation, 88.

33 Ibid., 88.
begin a process of purification and healing. Like meditative practices, ascetic exercises are not ends in themselves but pathways to a fuller, more connected life.

The public practices of pastoral ministry are formed, strengthened, and sustained by the private practices of the pastor; in this way, asceticism “is to spirituality what a training regimen is to an athlete.”34 Ecological pastors employ ascetic practices to help them perceive what is breaking the intended harmony of creation in their lives, their congregation, the wider human community, and the land. They reflect on the physical habits and patterns of living associated with bodily health, the built environment, modes of transportation, land use, and practices of work and rest. Through this, they identify ascetic practices which can address the ways these habits and patterns have been malformed and foster more comprehensive health and harmony.

The best place to start may be with an agrarian focus on food because food connects humans to God, others, and the land in direct and essential ways. Our perception of food – where it comes from, how it is grown, what it means to eat – and our food practices – how we grow food, what kind of food we eat, when and how we eat, who we eat with – reveal in intimate and complex detail the ecological, social, personal, and spiritual dimensions of our lives. Ecological pastors examine their personal perceptions of food and practices of eating and employ ascetic practices such as fasting (periodically from all food and more permanently from unhealthy food) to purify perception and heal broken relationships.

3.2.3.3 Study – Integrating Biblical and Ecological Literacy

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34 Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 74.
In addition to meditating on Scripture, ecological pastors approach their study of
the Bible as contemplatives of creation, which requires learning the interpretive
approaches that support an eco-agrarian reading of Scripture. Although the integration of
biblical scholarship with ecology and agrarianism is still relatively new, three distinct
(but overlapping) hermeneutical practices have emerged.35 On the more radical side is
the developing field of Ecological Hermeneutics, which prioritizes the insights of ecology
and the concerns of the eco-justice movement by reading the Bible and doing theology
from a position of solidarity with the earth (often rendered as a personal name, “Earth”).36
At the heart of this approach is empathy with the earth combined with suspicion that “we
are heirs of a long anthropocentric, patriarchal, and androcentric approach to reading the
text that has devalued the Earth and that continues to influence the way we read the
text.”37 Interpreters highlight the ways the Bible contributes to suppression and
oppression of the earth, and seek to retrieve nonhuman voices in the text.

There is much to appreciate in the Ecological Hermeneutics approach. It
recognizes that the Bible can and has been read in ways that diminish the worth of the
earth and its non-human creatures, and that legitimate human abuse. Many of the
principles that guide interpreters in this stream can help pastors bring the non-human
creation into their study of Scripture:

1. The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value;

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mention the agrarian approach discussed below. Ecological pastors will also want to be familiar with (and
reject) interpretive approaches that explicitly encourage humanity’s unrestricted dominion over the earth,
refuse to acknowledge the reality of human-induced ecological degradation and damage, and/or offer
various forms of escapist eschatologies. For a concise critique of these perspectives, see Steven Bouma-
36 See Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, eds., *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Atlanta:
Society for Biblical Literature, 2008).
37 Norman C. Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*,
edited by Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2008), 1.
(2) Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival;
(3) Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice;
(4) The universe, Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design;
(5) Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, Earth to sustain its balance and a diverse Earth community;
(6) Earth and its components not only suffer from human injustices but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.38

Critics of this approach have noted that Ecological Hermeneutics “remains entrenched in the colonial-industrial dissociation of human beings from the places in which they subsist.”39 Interpreters tend to operate from an anthropology that continues to set humanity apart from and against the natural world, thus perpetuating the very dualism it is trying to overcome. There is also a tendency to read anti-Earth assumptions into texts unnecessarily.40 That many texts can be (and have been) interpreted in destructive ways does not necessarily mean they should be.

The second, and largest, interpretive stream employs a hermeneutic of recovery. This approach takes modern ecological concerns seriously but rejects the deep suspicion of Ecological Hermeneutics. Interpreters seek to recover ecological wisdom and insight from the Bible that has been forgotten, ignored, or suppressed by interpretive traditions rooted in a modern theological worldview.41 While there are a wide range of

40 See, for example, the reading of Genesis 1:26-28 in Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, eds., Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics (SBL Symposium Series, 46; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 5-8, which critiques the text for being destructively anthropocentric without acknowledging the growing body of scholarship arguing that this is a misinterpretation of the text.
41 See, for example, Richard Bauckham, The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010); Steven Bouma-Prediger, For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2010); Ryan Harker...
interpretations within this stream, the recovery approach helps readers see that the Bible has an ecological perspective not just in individual texts but in the overall narrative flow, which includes a consistent ethic of care for the earth.\(^{42}\)

Critics have also noted shortcomings in this approach. It can tempt interpreters to gloss over interpretive difficulties, not allowing for the possibility that some biblical texts are not ecologically oriented, and may even support the kind of anti-earth perspectives highlighted by Ecological Hermeneutics adherents. Critics have also pointed out that adherents to this tradition advocate a confusing spectrum of human action under the broad concept of stewardship, ranging from encouraging humans to actively manage the earth’s systems to discouraging any kind of human intervention. Critics also point out that the concept of humans as stewards can effectively set humanity apart from the non-human creation in ways that discourage solidarity and hamper wise care.\(^{43}\)

A third interpretive approach, fairly new to the scene, is agrarian hermeneutics. In chapter two we noted that agrarianism is not a science, an ethic, or a religion, through it includes aspects of all three; it is a comprehensive way of life focused on humanity’s relationship to the land in specific times and places. This makes reading the Bible through agrarian eyes challenging (especially for the modern reader), even though “agrarianism is the mind-set native to many if not most of the biblical writers themselves.”\(^{44}\)

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\(^{42}\) See especially Bouma-Prediger, For the Beauty of the Earth, 81-110.


\(^{44}\) Ellen Davis, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture, An Agrarian Reading of the Bible (New York:
Ellen Davis, a pioneer in this field, notes that agrarian reading “is not a distinct method but rather a perspective for exegesis; it is theoria – literally, a way of viewing our world and the texts’ representation of it.”\(^{45}\) This involves asking a question not typically included in biblical interpretation: “How do these texts view the relationship between humans (or Israelites in particular) and the material sources of life as an essential aspect of living in the presence of God?”\(^{46}\) Davis highlights four aspects of the agrarian mind-set that informs her interpretive work:

1. The primacy of land, particularly its health and limits;
2. Embrace of ignorance that acknowledges the limits of human knowledge;
3. Modest materialism that recognizes our lives are inexorably, if not entirely, grounded in material reality and dependent upon the material world;
4. Land valued beyond price, in the sense of a gift to be cared for.\(^{47}\)

Agrarian hermeneutics has much to offer. Contemporary agrarian thought and action is closer to the worldview of most biblical authors than the other interpretive streams. It also presents an ecological understanding of the world that resists the traps of modern interpretive dualism, honors the Bible’s complex and integrative rendering of the world, and roots biblical ethics in the God’s call to care for particular places in their entirety.\(^{48}\)

“Agrarian theoria looks forward to a potentially healing future; it is informed by modern science and also by traditional patterns of thought and value, even practices that have endured through centuries and millenia – if now only among a remnant – and may yet be adapted to meet present and future exigencies.”\(^{49}\)

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\(^{45}\) Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 3. For this reason, Davis argues that reading the work of contemporary agrarians can make us better readers of Scripture (p.22).

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Ibid, 28-41. Using Davis’ framework as a starting point, Daniel Stulac identifies three additional principles of agrarian hermeneutics: the importance of the creaturely body, the primacy of local places, and the necessity of proper action in relation to those places. Stulac, *History and Hope*, 8-21.


\(^{49}\) Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 4.
Criticism of agrarian interpretation falls along the same lines as criticism of agrarianism (both biblical and contemporary). Ecologically conscious critics often see the prioritization of agriculture as ignoring or undermining broader ecological issues by elevating human needs over everything else. 50 Others have pointed out that not every biblical text or author is agrarian, raising questions about imposing agrarian perspectives on the Bible. 51 And as a new hermeneutic, there is only a small body of work to assess, most of which focuses on the Old Testament. 52

Ecological pastors pursue biblical literacy alongside ecological literacy, which involves learning to “read Creation” by studying specific aspects of the world as well as the ways those aspects are incorporated into the ecological systems that make life possible. This knowledge builds the capacity to “observe nature with insight,” merging “landscape and mindscape.” 53 Ecological literacy naturally shapes and encourages ethical action. The ecologically literate person “has the knowledge necessary to comprehend interrelatedness, and an attitude of care or stewardship.” 54

To foster this literacy, ecological pastors cultivate a sense of awe and wonder by finding ways to celebrate “the sheer delight in being alive in a beautiful, mysterious,

52 The New Testament is less explicitly focused on land care, partially because of the expectation of Christ’s imminent return. It is deeply rooted in Old Testament creation theology, however, and agrarian themes and concerns can be discerned. For a provocative agrarian reading of Jesus’ promise of abundant life see Wendell Berry’s “The Burden of the Gospels” in The Way of Ignorance (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2005), 127-37.
54 Ibid., 92.
bountiful world” and to tap into their innate “biophilia” – the deep desire to affiliate with other forms of life. Biophilia is the natural disposition of children, but is often stamped out by modernity’s industrial and technological framework and the educational system that serves it. Biophilia can be strengthened through activities such as spending time outside, learning the names of regional biota, participating in conservation work, and being directly connected to food production.

The contemplative life described above is for everyone, but it is especially important for those in positions of leadership, where misperceptions and disordered desires can have far-reaching consequences. The converse is also true; leaders who discipline themselves to become contemplatives of creation discover that a new way in God is made possible, one that aligns the ‘outward’ details of any way of life – family and community, clothing and diet, art and architecture, craft and trade, agricultural and healing practices, guiding ritual and rites of passage – as well as the ‘inward’ details – godly qualities of psyche, character, and spirit nurtured by everyday disciplines that shape daily habits.

3.2.4 The Process of Transformation

As ecological pastors become contemplatives of creation through meditation, asceticism, and study, there are particular transformations that indicate the journey is moving in the right direction. This includes increasing capacity for love and grief, living in gratitude and joy, and developing ecological virtue and wisdom.

3.2.4.1 Increasing Capacity for Love and Grief

55 Ibid., 86.
56 Ibid., 131-132.
57 David Orr contrasts biophilia with biophobia. “Biophobia is “the culturally acquired urge to affiliate with technology, human artifacts, and solely with human interests regarding the natural world.” Ibid., 131.
58 Rasmussen. Earth-Honoring Faith, 249.
Cultivating a perceptual transformation by attuning the senses through meditative and ascetic practices enables contemplatives of creation to give and receive God’s love in an expansive manner. “Love, that most personal of all communal connections, is subject joined to subject in a common life. As such, love might pertain to anything and all things, a friend, a mountain, a plain, a forest, a village, city, county, or life itself and the starry night.”\(^\text{59}\) This kind of affection knows no limits and draws contemplative into the unending and all-encompassing love of God expressed in creation. Giving and receiving this love is not a zero-sum game; people do not have to choose between loving God, ourselves, other humans, or the non-human world; while each calls forth a different kind and quality of affection, they are all part of the same whole.

The giving and receiving of love gives contemplatives a deeper understanding of God and creation: “We do not wish to know so that we can dominate. We desire to know in order to participate. This kind of knowledge confers community, and can be termed communicative knowledge, as compared with dominating knowledge.”\(^\text{60}\) This deeply personal and loving knowledge is the foundation of good care. Aldo Leopold, often referred to as the father of the modern conservation movement, saw this play out in the different ways people treat the non-human world: “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.”\(^\text{61}\) This is also true in our care for other humans and ourselves. Wendell Berry gets at the heart of why

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\(^{60}\) Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 32.

this is so important: “The primary motive for good care and good use is always going to be affection, because affection involves us entirely.”

By involving people entirely, affection includes grief and enlarges contemplatives’ capacity to bear it. Leopold experienced this as he became aware of expanding habitat destruction and species loss: “One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.” In the 70 years since that observation, the loneliness of being ecologically aware has lessened, but the wounds have grown deeper. Grief helps contemplatives to see and enter these wounds, finding a place in one’s heart for the ecological, social, and personal suffering that touches every creature and landscape.

Allowing this mixture of love and grief is necessary for ecological pastors, who must “love the Earth fiercely in its distress” in order to “join God’s love for its renewal and redemption.” This means living and pastoring with an open heart; Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky identify the virtues of an open heart as innocence, curiosity, and compassion. In its inherent vulnerability, this is a risky way of living and leading:

Leading with an open heart means you could be at your lowest point, abandoned by your people and entirely powerless, yet remain receptive to the full range of human emotions without going numb, striking back, or engaging in some other defense. In one moment you may experience total despair, but in the next, compassion and forgiveness. You may even experience such vicissitudes in the same moment and hold those inconsistent feelings in tension with one another.

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Despite the risks, ecological pastors commit to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15). Leading with an open heart keeps pastoral ministry rooted in service to God, congregation, and the wider community of creation. Ecological pastors who lead with an open heart understand Wendell Berry’s contrast between an exploiter and a nurturer:

The competence of the exploiter is in organization; that of the nurturer is in order and to mystery. The exploiter typically serves an institution or organization; the nurturer serves land, household, community, place. The exploiter thinks in terms of numbers, quantities, “hard facts”; the nurturer in terms of character, condition, quality, kind.”

When ecological pastors expand their capacity to love, they become nurturers who perceive their lives and ministries within the larger realm of God’s love and purposes for creation. When this includes expanding their capacity for grief, they do so knowing “we do not grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thes 4:13).

3.2.4.2 Living in Gratitude and Joy

The more ecological pastors contemplate creation, the more they perceive and receive the world as a gift. Gratitude, in turn, sharpens perception. David Orr points out that to acknowledge a gift “is to acknowledge an obligation to the giver. And herein is the irony of gratitude. The illusion of independence is a kind of servitude while gratitude – the acknowledgement of interdependence – sets us free.”

Gratitude also enables contemplatives to perceive joy in creation. Richard Bauckham’s commentary on Psalm 104, a poem surely written by a contemplative of creation, captures the joy that permeates creaturely life:

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67 Orr, Hope is an Imperative, 44.
The life God gives and resources is no mere utilitarian survival, but has its goal in God’s creatures’ joy in life: the birds sing for joy (v 12), God’s provision for humans includes wine to gladden the heart and oil to make the face shine (v 15), while the great sea monster Leviathan was created by God to play in the ocean (v 26). There is a hint (v 31) that the creatures’ joy is a participation in God’s own joy, the pleasure he takes in all he has created.68

Similar to love, the gratitude and joy experienced in creation includes its wounds as well. The writer of Hebrews invites us to look to Jesus, “who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2). What can the joy set before him be except the knowledge that through his suffering creation would be made whole?

The presence and quality of gratitude in ecological pastors’ lives can be a helpful indicator of growth and maturity. One important practice that can foster this kind of deep gratitude is saying grace before meals. This can be a meditative and ascetic practice when done intentionally: “Because saying grace is an act of faithfulness before God, it is also a political and economic act. It has to be. We cannot express gratitude to God for the gifts of food if, in our production and consumption practices, we are degrading those gifts.”69

Cultivating joy can be more difficult for ecological pastors in light of increasing destruction to land, persistent social problems, and declining church participation. This makes joy all the more important because of its subversive power. “Joy is a product of abundance; it is the overflow of vitality.”70 The ecological pastor remains open to joy by

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perceiving the ways in which creation, despite its suffering and problems, remains good, abundant, and secure in the promise of eventual renewal.

3.2.4.3 Developing Ecological Virtue and Wisdom

A third sign of perceptual transformation comes in recognizing the ways that practices of meditation and asceticism create over time certain dispositions, desires, and attitudes that enable right and praiseworthy action – what contemplatives of creation call ecological virtues. These virtues, in turn, continue to refine perception. While there are many lists of virtues meant to foster ecological healing, all virtues are inherently ecological. Michael Northcott illustrates this as he draws out the ecological implications of traditional virtues:

> [T]he moral quest is fundamentally concerned with the recovery of relationality, to God, to other persons and to the land and all created things. This relationality finds expression in the pursuit of those moral practices which are known as the virtues: Love and justice, temperance and prudence, fidelity and courage, hope and peacableness. These virtues enable us to become more fulfilled as persons, to live in solidarity with one another and to live in harmony with the created order.”

David Orr adds that virtues are also inherently religious; traditionally, they “implied actions that were harmonious in a larger commonwealth. I think it is no accident that the root for religion and for ecology similarly imply relatedness.” Though all the virtues are worth cultivating, three in particular stand out as crucial for ecological pastors: ignorance, humility, and meekness.

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71 For example, Stephen Bouma-Prediger highlights the following: Respect and Receptivity, Self-Restraint and Frugality, Humility and Honesty, Wisdom and Hope, Patience and Serenity, Benevolence and Love, Justice and Courage. Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 131-154.


Though not considered one of the traditional virtues, ignorance is an essential starting point to counteract the devastating hubris that has led us into the Anthropocene. This is not willful ignorance that comes from moral or intellectual laziness, but recognition and acceptance of the inherent limits of human understanding: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor 13:12). Contemplatives of creation perceive creation as a whole, but recognize “we tread the edge of mystery, as we do when we think of God. It will not be surprising if, like Job, we often find ourselves both awestruck and baffled.”

Acknowledging this ignorance is the beginning of knowledge, a way of “acknowledging the uniqueness of every individual creature, deserving respect, and the uniqueness of every moment, deserving wonder.” It helps ecological pastors resist reducing theology to doctrine, preaching to platitudes, people to pawns, churches to corporations, and ministry to measurement. It provides a check on the tendency, inherent in all forms of leadership, to overestimate one’s ability to control the destiny of others and predict the outcomes of decisions. It also keeps leaders open to new possibilities, experiencing each moment with an understanding (even an expectation) that there is something new to learn.

The virtue of ignorance is closely related to the second important virtue for ecological pastors: humility. Rooted in *humus*, the Latin word for ground or soil, this disposition keeps ecological pastors’ feet firmly planted on the ground. Humility allows “an honest acknowledgement of who we are, or who we might become: beings close to the earth, of the earth, aware of our kinship with other living beings, capable of looking

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74 Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 147. See also God’s thunderous and thorough critique of Job’s ignorance in Job 38-41.
75 Berry, *The Way of Ignorance*, 67.
out onto the world from below.”\textsuperscript{76} Humility is not an invitation to self-loathing or self-abasement so much as a warning “not to think of yourself more highly than you ought” (Rom 12:3).

Humility is especially important in positions of leadership, and helps pastors heed the warning Bernard of Clairvaux gave to his pupil Pope Eugene: “No poison or sword ought to terrify you as much as the lust for domination.”\textsuperscript{77} Ecological pastors do not stand above the congregation or the wider ecological community as superior beings ruling over personal kingdoms. Additionally, pastors are not solitary leaders whose heroism and brilliance promises to save the day.\textsuperscript{78} Humility keeps pastors in the midst of their communities in the posture of servants who lead with ideals without falling into idealism, are conscious of the limits imposed by land and human nature, and shape the church into forms and patterns that conform to their place within the surrounding community of creation.

If humility is the virtue that prevents ecological pastors from wielding power and authority in a disconnected and reckless manner, the virtue of meekness enables them to exercise power and authority properly. The third beatitude declares, “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth” (Mt 5:5). In this declaration, Jesus elevates meekness to a required virtue for those who will rule with him in the new creation. This meekness is not weakness or passivity; Eugene Boring notes that in Matthew, meekness is a key

\textsuperscript{76} Christie, \textit{The Blue Sapphire of the Mind}, 61.
\textsuperscript{78} For the dangers of solitary leadership see Ronald Heifetz, \textit{Leadership Without Easy Answers} (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994), 251. Heifetz recommends that all leaders need at least two types of partners: confidants and allies (Ibid., 268). One of my seminary professors, Dr. John Weborg, often told his students, “Isolation is the root of all heresy.”
word that “characterizes the reversal of this-worldly ideas of kingship.” Meekness is the exercise of power that is gentle rather than coercive, restrained rather than unbridled, focused on the building of others rather than oneself. Jonathan Wilson defines meekness as “the disposition of one who has power and who could act on the basis of that power but restrains or directs that power in such a way that the act of power is properly proportioned to the circumstance and the proper telos.” Simply put, meekness is power under control and in service to God’s new creation. For ecological pastors, meekness is a reminder of the ecological nature of power; we cannot touch one thing in creation without touching everything else. Meekness reminds pastors that power and authority come from God and must be exercised in a godly way and in service to God’s purposes.

One of the results that comes from developing these virtues is the gradual accumulation of wisdom, which comes from integrating “knowledge, understanding, critical questioning and good judgement” and is oriented toward “the flourishing of human life and the whole of creation.” Wisdom comes through the combination of right perception and right action, and requires a “multidimensional intelligence that includes tutored moral emotions and cultivated religious sensibilities.” Wisdom is perceiving God in creation and creation in God, and acting on that perception in ways that further God’s purposes for creation. Wisdom is particularly important for ecological pastors; in an extended poem in which wisdom is personified, the writer of Proverbs notes that by

wisdom “kings reign and rulers issue decrees that are just; by me princes govern, and nobles – all who rule on earth” (8:15-16).83

3.3. Watershed Discipleship

Allowing God to transform their perceptions and purify their actions prepares ecological pastors to follow Jesus in a new way as watershed disciples. The emerging paradigm of Watershed Discipleship is rooted in the philosophy of bioregionalism, which advocates for understanding the world through naturally defined areas called bioregions. Advocates of bioregionalism argue that the specific topographical boundaries, climate, and biota of particular regions should guide and inform human economic, cultural, political, and spiritual life.84 For ecological pastors, bringing the perspectives of bioregionalism to following Jesus “may teach us to rehabit our own places, to honor memberships to which we belong, and in so doing, to recover a long-neglected matter for our life of faith.”85

Watershed Discipleship orients bioregional faith around the particular watersheds in which Christians live. A watershed is the area through which water drains from the high points of a region to its end in a pond, stream, lake, or ocean. Aligning discipleship with a particular watershed enables ecological pastors to reframe their sense of place within a naturally bounded ecosystem and to reimagine the specific forms of discipleship that could foster comprehensive flourishing within that watershed.86

83 See also Prov. 16:10-15.
84 See Kirkpatrick Sale, Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985). This is in contrast to the modern practice of defining land through political borders that frequently ignore natural topography.
86 Watershed maps within the United States can be found at https://water.usgs.gov/wsc/map_index.html.
Watershed Discipleship is an emerging paradigm; its fullest articulation comes from Ched Meyers, who coined the phrase as an intentional triple entendre:

1. It recognizes that we are in a *watershed historical moment of crisis*, which demands that environmental and social justice and sustainability be integral to everything we do as Christians and citizen inhabitants of specific places;
2. It acknowledges the bioregional locus of an incarnational following of Jesus: our individual discipleship and the life and witness of the local church take place inescapably in a *watershed context*;
3. And it implies that we need to be *disciples of our watersheds*.

Proponents of Watershed Discipleship include food systems and food justice as a central part of the paradigm, but this could be strengthened by integrating specifically agrarian perspectives and concerns. One way this could happen is by integrating foodsheds – geographic regions that produce food for a particular population – more intentionally. This could also provide initial connections for ecological pastors who are unfamiliar with how ecosystems work but know how to eat.

Adopting a Bioregionalist approach oriented around watersheds and foodsheds requires ecological pastors to know the various plants, animals (including human), geological features, and agricultural practices of a particular region and how they function within the larger ecosystem and social structure. This is necessary to help them visualize and actualize what it means to live, in the words of Wes Jackson, “native to our place” as wise members of the biotic community. This means ecological pastors must spend time getting to know their place; they cannot hide behind church walls or a

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89 Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place* (Lexington, KY: Kentucky University Press, 1994).
specialized understanding of ministry. They must heed Wendell Berry’s advice that “professional people of all sorts will have to feel the emotions and take the risks of amateurism. They will have to get out of their “fields,” so to speak, and into the watershed, the ecosystem, and the community; and they will have to be actuated by affection.”90 It is this more comprehensive knowledge of place that enables the imaginative work of orienting discipleship around a particular watershed and foodshed. As an emerging paradigm, Watershed Discipleship lacks a developed ecclesiology; here ecological pastors can help as they put it into practice.91

3.4 The Ecological Pastor as Integrated Person

More than any particular practice, disposition, achievement, skill, or virtue, “the most crucial prerequisite for church leadership is the pastor’s holiness and life in Christ.”92 The monks who walked the contemplative path believed that a life of contemplation could foster such holiness through a deepened consciousness of God and creation, and would bring healing to their inner lives. The pioneers behind Watershed Discipleship believe following Jesus in a topographical framework can bring this healing to the wider world. The intentional practices of meditation, asceticism, study, and Watershed Discipleship can unite the inner realities of mind, heart, and soul with the outer realities of body, family, church, community, and land. They can also provide the

91 For a list of 7 Watershed Discipleship communities “percolating around North America” see Myers, Watershed Discipleship, 213.
foundation for ecological pastors: “Leadership begins with the practice of integrated living.”

From this place of personal integration, ecological pastors can “learn to live in the world as a healing presence, attentive and responsive to the lives of other beings and capable of helping to reknit the torn fabric of existence.” This contemplative life of discipleship is not meant to be a solitary experience; its end goal is not just personal holiness. “To contemplate is to see, and to minister is to make visible; the contemplative life is a life with a vision, and the life of caring for others is a life revealing the vision to others.” As contemplatives of creation and watershed disciples, ecological pastors are call their congregations to join them on the journey of transformation so they, too, can see creation transfigured and join God in the work of new creation.

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Chapter one highlighted the need for a new paradigm of pastoral ministry to help bring about the changes needed for churches to be faithful and fruitful as we enter the Anthropocene. Having then defined and described this paradigm in chapter two, and discussed how pastors are formed in it in chapter three, we now explore what the ministry of ecological pastors looks like in practice as they change congregational culture.

Larry Rasmussen defines a community’s culture as “what we do with nature to organize it for our own purposes and bend it to the way we live,” and notes that culture is undergirded by “first works,” the fundamental perceptual frameworks and modes of action that drive personal and corporate habits, often unconsciously: “They show up in our modes of production and reproduction; our cultural sensibilities; and our basic aesthetic, intellectual, and moral values. They furnish the content of our symbols and consciousness. They comprise, at day’s end, nothing less than our way of life.” To those within a particular culture, these frameworks and modes of action are so ingrained they are rarely examined or questioned; they are ‘second-nature.’

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3 Ibid.
4.1 – Cultivating Cultural Change

Rasmussen agrees that we need radical cultural change, and frames his argument around James Baldwin’s observation that sometimes we need to “do our first works over.” Ecological pastors understand that current church culture is the opposite of normative and natural, and that most churches need to “do their first works over.” This entails facilitating the fundamental shifts that we have already explored, restated here in terms of how congregations answer the four core cultural questions.

Congregations typically answer the first question – What is the world? – by using the language of creation but limiting the definition to the original act described by Genesis 1 and 2 or to only the non-human elements of the physical world. This makes it possible to reduce the world to raw materials for human consumption, and to render creation irrelevant to faith. The necessary shift is to perceiving creation wholly as an interconnected, interdependent manifestation of God’s love and central to God’s work of salvation. Congregations typically answer the second question – What is our place in the world? – by setting humanity apart from the rest of creation as uniquely privileged creatures. The necessary shift here is to seeing humanity primarily as part of creation with uniquely responsibilities. Congregations typically answer the third question – What is our role in the world? – with the language of lords and masters (often tempered by the language of stewardship) who have the right (even the calling) to bend the world to human needs and desires. The necessary shift is to accepting the call to be servants of the earth who live graciously within the world’s God-given limits. Finally, congregations typically answer the fourth question – Where is the world going? – with the language and

4 Ibid., 44.
imagery of an earthless heaven. The necessary shift with this final question is to envision the future through the biblical imagery of a heavenly earth.

In order to lead churches through such foundational shifts and transitions, ecological pastors must understand the dynamics of cultural change, exercise adaptive leadership, and reframe congregational focal practices.

4.1.1 – The Challenge of Cultural Change

A paradox of cultural change is that as awareness of the need for change grows, so does resistance. Ronald Heifetz identifies three reasons people resist difficult transitions they know they need to make. The first reason is that people misperceive the nature of the threat. For example, most Western churches have members who see no connection between their faith and creation, and therefore downplay the scale and scope of environmental damage, or even question whether there is any damage at all.

The second source of resistance comes when people perceive the threat, but the changes that are needed exceed the culture’s current adaptive capabilities. This is where increasing numbers of Western Christians find themselves as they slowly recognize the significance of our ecological crisis. Larry Rasmussen identifies three levels of change communities go through as they try to respond to this crisis. First, they look for solutions within the established way of life. Heifetz refers to these as technical solutions, which apply already existing knowledge and experience to problems through established organizational procedures by recognized authoritative practitioners. This would include

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6 An American denominational official illustrated this to me in comparing his experience talking with climate change denying American Christians to his time in Africa, where Christians do not have time to debate climate change because they are too busy trying to adapt to it.

7 Rasmussen, Earth-Honoring Faith, 115ff.

8 Heifetz, Leadership Without Easy Answers, 73-76.
actions such as adapting technology to harness renewable energy, eating more locally, and expanding recycling practices. For churches, this often means adding stewardship of the earth to existing theological frameworks and ministry structures. Though these steps constitute genuine change, Rasmussen argues that they can actually become counterproductive, ultimately propping up an unsustainable way of life for a few more years and delaying the necessary cultural reckoning, which only comes at the next level of change.⁹

The second level of change is grounded in the epiphany that a wholesale paradigm shift is needed. On this level, there are still options, but it becomes clear that maintaining the status quo is not one of them. This requires abandoning what has worked in the past, as well as the underlying value systems. Individuals and communities recognize the limits of technical solutions and begin to do adaptive work, which acknowledges the gap between existing values and knowledge and what is needed to address the reality that they face. For society at large, this requires shedding the industrial-technological paradigm that has shaped the modern world, as well as the marriage of democracy and capitalism. For churches, this means abandoning overly anthropocentric, dualistic theologies and ministries that push creation to the background. This is a difficult level of change to navigate because it is “a world in decline, even collapse. Or at least it seems so until jarring recognition moves to a third level and kind of change.”¹⁰

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⁹ For example, even if we switched to 100% renewable energy, we would still need to address the destructive ways we use energy. Rasmussen also points to a study that found an increase in energy efficiency actually increases energy consumption. Ibid., 116.

Rasmussen’s third level of change entails a shift in consciousness and cosmology that allows systemic change to happen and guides the process. Here perceptions begin to take new form, and a new world emerges, as well as new possibilities for life. Drawing on biblical language, Rasmussen describes the fruit of this change as “transformed values and cultures, a new wisdom; new songs in a strange land, if you will, and different wineskins – or different cornerstones and new architecture.”

In this level of change, new ways of inhabiting the planet appear that inform new ways to be Christian and new definitions of what it means to gather God’s people into community.

The increasing difficulty of these changes is behind Heifetz’s third reason for resistance - the changes required and the resulting distress prove too much to bear. Resisting the pain, anxiety, and conflict that true change requires results in significant dysfunction that manifests in behaviors such as holding on to past assumptions, blaming authority, scapegoating, externalizing the enemy, denying the problem, jumping to conclusions, or finding a distracting issue.

For Heifetz, understanding the tendency of individuals, communities, and cultures to avoid pain and distress is crucial to leading through transition. In the face of such inevitable resistance, how can ecological pastors lead congregations toward Rasmussen’s third level of change and facilitate a transformation in consciousness?

4.2 – The Practice of Adaptive Leadership

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11 Ibid.
12 For this reason, the most loving and faithful response for congregations mired in decline or conflict might be to close and use their resources to plant new churches that have an eco-agrarian perspective in their core identity.
Arthur Boers notes that leadership “is a primary quality people expect of pastors, even if no one is precisely sure what leadership actually is.”\textsuperscript{13} Adaptive Leadership offers ecological pastors a framework to exercise leadership that is intentionally geared toward leading communities through the adaptive work necessary to make significant cultural change. Pioneered by Ronald Heifetz and Marvin Lansky, Adaptive Leadership helps leaders understand what is happening when a community is faced with change, and what is required to help that community confront those changes in ways that lead to positive transformation.\textsuperscript{14} The process of change is not typically linear; communities move forward and backward, and individuals within those communities go through change at different speeds and with different levels of resistance. That said, there are three key stages to change, each of which require leaders to play a specific role and take specific actions. These stages align well with the three key leadership roles we have been exploring: prophet, priest, and servant ruler.

### 4.2.1 Confronting Reality and Describing the Alternative

The first task of a leader when facing change is to tell the truth – this requires prophetic leadership. Telling the truth entails persistently directing the community’s attention to its problems, what Jim Collins calls “confronting the brutal facts.” Collins encourages leaders to prepare for this before a crisis arises by creating a culture of truth-telling through four practices: (1) leading with questions, not answers, which begins the process of helping communities accept responsibility and learn together, (2) engaging in

\textsuperscript{13} Arthur Boers, \textit{Servants and Fools: A Biblical Theology of Leadership} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 3. This is true in the wider culture as well; one leadership scholar has counted 1500 definitions. See Barbara Kellerman, \textit{The End of Leadership} (New York: Harper, 2012), xxi.

dialogue and debate, not coercion, (3) examining the past without blame, which allows communities to understand what has gone wrong, and (4) building “red flag” mechanisms, internal processes that allow everything to stop in order to address crucial new information.\textsuperscript{15} Telling the truth undergirds the whole process of change, and is often difficult to sustain; “Reality testing – the effort to grasp the problem fully – is often an early victim of disequilibrium.”\textsuperscript{16}

Confronting reality is accompanied by describing alternatives. Leaders who encourage their people to look at the dark and difficult aspects of their lives must be able to help them envision a different future. People will not submit themselves to painful changes if they do not know what the new possibilities are. They also will resist taking the necessary steps to pursue those possibilities unless someone begins to lay a path for them. This leads us to the second stage.

4.2.2 Entering the Wilderness

Adaptive leaders who empower their people to confront reality and invite them to pursue an alternative must begin to help them leave the old ways behind – this is priestly work. In this stage, leaders continue to articulate the reasons why the community must change, but they also take specific steps to crystallize the change, making it official in ways that communicate that there will be no going back. This is delicate work, requiring a high level of individual and communal care. The leader must help the community lament its losses – the ideas, practices, and attachments that have made the world sensible

\textsuperscript{15} Jim Collins, \textit{Good to Great}. (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 65-87. These mechanisms can be as simple as giving each person in a meeting one opportunity to bring the meeting to a complete halt in order to address something important that is being missed.

\textsuperscript{16} Heifetz, \textit{Leadership Without Easy Answers}, 38.
and meaningful. Grief is to be expected, and even welcomed as a necessary step to make room for the new.

An important leadership strategy in this stage is to “manage the holding environment,” which requires keeping the community in a helpful state of tension by not turning back or rushing forward. 17 Adaptive change requires sustained disequilibrium: “Like living systems, social systems under threat try to restore equilibrium.” 18 Heifetz offers four strategies for this stage. 19 First, leaders set the right pace for the work. If it is too slow, people get distracted and impatient. If it is too fast, people get overwhelmed and resistant. Second, leaders choose a constructive decision making process. Adaptive situations typically require a participative approach, and key stakeholders need to be involved. Third, leaders orchestrate conflicting perspectives, controlling the temperature of disagreements. This is also a delicate yet important task. “The exposure and orchestration of conflict – internal contradictions – within individuals and constituencies provide the leverage for mobilizing people to learn new ways.” 20 Fourth, leaders protect those asking hard questions or challenging the status quo through “creative deviance,” 21 particularly those without formal authority. Creating such an environment allows the tension and pain to be directed toward moving the community forward, which leads to the third stage.

4.2.3 Cultivating A New Way of Life

17 Heifetz, Leadership Without Easy Answers, 104ff. To understand the individual and interpersonal dynamics that accompany this stage of change see William Bridges, Transitions: Making Sense of Life’s Changes (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004).
18 Ibid., 35.
19 Ibid., 101-124.
20 Ibid., 22.
21 Ibid., 183-206.
At some point in the wilderness, leaders begin to focus more energy on forming a new way of life for the community – this is servant ruler work. At this stage, many people will continue to expect their leaders to discover and implement these changes for them. The adaptive leader resists this expectation, knowing that it actually stunts cultural change. Instead, the leader continues to include the community in the process, helping them to reexamine their ‘focal practices’, the “ways of being, living, and behaving that express the vision of the good of a community or a group of practitioners of a particular discipline or profession.”22 Often this means intentionally looking to the margins: “The leadership to meet adaptive challenges often comes from the foot of the table. It arises with dissenters and entrepreneurs who have known for a long while that the prevailing arrangements have not served well.”23

As new ways of living emerge, adaptive leaders participate with the community in the change, leading by example and immersing everything in hope. In this tenuous time of experimentation, leaders also frame every failure as a learning moment and make sure to celebrate every success as a sign that a new and better way is coming together in their midst.

4.2.4 Learning on the Way

Adaptive leadership is a philosophy and process before a technique; it requires different strategies and styles depending on the situation. For this reason, adaptive leaders are what Donald Schon calls “reflective practitioners,” constantly in a cycle of lead – reflect – learn – repeat. The reflective practitioner

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allows himself [sic] to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomena before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomena and a change in the situation. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique...his inquiry is not limited to a deliberation about means which depends on a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate...he does not separate thinking from doing.\textsuperscript{24}

Reflective practitioners go through this process inwardly as they reflect on their place as people and leaders within the community, and outwardly as they reflect on the community as it grows and changes. This requires leading with humility and openness, allowing oneself to be changed by circumstance and new revelations.

4.2.5 Adapting Focal Practices

We noted above that focal practices are the core activities that order and sustain a community’s way of life. In religious communities, focal practices “embody dramatic distillations of the grand story, the foundation narrative, of a faith.” As they are repeated individually and communally, they “speak to something deep in human nature, and they bear moral substance whether it is named or not. They take place in the present, but they bespeak a world longed for, a world in the making: the world of “might be,” Nirvana, Eden, Paradise, the “beloved community.”\textsuperscript{25} Duane Friesen identifies four areas of focal practices for Christians:\textsuperscript{26}

1. Rituals – Baptism, Lord’s Supper, Sabbath, Prayer, Singing, Offering
2. Processes – Discernment, Reconciliation, Recognition of gifts
3. Pastoral Care – How church cares for each other (not limited to clergy)
4. Service to the Wider Community – Addressing the needs of the world


\textsuperscript{26} Duane K. Friesen, \textit{Artists, Citizens, Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City: An Anabaptist Theology of Culture} (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2000), 141-166.
To this we add a fifth area – Corporate Study. Using the framework of Watershed Discipleship, ecological pastors begin to adapt these practices to facilitate cultural change.

4.2.5.1 Rituals – Crafting Creation-centric Worship

The ritual life of the church is centered on communal worship, and it is here, “in the identity-forming matrix of the church’s liturgical and spiritual practices,”27 that ecological pastors craft creation-centric worship. This begins by centering weekly worship in the practice of Sabbath, which is “a projection, not of ourselves, but of creation and creation’s God. Keeping the Sabbath holy is a weekly, Earth-honoring practice that joins a mystery surpassing us and a purpose outstripping us.”28 Worship that flows from this understanding of Sabbath is essentially “the ritual enactment or reenactment of cosmic community and the drama of creation’s redemption.”29

Ecological pastors craft liturgy that tells this drama again and again by bringing together word and sacrament in creative ways that “call us to the surprise of a reoriented cosmos. If we lay down our heads on them, even a little, they will be Bethel-stones for us, full of the presence of the triune God and enabling a new view of the world.”30 This entails incorporating Scripture in ways that highlight the centrality of creation, paying particular attention to preaching, which offers pastors a weekly opportunity to define, describe, and bring to life the Bible’s rendering of the world. Special attention is also be

29 Ibid., 263.
given to celebrating the sacraments in ways that deepen sacramental perception of the world and encourage sacramental living. In addition to preaching and celebrating the sacraments, songs and prayers are formative elements of worship, and must also be considered when crafting creation-centered worship.

4.2.5.2 Processes – Attending to the Church as Organism

As an organized community, a local church can function like a family, a non-profit agency, or a business; many times it functions as a combination of all three. Ecological pastors understand this complexity by perceiving the organic nature of community. Howard Snyder and Joel Scandrett argue that this perception is rooted in the nature of God and creation:

The Trinity, and the very nature of the material creation God has made, show us that we should conceive of the church and its ministry in organic, relational terms, not primarily in institutional or hierarchical ones. The church is not so much a rational organization or religious machine as it is a complex organism.31

It also aligns with the organic imagery of 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; when individual Christians come together they create a whole, just as parts of the body join together to create a person.32 Perceiving the church this way allows pastors to see the congregation as a whole and assess its health based on the connections between the various individuals and groups that make up a congregation, and the ways energy flows (or is blocked) through those connections.

32 See also Romans 11:11-24, which describes the relationship between Gentile believers and Israel in the organic imagery of dough and grafting branches onto fruit trees.
Attending to the church as an organism also encourages flexibility and openness with church leadership, allowing as much as possible the strengths and energies of leaders to determine direction.

In this relational world, it is foolish to think we can define any person solely in terms of isolated tasks and accountabilities. We need to be able to conceptualize the pattern of energy flows required for that person to do the job. We need to see any person’s role as the place where energies meet to make something happen.33

Understanding the church as an organism also shapes the way discernment happens. Since the church is not only an organic whole but also part of a larger organic whole, ecological pastors encourage personal and corporate discernment and decision making with the whole in mind, adopting and adapting the wisdom of Aldo Leopold: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”34 Ecological pastors help individuals, particular ministries, or the church as a whole make decisions based on the following questions:

1. How do our actions harm the community? What needs to stop?
2. How do our actions preserve the health of the community? What needs to continue?
3. How can our actions restore the community? What needs to change?
4. How can our actions enhance the community?35 What do we need to learn?

4.2.5.3 Pastoral Care – Curing Creaturely Souls

35 Richard Bauckham, defines enhancement as “what humans do when they modify nature in ways that are not destructive but productive.” The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 35.
Ecological pastors adapt what Gregory of Nazianzus called “the cure of souls” by caring for people as fully embodied creatures. This entails diagnosing the ways in which an individual’s internal integrity – the health and unity of body, mind, and spirit – and external relationships – with God, humans, and the land – have been fractured or distorted. While this involves exploring the psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life through the traditional practices of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, it also makes room for the physical dimensions of life. Ecological pastors include bodily health, connection to the non-human world, and even the role that a person’s built environment plays in their well-being.

This comprehensive care is always shaped for particular people in particular places. For this work, ecological pastors are both caregivers and trainers, inviting those with gifts of healing to share in particular ministries of care. It is also a corporate practice; all church life and ministry is meant to be a means of such care. Caring for creaturely souls is ultimately about guiding people in “the art of creaturely life,” which entails helping them to be “attuned to God as Creator and the world as God’s creation,” and to live “a life inspired and directed by the true and complete human creature Jesus Christ.”

4.2.5.4 Service to the Wider Community – Leading Creational Mission

Ecological pastors understand the aspects of traditional church outreach - evangelism, hospitality, works of mercy and justice – as interconnected parts of a wholistic mission that partners with God in the renewal of creation. This extends the traditional scope of mission beyond humanity, calling the church “to be the hospitable

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presence that heals, nurtures, liberates and celebrates all creatures into the life that God desires for them.”  

This mission is inherently economical, not in the narrow framework of human financial systems but in a broader eco-agrarian one that draws on the biblical language of “household management” (oikonomia) to describe the Church’s role in declaring and furthering God’s work of salvation.\(^{38}\) Wendell Berry helps bring this idea into practical focus:

> You cannot know that life is holy if you are content to live from economic practices that daily destroy life and diminish its possibility...if we are to maintain any sense or coherence or meaning in our lives, we cannot tolerate the present utter disconnection between religion and economy. By “economy” I do not mean “economics,” which is the study of money-making, but rather the ways of human house-keeping, the ways by which the human household is situated and maintained within the household of nature.\(^{39}\)

Economist Kate Raworth refers to this as the “Embedded Economy,” and argues that we need to replace the neo-liberal myth of the self-contained, self-sustaining market with the more comprehensive model of “provisioning by the household, market, commons and state – all embedded within and dependent upon society, which in turn is embedded within the living world.”\(^{40}\)

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Ecological pastors embrace Raworth’s declaration – “We are all economists now”\textsuperscript{41} – by seeking to understand the ways the church’s mission is embedded within the economy of creation. This includes finding creative ways to “provide prophetic alternatives to individualized, consumer, globalized, ‘growth’ economies which are destroying the earth,”\textsuperscript{42} assisting the transition from an economy of consumption to an “economy of communion.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{4.2.5.5 Corporate Study – Increasing Biblical and Ecological Literacy}

Ecological pastors begin the process of reform by teaching their congregations to read and interpret the Bible alongside the ‘Book of Creation.’ This involves intentional instruction on how to read Scripture from an eco-agrarian framework integrated with learning opportunities that increase congregants’ knowledge of ecology in general and their watershed in particular. “In so many ways local congregations are ideally situated to become centers of learning to know and love our places enough to defend and restore them.”\textsuperscript{44} Unfortunately, most congregational education programs are not set up to support such a vision. Ecological pastors can lead change by adapting David Orr’s suggestions for educational reform to their congregational context:\textsuperscript{45}

1. All education is environmental education.
2. Environmental issues are complex and cannot be understood through a single discipline or department.
3. Education occurs in part as a dialogue with a place and has the characteristics of good conversation.
4. The way education occurs is as important as its content.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 243-49.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Edward P. Echlin, \textit{Climate and Christ: A Prophetic Alternative} (Dublin: Columbia Press, 2010), p.87.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Jonathan Wilson, \textit{God’s Good World} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 209.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ched Meyers, \textit{Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice} (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 210.
\end{itemize}
5. Experience in the natural world is both an essential part of understanding the environment, and conducive to good thinking.

6. Education relevant to the challenge of building a sustainable society will enhance the learner’s competence with natural systems.

The ideal pedagogical approach will be as inter-disciplinary as possible, seeking to bring areas as apparently diverse as theology, ecology, spirituality, sociology, and ethics together in ways that support whole-person learning. It will also be intergenerational, incorporating all ages and bringing them together as much as possible. More than putting together classes or experiences, the ecological pastor creates a culture of learning in which the congregation adopts an open and humble attitude, recognizing that there is much unlearning to do.

To enter into the knowledge of their own creatureliness, people must live and work in the dark, that is, with an honest appreciation of their ignorance and impotence. They must learn to calm the ravenous and rapacious intellect that wants, through its knowing, to comprehend and control the world.

4.3 First Fruits – Key Practices to Begin the Journey

Adopting the philosophy of Adaptive Leadership and adapting the church’s focal practices creates the conditions for cultural change within the congregation. What this change looks like will vary from church to church, but there are key practices that will help ecological pastors as they lead their people on the journey. While the actual process will not be linear, it helps to look at these practices in each of the three stages of adaptive change.

4.3.1 Key Practices in Confronting Reality and Describing the Alternative

The key ritual practice in this stage is prophetic preaching. This deserves some extended attention, for preaching is unique in its power to move a congregation “to a new

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46 Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 106.
location, a new world, a new politics through the inculcation of language that enables us to name a new citizenship. All worlds begin with words.”47 Ecological pastors steward this power by bringing multiple voices to the pulpit.

The primary voice is the Bible’s, with particular attention placed on how particular texts fit within the movement of creation to new creation. While a diligent preacher will be able to connect most texts to this metanarrative, there are specific texts that can be helpful starting points for congregants to see Scripture’s ecological perspective more clearly and make connections to modern life more directly. Preachers might start with the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2, with particular attention on the connection between the image of God and the human vocation to care for the earth. Noah offers a great ecological case study, as do the prophets in their critiques of Israel’s way of life and their visions of shalom. Job’s encounter with God offers a particularly compelling example of perceptual change in light of humanity’s place in creation,48 and the poetry of Psalms can help form sacramental imagination. Careful and creative preaching on the gospels can help congregants place Jesus within the framework of creation and new creation, and exposition of Revelation’s climactic conclusion can reshape their understanding of the future.49 As preachers work through these texts, they

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49 For a guide to preaching apocalyptic texts from an eco-theological perspective, see Barbara R. Rossing, “The World Is about to Turn” in *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril*, Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin Schramm, eds. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 140-159.
will want to allow the voice of the earth to speak, helping the congregation attune their ears to the praise, lament, and groans of the non-human world as part of their reorientation.

Preachers will also want to bring in other human voices to challenge the congregation’s perceptions, prick their conscience, and inspire them to act. Theologians, mystics, and prophets who have an ecological perspective can be found in almost every tradition. There is also the growing chorus of scientists who offer regular revelations of the crisis unfolding across the planet, as well as activists who are sounding the alarm and advocating specific change.

The most important human voice, however, is the preacher’s, for that is a central way that the Word begins to become flesh in particular congregations. Ecological pastors need to be very mindful of their words, particularly the words and phrases that reinforce a modern framework of faith. For example, Wendell Berry notes the challenge of dualistic speech:

I would like to purge my own mind and language of such terms as “spiritual,” “physical,” “metaphysical,” and “transcendental” – all of which imply that the Creation is divided into “levels” that can readily be peeled apart and judged by human beings.51

Care for language also includes taking creative risks. Crystal Downing argues that the language (signs) we use often generates change, and that theological signs have been changed frequently through the centuries. For Downing, (re)signing Christian faith is


about articulating ancient, essential truths in a new way.\textsuperscript{52} This is done by staying rooted in the tradition without idealizing the past as a time of purity and perfection, or the future as a time of perfect change and progress (Downing calls this “mystification”). Ecological pastors are “resigned to essential truths revealed by God,” but as preachers they “recognize the need to re-sign those truths, generating fresh signs that make ancient truths meaningful to contemporary audiences.”\textsuperscript{53} This could mean, for instance, (re)signing creation as a “Web of Being” that is fractured by human sin, healed by Christ, and perfected in the age to come. Ecological pastors can expect such new language to be met with resistance; “(re)signing truth is not for the faint of heart.”\textsuperscript{54}

Taking prophetic risks with language also involves bringing the text into creative conversation with current reality. For example, imagine a sermon that offers an ecological reading of the Good Samaritan. The prodigals are those steeped in modern, Western culture who have left the father’s house (Eden/Earth) and spent their future inheritance in years in riotous living. The older brothers are the cultures that have maintained a proper way of life within the father’s house. Will the prodigals return to the Father’s house? If so, what will repentance look like? Who are the future heirs of the earth? Will the brothers/cultures be reconciled?

Prophetic preaching must be rooted in love for the congregation; success or failure hinges on congregations trusting that their pastors care for them and have their best interests at heart. Ecological pastors preach to their congregations as fellow disciples

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 61.
on the journey, making sure to include their own struggles to change perception and action.

A key prophetic practice in attending to the church as an organism is amplifying marginal voices. Who are the people in the congregation who already have an ecological approach to life and faith? The first group to focus on is children and youth, who know no other world than one in peril, and whose future is at stake in decisions that are made now. Another marginal group is the poor, who often bear the worst consequences of unsustainable consumption and environmental abuse. Most congregations also have their share of mystics and misfits who intuitively connect with a non-dual, creation-centric perspective but may keep this to themselves for fear of ostracism. Ecological pastors can amplify their voices by quoting them in sermons, including their testimonies in worship, inviting them to speak to church leaders, and letting them shape church events and ministries.

When it comes to pastoral care in this stage of change, a key practice for ecological pastors is to unveil the local food system so people can see the numerous ways food is connected to the well-being of people, creatures, and land. In individual pastoral care situations, this could mean sensitively exploring the role of food in a person’s life. On a corporate level, pastors can encourage the church’s care and hospitality ministries to learn about the industrial food system and study their local foodshed, with the goal of imagining how the church might connect to its foodshed in more direct and healthier ways.55

55 One way to do this is through visiting a local farm committed to sustainable agriculture. Farmers who oversee such farms are typically eager to talk about what they do and why with community members. A particularly public example of this is Joel Salatin of Polyface Farms; see www.polyfacefarms.com.
A key missional practice in this stage is organizing vision trips that get people out in the local watershed to see the ways in which it has been ecologically compromised. Seeing a polluted river, shopping at a convenience store in a food desert, or simply walking in the local neighborhood noting who and what is there (and isn’t there) can accelerate the process of transformation. Ecological pastors can follow David Orr’s example to help participants make ecological connections: “Show me the hamburger stands, neon ticky-tacky strips leading toward every city in America, and the shopping malls, and I’ll show you devastated rain forests, a decaying countryside, a politically dependent population, and toxic waste dumps. It is all of a fabric.” Though these are not the typical “feel-good” mission trips, confronting reality in this way can “serve as a starting point for a larger ethical and spiritual project of renewal and healing.” Such vision trips should also include places where Christians (and others) are bringing healing to both land and people to instill hope and inspire congregants to reimagine their own life and community.

In addition to these vision trips, ecological pastors can organize educational classes and smaller study groups focused on understanding the ways the Bible has been misinterpreted and learning how to read from an eco-agrarian perspective. This can be combined with reading books that explore the consequences of disconnection from the non-human world and offer suggestions for reconnection.

4.3.2 Key Practices in Entering the Wilderness

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58 This could include books by contemporary ecologists and agrarians, or more popular-focused works such as Richard Louv’s *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2005).
As the congregation begins to shed its modern framework, there are key priestly practices ecological pastors can focus on that allow for grief and hold the tension and conflicts of the community while it is in transition. A key ritual practice is lament, which helps people work through the reality of change by specifically naming what has been lost. This includes the loss of species, biodiversity, and beauty, but also the loss of a coherent world held together by the modern narrative of individual freedom, human progress, and faith in technology, and the loss of a coherent church as theological and institutional systems are reimagined.

Lament guards against the modern tendency to rush to solutions. “In the local parish we need to develop worship, liturgies and educational media which enable people both to live and thrive in the midst of ecological ambiguity and at the same time to develop a spirituality and mentality of fruitful resistance.”\textsuperscript{59} Patience in the face of loss readies people for real solutions. “A slow church begins with lament, or repentance, and then identifies practices that will help its community think and act ecologically.”\textsuperscript{60} Lament is the first step toward repentance. “A ministry with no penitential element is drastically incomplete, and indeed it is positively cruel, because it leaves people in their most debilitating habits and conditions.”\textsuperscript{61} Franciscan theologian Keith Warner calls this “eco-penance,” which “promotes consistency between the statement of values we make about Creation and our behavior towards it . . . It includes a sense of personal responsibility for the environmental impact of our lifestyle, and that of our society, and will lead to efforts to

\textsuperscript{60} C. Christopher Smith and John Pattison, \textit{Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 115.
\textsuperscript{61} Christopher A. Beeley, \textit{Leading God’s People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 71.
reduce the harmful effects that we have on other forms of life.” Ecological pastors will want to incorporate periodic times of lament in weekly worship, as well as seasonal or yearly services of lament that focus on the cumulative and connected losses experienced by the congregation.

In addition to the public practice of lament, ecological pastors will want to invest heavily in church leaders during this stage. Solidifying congregational change only happens when key leaders (formal and informal) support what is happening. This involves spending time with individual leaders to answer questions and encourage them in their leadership, as well as beginning to help leaders imagine new possibilities for the church. This might include drafting new vision and mission statements, or imagining what church ministry and mission would look like if renewal of creation were at the center.

Ecological pastors also work with leaders during this time to assess the stress level of the congregation and adapt the pace of change as needed. This can happen through formal processes like church meetings and surveys, as well as paying attention to informal conversations and behavior. Since adaptive situations typically require a lot of community participation, it is important during this time to communicate well and choose a decision making process that allows for broad participation. Ecological pastors will want to prepare

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63 Pastors can use biblical texts, such as Jeremiah 9:10, as a model for crafting laments:

Take up weeping and wailing for the mountains,
and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness,
because they are laid waste so that no one passes through,
and the lowing of cattle is not heard;
both the birds of the air and the animals
have fled and are gone.
church leaders for a wide range of responses; they must be ready to reel in the idealistic visionaries demanding rapid change, and be prepared to say goodbye to those who cannot support the new direction.

From a pastoral care perspective, this is a time when ecological pastors help people articulate the grief they feel in the midst of change. In addition to the personal harm that comes from holding in grief, the inability to mourn “can be linked, directly or indirectly, to the inertia and the impotence that afflicts us, as persons and as a society, when we consider the cost of facing the increasing environmental degradation all around us.”"\textsuperscript{64} Grief is both personal and corporate, expressed “within a broader social, cultural, political (and we would now add, ecological) fabric.”\textsuperscript{65} The grief expressed by those in the congregation as they experience the pain of loss and the uncertainty of change can be expressed in many forms, often masked as anger, resistance, or absence. Ecological pastors will do well to resist becoming defensive or taking it personally when grief is manifested in these unhealthy ways. Patient pastoral care will go a long way towards preserving the community and preparing it for a new future.

That said, time in the wilderness is not only about patiently dealing with loss and grief. A key missional practice during this stage is to create strategic disruptions within existing ministry and mission activities. This is a time for creative experimentation, strategically upsetting the status quo in small ways that continue the process of change and communicate to the people that more change is in their future.

Dissipative structures demonstrate that \textit{disorder} can be a source of new \textit{order}, and that growth appears from disequilibrium, not balance. The

\textsuperscript{64} Christie, \textit{The Blue Sapphire of the Mind}, 80. Christie draws this out with a comparison to Germany’s inability to face the losses of WWI, their complicity in those losses, and the resulting rise of Nazism.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 72.
things we fear most in organizations - disruptions, confusion, chaos - need not be interpreted as signs that we are about to be destroyed. Instead, these conditions are necessary to awaken creativity.\textsuperscript{66}

This could include a worship service led by youth and focused on ecological concerns, switching to organic, fairly traded coffee, or bringing in a speaker to talk about the connections between faith, race, and land care.

A key study practice during this time might be a formal study that connects biblical lament with our current situation.\textsuperscript{67} This could involve a study of the laments in Jeremiah and what they tell us about a culture in decline, coupled with learning about the impact of the church on the local watershed and what transitioning to a simpler lifestyle might entail.\textsuperscript{68}

### 4.3.3 Key Practices in Cultivating Solutions

Though these stages overlap (and sometimes repeat), at some point churches move past the transition point and begin to turn towards creating new patterns of common life and new forms of ministry and mission. As this happens, ecological pastors are able to step more fully into the servant ruler role. The key ritual practice in this stage is the comprehensive greening of worship.\textsuperscript{69} One place to start is reframing when worship happens, allowing seasonal changes to shape weekly worship alongside liturgical and


\textsuperscript{67} For a contemporary exposition of the biblical call to lament see Soong-Chan Rah, \textit{Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015). Rah connects Lamentations and the fall of Jerusalem to contemporary urban injustices, particularly racism, but does not explore the need to lament injustice in the non-human world, or make connections between ecological and racial injustice.

\textsuperscript{68} David Orr suggests six steps to simplify life, all of which could profoundly shape a local congregation’s people, structure and mission: (1) Distinguish basic needs from wants, (2) reduce dependencies, (3) take full advantage of the free services of nature, (4) use locally available resources, (5) rebuild local and regional economies, and, most importantly, (6) rebuild strong, participatory communities.

\textsuperscript{69} On the greening of worship see Brunner, Butler, and Swoboda, \textit{Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology}, 227-232.
calendar time. “In attending to the cycles of the earth, and the cycles of the liturgical year, Christian worship can do much to overcome the consequent alienation between human consciousness and the natural order, through ritual which explicitly remake those lost connections.”

In addition to setting worship within multiple time frameworks, ecological pastors seek to orient worship in just one place – their watershed. They begin by asking a question posed by Ched Myers: “How can our music and litanies, altars and furniture, windows and statuary help (and prod) parishioners to learn about this place where the body of Christ in incarnated?” One way to answer this question is to worship outdoors as frequently as possible, to the point where congregations could start to speak of having two (or more) sanctuaries. These spaces for worship can be connected by bringing the indoors out and the outdoors in. Native plants and flowers can grace an inside space; chairs and communion tables can be taken outside. Local artists and musicians (ideally within the congregation) can be employed to produce a wide variety of locally-inspired arts and crafts that connect the congregation’s faith to the local culture and landscape, furthering the formation of a locally-focused sacramental imagination. All this can be reinforced in the actual practice of the sacraments:

The watershed invitation to use local waters, bread, and wine for baptism and the Lord’s Supper, makes tangible the vision of life re-orienting the community of disciples. This vision insists that our identity and well-being are inextricably linked to the rest of the creation community, specifically the chapter of the Book of Creation we actually inhabit.

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70 Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, 321. This could be accomplished by holding worship services that celebrate seasonal and/or agricultural marking points, as well as including multiple time designators for each worship service. Imagine the following greeting: “Welcome to worship. Today is Sunday, the twenty-third day of September and the first autumn sabbath. We gather to give praise to God, who has blessed us with warm summer evenings and good harvests to nourish us as we head into the darker months of the year. Join me in praising the God who gives life to our bodies and light to the world.


72 Laura Schmidt Roberts, “The Theological Place of Land: Watershed Discipleship as Re-placed
Ecological pastors can also help the congregation see the role that buildings play in shaping worship, understanding that “the problems associated with the built environment are not primarily technical but spiritual.”

We shape our buildings, but they also shape us. “If the design orthodoxies of our built environment have brought us to the brink of ecological and social collapse, then a radical response must advocate a return to the art, science, and theology, of ‘biomimicry.”

Ecological pastors can help reimagine sanctuaries that take their cues from the natural world.

The key process practice in this stage, especially at the beginning, is to celebrate every success with the congregation publicly, frequently, and joyfully. This reinforces the transformations that have already happened, and reduces resistance to further change. Ecological pastors tell these stories of success over and over, making sure to praise the specific people involved while connecting everything to the larger story. Pastors may want to create a ritual that allows the congregation to articulate and affirm the journey they have been on. Larry Rasmussen recounts such a ritual he witnessed while visiting seminarians in the African Association of Earthkeeping Churches:

On a visit to Zimbabwe I went along for a round of classes. The professor posed a question: “What did we formerly believe?” Hands shot up, a student was called on, and the answer came: “We believed that Jesus Christ died for our sins.” Not an answer I expected as a “former” belief, I awaited the follow-up. “What do we now believe?” came next. Hands high again, and a reply: “We now believe Jesus Christ died for all creation.”


74 Meyers, Watershed Discipleship, 12.

75 An example of this is the Thorncrown Chapel in Eureka Springs, AR; see www.thorncrown.com.

76 Rasmussen, Earth-Honoring Faith, 306.
Pastoral care in this stage broadens as ecological pastors draw on a wider community of help for those in distress. In addition to traditional referrals to professional counselors and therapists, ecological pastors can include dieticians, physical therapists, spiritual directors, and landscape architects in their care for individuals, as well as emphasizing the importance of connections with friends. Pastors must lead by example, practicing this comprehensive self-care with and for the congregation. In terms of caring for the congregation as a whole, nothing is more powerful in this stage that incorporating healthy, local food into all church events, from the snack jar in the office to the potlucks in the meeting hall.77

As the church moves farther into creational mission, it is important to remember that mission starts at home. To this end, a key practice is reimagining the church’s property (or a local space if the church does not own property): “Any real estate owned by the church should be a demonstration plot of creation healed.”78 Going through this process of rethinking and redesigning how church buildings and grounds are used can “signal a new era of ‘demonstration project evangelism’ – because in our critical times, the gospel must be shown, not just told.”79

Once again a focus on food can help this process, because “it is in agriculture, far and away our largest and most basic artifact, that human culture and the creation totally

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77 A powerful example of this is the Garden Church in San Pedro, CA, which is both an urban farm and a church that is slowly transforming an empty city lot; see www.gardenchurchsp.org.
78 Snyder and Scandrett, Salvation Means Creation Healed, 201.
The clearest way this can happen for churches is through planting a church garden, or participating in a community garden if there is no church land available. Church gardens naturally connect faith, community, and creational mission because our “identity and vocation come together in the work of gardening,” which is a “complex activity that leads us into a deeper encounter with and understanding of creation, creatureliness, and the Creator’s life.” Gardening together can open up possibilities to expand the church’s missional focus on food. Norman Wirzba wonders what a Church Supported Agriculture system might look like, suggesting that churches connect directly and deeply with local farms and asking, “What if the ‘mission field’ came also to be understood as an actual agricultural field?” Stan Goff takes this idea even further:

Churches should be in the forefront on land reclamation for local, small-scale food production. Churches should be finding ways – especially among the young – to quit sending missions abroad to force subsistence cultures to become more “developed,” and start rebuilding their own communities in a direction that points from “developed” to subsistence. If American churches want a real mission, let us help twenty million more young people to be small-scale farmers, urban agriculturists, permaculture practitioners, truck gardeners, suburban sharecroppers, community gardeners, and gleaners.

Moving into this stage also allows for more opportunities to study the Bible and creation together. Ecological pastors can encourage congregants to read the Bible outside more frequently, testing Wendell Berry’s contention that Scripture “is best read and understood outdoors, and the farther outdoors the better.”

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80 Wes Jackson, Becoming Native to This Place (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 1994, 22.
81 Wirzba, From Nature to Creation, 104. An inspiring example of this is Paradise Parking Lots Community Garden in Kent, WA, a large community garden created for refugees and made possible by depaving half of Hillside Church’s parking lot; see www.worldreliefseattle.org/garden.
82 Ibid., 128.
84 Wendell Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation” in Sex, Economy, Freedom &
more intentional ecological education that involves inviting indigenous teachers, naturalists, and ecologists as a regular part of the church’s educational life.\textsuperscript{85}

4.4 Conclusion

This thesis has argued that a new paradigm of pastoral ministry – the Ecological Pastor - is needed to renew congregational ministry at the dawn of the Anthropocene, and has offered a preliminary definition and description. Hopefully, those who are already employing this framework as they pastor their congregations (as well as those interested in doing so) will continue to develop and refine it, along with scholars, laypeople, and all who care about the Church and believe that local congregations must play a key role in the Church’s renewal. May God grant us all wisdom, insight, patience, and vision.

If we will have the wisdom to survive, to stand like slow-growing trees on a ruined place, renewing, enriching it, if we make our seasons welcome here, asking not too much of earth or heaven, then a long time after we are dead the lives our lives prepare will live here, their houses strongly placed upon the valley sides, fields and gardens rich in the windows. The river will run clear, as we will never know it, and over it, birdsong like a canopy. On the levels of the hills will be green meadows, stock bells in noon shade. On the steeps where greed and ignorance cut down the old forest, an old forest will stand, its rich leaf-fall drifting its roots. The veins of forgotten springs will have opened. Families will be singing in their fields. In the voices they will hear a music risen out of the ground. They will take nothing from the ground they will not return,


\textsuperscript{85} Vacation Bible School can be reimagined as Creation Care camp. An example of this is A Rocha’s excellent curriculum for children, Wild Wonder. See https://arocha.us/wild-wonder.
whatever the grief at parting. Memory, native to this valley, will spread over it like a grove, and memory will grow into a legend, legend into song, song into sacrament. The abundance of this place, the songs of its people and its birds, will be health and wisdom and indwelling light. This is no paradisal dream. Its hardship is its possibilities.  

Bibliography


Biography

James Amadon was born in Kings Lynn, England on September 28, 1977, and currently lives in Redmond, WA. He is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church, and serves as Executive Director of Circlewood, a ministry focused on reforming Christian faith around God’s reconciliation and renewal of all creation.

James did his undergraduate work at Gordon College in Wenham, MA, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1999, with majors in Biblical/Theological Studies and Philosophy. He attended North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL, graduating in 2005 with a Master of Divinity Degree. At North Park he was a Fund for Theological Education Young Scholar Fellow and a recipient of the Presidential Scholarship. He also received the Top Student Award in the areas of preaching, Greek, Bible, and Theology, and was awarded the Ahnfelt Medallion for highest GPA.